

# Linguistic Difficulties in Learning Indonesian as a Foreign Language: A Syntactic and Morphological Analysis of Foreign Learners

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## ABSTRACT

Indonesian is increasingly learned by foreign students, yet linguistic challenges remain insufficiently documented, particularly in syntax and morphology. This study investigates: (1) what syntactic difficulties foreign learners experience and (2) what morphological difficulties hinder their Indonesian acquisition. A descriptive quantitative design was employed with 22 intermediate foreign learners of Indonesian. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and percentage analysis. Findings show that sentence structure (81.8%) and prefix use (77.2%) are the most dominant difficulties, followed by conjunction use and noun–verb distinctions. Learners frequently struggle with SPO patterns, affixation, and word formation, leading to inaccurate sentence construction. These results indicate the need for contextualized grammar instruction, communicative practice, and technology-supported learning. The study contributes empirical evidence for improving BIPA pedagogy and curriculum design in Indonesia.

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## 1. Introduction

Indonesian has increasingly gained international attention as a language of communication, education, and cultural exchange in the global academic community. In recent years, the Indonesian language has been introduced in various universities and language institutions worldwide through the Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) program, reflecting the growing interest of international learners in studying Indonesian. This expansion is closely related to the intensification of cultural exchange, academic mobility, and international cooperation between Indonesia and other countries (Harjono and Wachyuni, 2025; Sneddon, 2006). As the number of foreign learners continues to increase, understanding the linguistic challenges they encounter becomes essential for ensuring the effectiveness of Indonesian language teaching and learning processes.

The growing interest in Indonesian is not only driven by academic curiosity but also by practical needs in diplomacy, business, tourism, and intercultural communication. Foreign learners are expected to develop communicative competence that enables them to interact effectively in academic and social contexts. However, learning Indonesian as a foreign language is often accompanied by linguistic difficulties that hinder the development of language proficiency, particularly in structural aspects of the language (Youngsun et al., 2024; Jones, 2021). These challenges highlight the importance of examining linguistic barriers in a systematic and empirical manner so that appropriate pedagogical strategies can be developed to support foreign learners in acquiring Indonesian more effectively.

In the field of second language acquisition, linguistic competence is strongly influenced by learners' ability to understand the structural components of the target language. Among these components, syntax and morphology play a central role in shaping grammatical accuracy and communicative clarity (Pearl, 2021; Zhou, 2023). Syntax refers to the organization of sentence structures and the relationships between linguistic elements, while

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morphology focuses on the internal structure of words and the processes of word formation. In the context of Indonesian, these two linguistic dimensions are closely interconnected and significantly affect how foreign learners construct and interpret meaning in communication.

Previous studies have shown that syntactic structures are fundamental in developing learners' ability to produce coherent and meaningful sentences. Indonesian sentence construction generally follows the Subject–Predicate–Object (SPO) pattern, which may differ from the grammatical structures of many other languages (Setiawan, 2018; Budiwiyanto & Suhardijanto, 2020). This structural difference often leads to confusion among foreign learners, especially when they attempt to transfer grammatical patterns from their native language into Indonesian. As a result, learners may produce sentences that are grammatically inaccurate or structurally inconsistent, which ultimately affects their communicative effectiveness.

In addition to sentence structure, the complexity of Indonesian morphology also contributes to linguistic difficulties experienced by foreign learners. Indonesian is characterized by a productive affixation system that involves prefixes, suffixes, and infixes, which function to modify word meaning and grammatical roles (Sandra et al., 2024; Gani, 2020). Understanding these morphological processes requires learners to recognize root words and apply affixes appropriately in different contexts. However, due to differences between Indonesian and learners' native languages, many foreign learners struggle to comprehend and apply morphological rules correctly (Auni & Manan, 2023). This difficulty often results in errors in word formation, incorrect grammatical usage, and limited lexical development.

The interaction between syntax and morphology further complicates the process of learning Indonesian as a foreign language. Syntax and morphology are not independent linguistic components; rather, they work together to construct meaning and grammatical coherence in sentences (Smith, 2022; Wu, 2022). When learners experience difficulties in morphological formation, their syntactic constructions are also affected, and vice versa. This interdependence suggests that linguistic difficulties in Indonesian language learning should be examined from an integrated perspective that considers both syntactic and morphological dimensions simultaneously.

From a pedagogical perspective, understanding these linguistic challenges is essential for designing effective instructional strategies. Language teaching should not only focus on vocabulary acquisition but also emphasize structural competence, including sentence construction and word formation. Communicative language teaching approaches highlight the importance of meaningful interaction and contextualized learning in developing grammatical competence (Berezenko et al., 2022; Meyer, 2009). Through communicative practice, learners are expected to internalize syntactic patterns and morphological structures in real-life communication contexts, thereby improving both accuracy and fluency.

In addition to communicative approaches, contextualized learning has been widely recognized as an important strategy in language pedagogy, particularly in teaching syntactic structures. Contextualized instruction allows learners to understand grammatical forms through meaningful communication and real-life language use, rather than memorizing isolated rules (Chatterjee and Halder, 2022). Within this framework, linguistic errors are viewed as a natural part of the learning process and serve as valuable indicators of learners' developmental stages. Error analysis, therefore, becomes an essential tool for identifying specific linguistic difficulties and designing targeted instructional interventions that address syntactic and morphological challenges more effectively.

