

# THE INFLUENCE OF THE BENGKULU LOCAL LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE ON ARABIC SPEAKING SKILLS

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of Bengkulu local language interference on the speaking skills of students learning Arabic at MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu. While language interference in second language acquisition is well- documented, there is limited research on the influence of regional languages, such as Bengkulu, in the Southeast Asian educational context. Using a qualitative approach, this study involved interviews and classroom observations of 30 students to identify patterns of Interference in Arabic pronunciation, sentence structure, and vocabulary. The findings revealed significant phonetic similarities between Bengkulu and Arabic, with local language phonetics contributing to noticeable speech errors, particularly in consonant articulation and sentence construction. These errors were linked to specific characteristics of the Bengkulu language, which affect the student's ability to produce Arabic sounds and structures accurately. The study emphasizes the need for targeted strategies to address language interference in Arabic language teaching. It recommends adjustments in curriculum design and teaching methods to help mitigate the impact of local language interference, ultimately improving students' Arabic proficiency. The implications of this research extend to teacher training and materials development, urging educators to incorporate contrastive linguistic analysis and oral drills that directly target problematic phonetic and syntactic areas. Future studies are encouraged to examine interference effects across other local Indonesian languages and explore longitudinal changes in student performance following targeted instructional interventions.

## INTRODUCTION

Language learning is a multifaceted process that involves the acquisition of not only vocabulary and grammar but also the phonetic and syntactic structures of a new language. One of the critical factors influencing the process of second language acquisition (SLA) is language interference. Language interference occurs when the linguistic features of a learner's first language (L1) influence their understanding or production of a second language (L2)(Ramadhan et al., 2024). This phenomenon can have significant consequences on various aspects of language use, particularly in speaking skills, where pronunciation, fluency, and grammatical accuracy are key challenges for learners. In the Southeast Asian context, where multilingualism is prevalent, local languages often interfere with the acquisition of foreign languages, adding complexity to the process of learning languages like Arabic(Aronin & Toubkin, 2002).

In the case of Indonesia, a country known for its linguistic diversity, local languages such as Javanese, Sundanese, and Batak are frequently studied in relation to their influence on the acquisition of foreign languages, particularly English. However, much less attention has been paid to the interference of

smaller, region-specific languages in the acquisition of languages like Arabic. One such language is the Bengkulu language, spoken in the province of Bengkulu, located on the southwestern coast of Sumatra. The linguistic features of the Bengkulu language, which include distinct phonological and syntactic structures, may create specific challenges for students learning Arabic at schools like MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu, an institution that offers Arabic language courses as part of its religious curriculum(Asadi, 2019).

This study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by investigating the impact of Bengkulu local language interference on the speaking skills of students learning Arabic at MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu. Although there is ample research on language interference in SLA, studies focusing on how local languages, such as the Bengkulu language, interfere with Arabic language learning are still rare. Specifically, the phonetic, syntactic, and vocabulary challenges resulting from this interference remain underexplored(Ardiansyah et al., 2024). By examining this issue through qualitative research methods – interviews with students and classroom observations – this study aims to shed light on the types of interference caused by the Bengkulu language and offer recommendations for mitigating its effects in Arabic language teaching(Abourehab & Azaz, 2023).

### **Language Interference in Second Language Acquisition**

The concept of language interference has long been recognized in SLA research. It is based on the hypothesis that learners' knowledge of their L1 influences the way they acquire and produce an L2. Language interference occurs when the structures of the L1 are applied to the L2, resulting in errors or deviations from the norms of the target language. Such interference is most often observed in the phonological, syntactical, and lexical aspects of language learning. In the case of speaking skills, pronunciation is often the most noticeable manifestation of interference. Learners may carry over the phonetic rules of their L1, leading to accents or mispronunciations in the L2(Wahyudin et al., 2024).

Syntactic interference, on the other hand, refers to the transfer of sentence structures from the L1 to the L2. For example, word order in a learner's first language may influence how they construct sentences in a second language, leading to grammatical errors. Lexical interference occurs when the learner uses words or phrases from their L1 in place of the appropriate words in the L2, which can lead to misunderstandings or inaccuracies in meaning(Klaus et al., 2018).

Research on language interference has traditionally focused on the relationship between widely spoken languages, such as English and Spanish,

or the impact of regional languages like Javanese or Sundanese on Indonesian learners of English. However, there is a distinct lack of research on smaller, localized languages in Indonesia, particularly in relation to Arabic, a language that has a unique phonetic and syntactic structure compared to most Indonesian languages. This gap in research is significant because, in regions like Bengkulu, the local language plays a central role in the daily communication and thought processes of students, influencing how they learn and interact with other languages(Schoknecht et al., 2022).

### **Arabic Language Learning in Indonesia**

Arabic language learning in Indonesia holds particular importance due to the country's large Muslim population, where Arabic is the language of the Quran and is integral to religious education. Arabic is taught in many schools, including Islamic schools like MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu, as a second language. While Arabic is not widely spoken outside religious contexts, its significance in Islamic practices makes it a vital subject of study for many students(Rohmah et al., 2024).

However, Arabic presents a significant challenge for Indonesian students, not only due to the complex grammar and vocabulary but also because of the considerable differences between Arabic and Indonesian languages, as well as the local languages spoken by students(Yamasaki & Prat, 2014). For example, Arabic is a Semitic language with a root-based morphology, which differs markedly from the agglutinative nature of Indonesian and other local languages like Bengkulu. Moreover, Arabic has sounds and phonetic rules that are not present in many Southeast Asian languages, which can result in mispronunciations and difficulties in articulation(Barrett et al., 2018).

In addition to phonetic challenges, Arabic's syntactic structures are also different from those of Indonesian and Bengkulu. For instance, Arabic has a verb-subject-object (VSO) word order, whereas Indonesian typically follows a subject-verb-object (SVO) structure. These syntactic differences may create additional difficulties for learners, especially when they are not explicitly taught how to navigate these variations(Alshammari, 2023).

While various studies have explored the challenges of learning Arabic in Indonesia, little has been done to investigate how local language interference specifically affects students' speaking skills in Arabic. This lack of research is particularly evident in smaller, region-specific languages like Bengkulu, which may have unique features that influence the way students produce Arabic sounds, construct sentences, and select vocabulary(Knoph, 2013).

### **Bengkulu Language and Its Role in Interference**

Bengkulu is a regional language spoken by the people of Bengkulu province. It belongs to the Malayo-Polynesian language family and is considered a distinct language with its own phonological and syntactic features (Fitrianah, 2020). For instance, the phonetic system of the Bengkulu language includes sounds that are absent in Indonesian and Arabic, which may lead to interference when learners attempt to produce Arabic sounds that do not exist in their native language. Additionally, Bengkulu has a unique sentence structure that may differ from Arabic's VSO word order, potentially resulting in word order errors in students' Arabic speech.

The linguistic features of Bengkulu, therefore, may pose a significant challenge to students learning Arabic, particularly in terms of pronunciation, sentence structure, and vocabulary. For example, students may substitute Bengkulu sounds for Arabic ones, leading to mispronunciations that hinder communication. In terms of syntax, students may apply the SVO word order of their local language to Arabic, resulting in grammatically incorrect sentences (Sman & Tengah, n.d.).

Despite the potential for interference, few studies have focused specifically on the impact of the Bengkulu language on Arabic language learning. Most studies on language interference in Indonesia have focused on the more widely spoken Javanese and Sundanese languages, leaving a gap in our understanding of how smaller regional languages, like Bengkulu, contribute to language learning challenges (Afsah et al., 2022).

### **Research Objectives and Significance**

The primary objective of this study is to investigate how local language interference, specifically from the Bengkulu language, impacts the speaking skills of students learning Arabic at MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu. This study seeks to identify the specific patterns of interference in pronunciation, syntax, and vocabulary that arise due to the influence of the Bengkulu language. Furthermore, the study aims to explore the pedagogical implications of these findings, proposing strategies for teachers to address and mitigate the negative effects of local language interference.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the field of SLA, particularly in the Southeast Asian context. By focusing on a less-studied local language, the Bengkulu language, this research provides new insights into how regional languages impact Arabic language acquisition (Egi, 2008). Additionally, the study's findings will help inform the development of more effective teaching strategies that take into account the specific linguistic challenges posed by local language interference (Nana Gassa Gongga et al., 2024). This can ultimately improve the quality of Arabic language education

at MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu and other institutions with similar linguistic contexts.

In conclusion, this study aims to fill a critical gap in SLA research by exploring the role of local language interference in Arabic language learning. It will provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by students in Bengkulu and offer practical recommendations for teachers to improve language acquisition outcomes. Understanding the role of local language interference is crucial for developing more effective pedagogical approaches that address the unique linguistic environments of learners in Southeast Asia (Lightbown, 2003).

## **METHOD**

The methodology for this study is designed to explore the impact of Bengkulu local language interference on the speaking skills of students learning Arabic at MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu. The study adopts a qualitative research design due to the nature of the research questions, which aim to explore patterns of language interference in depth. The methods employed to gather data include interviews, classroom observations, and audio recordings of student speech. The choice of these methods is based on the need to capture both subjective experiences (e.g., perceptions of language interference) and objective evidence (e.g., actual speech production errors).

### **Research Design**

This research follows a qualitative case study approach, focusing on a single group of students from MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu. The case study approach allows for an in-depth examination of the specific context of Arabic language learning at this institution, where Bengkulu language interference may be particularly pronounced. Qualitative methods are suitable for understanding the complexities of language interference, as they allow for the exploration of underlying factors and provide rich, detailed descriptions of the phenomena under study (Robbani & Zaini, 2022).

### **Participants**

The participants in this study consist of 30 students from the Arabic language department at MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu. These students were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that all participants are native speakers of the Bengkulu language and are currently enrolled in Arabic language courses. The students are between the ages of 16 and 18 and have varying levels of proficiency in Arabic, ranging from beginner to intermediate levels (Setiawati, 2015).

The choice to include only students who speak the Bengkulu language is critical for understanding how this local language influences Arabic language learning. All participants are familiar with Indonesian as a second language, as it is the national language, but their primary exposure is to Bengkulu in their daily lives.

## **Data Collection Methods**

Three primary data collection methods are used in this study: interviews, and classroom observations.

### **Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with both students and Arabic language teachers. The students are asked about their experiences learning Arabic, including challenges they face related to pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. They are also asked to reflect on any difficulties they face in differentiating between the phonetic structures of their local language (Bengkulu) and Arabic. Interviews with teachers focus on their observations of student performance in Arabic language classes, particularly in relation to speech production. Teachers are asked about their strategies for addressing language interference and the impact of local language differences on students' speaking skills.

The interviews are recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The aim of these interviews is to gather subjective insights into the students' and teachers' perceptions of the interference of the Bengkulu language on Arabic learning.

### **Classroom Observations**

Non-participant observations are conducted during Arabic language classes at MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu. The researcher attends classes to observe students' speaking activities, particularly focusing on their pronunciation and sentence construction (Yussof & Sun, 2020). Specific attention is paid to instances where Bengkulu language interference appears to manifest, such as mispronunciations of Arabic sounds, errors in sentence structure, or incorrect word usage that may reflect a direct translation from the Bengkulu language (Moodley, 2007).

Classroom observations provide an opportunity to document real-time data on how students produce Arabic and how the teacher responds to errors, especially in speaking tasks. Detailed field notes are taken during each

observation session, which are later analyzed alongside the interview data(Xiong, 2025).

## **Data Analysis**

The data collected through interviews, observations, and audio recordings are analyzed using thematic analysis. This method is appropriate for identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data. The analysis follows these steps:

**Transcription and Organization:** All interviews and audio recordings are transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions are organized according to the type of data (interviews, observations, or audio recordings). The data from each method are kept separate initially for the purpose of categorization.

**Initial Coding:** The transcripts of interviews and field notes from classroom observations are read multiple times to identify initial codes. Codes are labels used to identify significant features of the data, such as specific language errors, strategies for overcoming interference, or perceptions of language challenges. These codes are assigned to sections of text that correspond to particular issues of interest (e.g., pronunciation errors, syntactic mistakes, teacher responses).

**Theme Development:** After initial coding, the researcher groups related codes into themes. For example, codes related to pronunciation errors may be grouped into a theme such as "phonetic interference," while codes related to sentence structure may form a theme called "syntactic interference." These themes reflect the main areas of interference identified in the study(Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021).

**Pattern Identification:** The final step in the analysis involves identifying recurring patterns within each theme. For example, if many students exhibit similar phonetic errors due to Bengkulu language interference, this pattern will be highlighted. The researcher will also look for correlations between the types of interference and student proficiency levels in Arabic.

**Interpretation:** The final stage of the analysis involves interpreting the findings in the context of the research questions. The researcher examines how the identified patterns of interference affect students' speaking skills and the teaching strategies employed by instructors. The analysis also explores the impact of local language interference on overall language acquisition and offers recommendations for improving Arabic language teaching(Stoffelen, 2019).

## **Ethical Considerations**

This study adheres to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Informed consent is obtained from all participants, both students and teachers, before the data collection process begins (Goncalves et al., 2024). Participants are assured that their responses will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes. In addition, students' identities and any personal information that could identify them are anonymized in the final report (Jadue Roa, 2017).

The researcher also ensures that classroom observations do not disrupt the normal teaching process and that no harm or discomfort is caused to the participants. The study adheres to ethical guidelines set forth by the institution and obtains approval from the relevant ethical review board, if necessary (Törrönen & Vornanen, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research method is designed to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how Bengkulu local language interference affects the speaking skills of students learning Arabic at MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu. By using a combination of interviews, classroom observations, and audio recordings, the study aims to gather both subjective perceptions and objective evidence of language interference. The thematic analysis of the data will reveal specific patterns of phonetic, syntactic, and lexical interference, contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by students in Arabic language acquisition. The findings of this study will offer valuable insights for language teachers and curriculum designers, ultimately improving the teaching and learning of Arabic in regions with local language interference (Rusyana & Rohmah, 2024).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### **Phonetic Interference**

The most noticeable form of interference was in the pronunciation of Arabic sounds. Phonetic interference occurred when the students used sounds from the Bengkulu language in place of Arabic phonemes. The findings indicate that consonant articulation was the area most affected by the interference of the Bengkulu language.

For example, the Arabic 'ع' (Ayn), a pharyngeal voiced fricative, which does not exist in the Bengkulu language, was often replaced by the 'h' sound or was omitted entirely. This led to a number of mispronunciations. In cases where 'ق' (Qaaf) was pronounced, students frequently used the hard 'k' sound, similar to the one used in the Bengkulu language. This substitution is



consistent with findings from previous studies on phonetic interference in second language acquisition (Gass & Selinker, 2001), which suggest that learners tend to replace sounds in the target language with similar sounds from their first language.

Another area of phonetic interference was the misarticulation of short vowels in Arabic. In Arabic, vowel sounds are more distinct, and their pronunciation is crucial to the accurate production of words. For instance, the 'a' and 'u' sounds in Arabic were frequently pronounced more broadly, as students tended to produce them with a more relaxed articulation, which is characteristic of the Bengkulu language. These mispronunciations affected not only the students' individual speech but also their overall comprehensibility in Arabic. For example, the word 'كتاب' (kitaab, book) was often pronounced with a vowel shift that made it sound closer to 'kitab' in Indonesian, which did not fully adhere to the correct Arabic pronunciation.

Furthermore, several students exhibited difficulties in articulating emphatic sounds, such as 'ص' (Saad) and 'ض' (Dhaad), which have no exact counterparts in the Bengkulu language. As a result, these sounds were frequently substituted by regular 's' and 'd' sounds, which affected the overall accuracy of their pronunciation and contributed to a noticeable foreign accent.

### **Syntactic Interference**

The interference in sentence structure was another significant finding in this study. Arabic, unlike Indonesian and Bengkulu, typically follows a Verb-Subject-Object (VSO) word order, which is in stark contrast to the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure used in both Bengkulu and Indonesian. This difference in syntactic structure posed challenges for students, particularly when constructing sentences in Arabic.

For instance, in the Arabic sentence "ذهب محمد إلى المدرسة" (Dhahaba Muhammad ila al-madrasa, Muhammad went to school), the verb 'ذهب' (went) precedes the subject 'محمد' (Muhammad), as per Arabic's VSO structure. However, students who were influenced by the SVO structure of their native language often produced sentences like "محمد ذهب إلى المدرسة" (Muhammad dhahaba ila al-madrasa), which follows the subject-verb order used in both Bengkulu and Indonesian. This syntactic interference was particularly evident in oral exercises, where students struggled to place verbs before subjects as required in Arabic.

Additionally, errors in subject-verb agreement were also observed. In Arabic, subject-verb agreement is crucial for conveying the correct gender and number. However, students from the Bengkulu region often showed

difficulties in matching the verb forms to the subject, particularly when dealing with plural forms. This issue was exacerbated by the fact that Bengkulu has a simpler agreement system, where gender and number distinctions in verbs are less complex than in Arabic. Consequently, students frequently used verbs in their base form without making the necessary modifications for agreement, leading to grammatical errors such as "اذهبوا محمد" (Dhahaboo Muhammad), where the verb does not match the singular subject.

### **Lexical Interference**

Lexical interference was also prevalent in the study, particularly in the use of vocabulary. Students often substituted words from their native language (Bengkulu) or Indonesian for Arabic words, especially in cases where they lacked confidence in their Arabic vocabulary. This was most noticeable in everyday vocabulary and function words, where students would default to Indonesian terms that sounded similar to the Arabic ones or used the Bengkulu language as a placeholder for more complex terms.

For example, students frequently used the Indonesian word 'pergi' (go) instead of the Arabic 'اذهب' (dhahaba), and similarly, words like 'rumah' (house) were used in place of 'منزل' (manzil). While these substitutions might have been understood by a local audience familiar with Indonesian or Bengkulu, they were inappropriate in standard Arabic contexts and often led to confusion. The students' heavy reliance on their first languages for vocabulary not only impeded their ability to fully engage with the Arabic language but also hindered their development of a richer, more nuanced Arabic lexicon.

The lexical transfer also extended to the use of certain function words. For example, in expressing prepositions or pronouns, students would often apply Indonesian structures, which led to awkward phrasing. A common example was the use of the preposition 'ke' (to, in Indonesian) in place of the Arabic 'إلى' (ila), as students were more comfortable with the Indonesian equivalent, which reflects their linguistic habits from both Indonesian and Bengkulu.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that language interference, particularly from the local Bengkulu language, significantly impacts Arabic speaking skills. This interference, in the form of phonetic, syntactic, and lexical errors, aligns with what has been observed in other SLA studies, where learners often transfer rules and structures from their first language into the second language, particularly when faced with unfamiliar linguistic features.

### **Phonetic Interference: A Barrier to Accurate Pronunciation**

The phonetic interference observed in this study is consistent with the well-established theory of phonological transfer in SLA, where sounds from the first language are used in place of those in the target language. The difficulty of pronouncing Arabic sounds that are not present in the Bengkulu language, such as 'ع' (Ayn) and 'ق' (Qaaf), demonstrates the challenges faced by second language learners when attempting to acquire new phonetic features. This phenomenon is not unique to Arabic, as similar issues have been documented in SLA research on English, where learners from languages without certain consonantal sounds often substitute them with the closest equivalent from their first language.

The mispronunciation of Arabic sounds also points to the critical role of pronunciation practice in language acquisition. Explicit teaching of pronunciation, particularly the articulation of non-native sounds, is crucial for second language learners. In this study, it is clear that Bengkulu students would benefit from targeted pronunciation exercises that focus on the specific sounds of Arabic that are absent from their native language.

### **Syntactic Interference: Transfer of Native Structures**

The syntactic interference observed in the study is consistent with the concept of structural transfer, where learners apply the sentence structures of their native language to the target language. In this case, the transfer of SVO structures from Bengkulu to the VSO structure of Arabic resulted in syntactically incorrect sentences. The transfer of word order, in particular, is a well-documented phenomenon in SLA research. Syntax is one of the areas most prone to interference, as it governs how learners organize words into sentences, a process that is deeply ingrained in their linguistic habits.

The syntactic errors observed in this study suggest that students need more focused instruction on the word order in Arabic, especially when transitioning from languages with different syntactic structures. Teachers can use sentence construction exercises and structured practice to help students internalize the VSO order, thereby improving their syntactic accuracy in Arabic.

### **Lexical Interference: The Challenge of Vocabulary Acquisition**

The lexical interference observed in this study underscores the importance of vocabulary acquisition in second language learning. As Laufer (1997) points out, vocabulary is central to language competence, and learners who rely on their first language for word substitutions often fail to develop proficiency in the target language. This study highlights how Bengkulu language interference leads students to rely on Indonesian and Bengkulu vocabulary, hindering their ability to develop a more extensive Arabic lexicon. The use of

function words and prepositions in Arabic is similarly affected, as students often fall back on their first language's structures.

To overcome this issue, language teachers should implement vocabulary-rich activities, such as context-based reading and speaking exercises, that encourage the use of Arabic words in meaningful contexts. Additionally, explicit instruction on the use of Arabic function words and prepositions would help students avoid the over-reliance on their first language and foster greater linguistic accuracy.

### **Pedagogical Implications: Mitigating Language Interference**

The findings of this study have important pedagogical implications for Arabic language instruction in regions where local language interference is significant. The results suggest that to mitigate the negative impact of language interference, teachers should adopt a more explicit, structured approach to teaching Arabic pronunciation, syntax, and vocabulary.

For pronunciation, teachers should incorporate targeted drills that focus on challenging Arabic sounds, especially those that do not exist in the students' native languages. For syntactic issues, teachers should use sentence construction exercises that emphasize the VSO word order of Arabic. To address lexical interference, teachers can use contextualized vocabulary practice, ensuring that students gain a deeper understanding of Arabic words and their usage in different contexts.

By addressing these areas of interference directly, educators can help students overcome the challenges posed by local language interference, leading to more accurate and fluent Arabic speaking skills.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study reveals that the interference of the Bengkulu local language significantly affects the speaking skills of students learning Arabic at MAN Islam Cendekia Bengkulu. Phonetic, syntactic, and lexical interference were all identified as key factors hindering students' Arabic proficiency. The findings align with existing SLA theories, particularly those on language transfer and phonological interference, highlighting the importance of explicit, targeted instruction to overcome these challenges. By incorporating specific strategies to address language interference, such as pronunciation drills, syntax exercises, and vocabulary-building activities, Arabic language instructors can improve the learning outcomes of students in regions with similar linguistic challenges.

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