Several pedagogical strategies have been proposed to help foreign learners overcome structural difficulties in language learning. Brown (2020) emphasizes the importance of integrating grammar instruction with communicative activities such as role-playing, guided practice, and constructive feedback. These strategies enable learners to apply syntactic structures in interactive situations while receiving immediate correction and reinforcement. By combining structural understanding with communicative practice, language instruction can promote deeper internalization of grammatical patterns and improve overall linguistic competence. This perspective suggests that effective Indonesian language teaching should balance explicit grammar instruction with meaningful communication activities to address learners' structural difficulties.

The teaching of Indonesian to foreign learners also requires a comprehensive pedagogical framework that integrates linguistic, cultural, and technological dimensions. Kustaryo (2015) and Kartini et al. (2025) highlights six essential components in teaching Indonesian as a foreign language: communicative approaches, cultural integration, the use of learning media and technology, participatory teaching methods, continuous evaluation, and project-based learning. These components emphasize that language learning is not merely a process of mastering grammatical structures but also involves understanding cultural contexts and engaging in interactive learning environments. The integration of technology and project-based learning, in particular, can enhance learners' motivation and provide opportunities for applying syntactic and morphological knowledge in authentic communication contexts.

Within the broader framework of second language acquisition, the role of syntax and morphology can be explained through the interaction between linguistic knowledge and cognitive processing. Learners construct new linguistic systems by integrating input from the target language with their existing knowledge of their native language, which often results in language transfer phenomena (Smith, 2022). This transfer may facilitate learning when structures are similar, but it may also create difficulties when grammatical systems differ significantly. In the case of Indonesian, differences in sentence structure and morphological systems frequently lead to errors in word order, clause formation, and affixation, which indicates the need for systematic linguistic analysis in foreign language learning contexts.

Furthermore, syntactic competence plays a crucial role in developing discourse-level communication. Learners who understand sentence structures can organize ideas more logically and produce coherent texts in both spoken and written forms (Berezenko et al., 2022; Asrini et al., 2024). However, syntactic competence cannot be separated from morphological knowledge, as word formation directly influences grammatical accuracy and semantic clarity. Wu (2022) and Pili-Moss (2022) argue that the interaction between syntax and morphology determines learners' ability to produce complex sentences and express nuanced meanings in a second language. This interaction highlights the importance of examining both linguistic dimensions simultaneously to obtain a comprehensive understanding of foreign learners' difficulties.

Theoretical discussions on Indonesian morphology also emphasize the importance of affixation and word formation processes in determining grammatical meaning. Indonesian morphology allows the formation of various lexical categories through systematic use of prefixes, suffixes, and confixes, which function to indicate grammatical relationships and semantic distinctions (Sandra et al., 2024; Gani, 2020). When learners fail to understand these morphological patterns, their ability to construct grammatically correct sentences becomes limited. This limitation not only affects linguistic accuracy but also reduces learners' confidence in using Indonesian in academic and social communication contexts.

In the context of Indonesian language teaching for foreign learners, these theoretical perspectives suggest that syntax and morphology should be treated as interconnected components within a unified instructional framework. Language teaching practices need to incorporate structural awareness, communicative interaction, and contextual learning to support learners' linguistic development. The combination of linguistic theory and pedagogical practice provides a strong foundation for analyzing foreign learners' difficulties and designing effective teaching strategies that address both syntactic and morphological challenges in Indonesian language learning.

Despite the growing body of research on Indonesian language learning for foreign learners, several important issues remain insufficiently addressed in the existing literature. Many previous studies (e.g., Biber et al., 2024; Dai, 2023; Matiso, 2023) have primarily focused on general language learning challenges, communicative competence, or pedagogical approaches without providing a detailed empirical analysis of specific linguistic difficulties at the structural level. While these studies offer valuable insights into language teaching strategies and communicative development, they tend to overlook the systematic examination of syntactic and morphological problems experienced by foreign learners in constructing Indonesian sentences. As a result, the structural dimensions of language learning, particularly those related to sentence formation and word formation processes, remain underexplored in the context of Indonesian as a foreign language.

Furthermore, existing studies often discuss syntax and morphology separately without examining their interaction in shaping foreign learners' linguistic performance. Although research in second language acquisition highlights the importance of structural competence (Pearl, 2021; Zhou, 2023), the empirical investigation of how syntactic and morphological difficulties coexist and influence each other in Indonesian language learning is still limited. Studies on Indonesian language pedagogy have emphasized communicative approaches and contextualized learning (Berezenko et al., 2022; Chatterjee and Halder, 2022; Brown, 2020), but they rarely provide quantitative evidence on specific linguistic barriers faced by foreign learners at the intermediate level. This lack of empirical data makes it difficult to design targeted instructional strategies that directly address learners' structural weaknesses.

In addition, the pedagogical framework proposed in previous research, including communicative approaches, cultural integration, and technology-supported learning (Kustaryo, 2015), highlights the importance of comprehensive language teaching strategies. However, without detailed information about the exact linguistic difficulties experienced by foreign learners, the implementation of these pedagogical strategies may not fully address the structural challenges encountered in Indonesian language learning. Similarly, theoretical discussions on syntax and morphology (Smith, 2022; Wu, 2022; Sandra et al., 2024; Gani, 2020; Auni & Manan, 2023; Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021) emphasize the importance of structural understanding, yet empirical studies that focus specifically on Indonesian linguistic difficulties remain limited. This situation indicates a clear need for research

that integrates theoretical perspectives, empirical data, and pedagogical implications in a single analytical framework.

Another limitation in previous studies is the lack of focused investigation on intermediate-level foreign learners who already possess basic communicative competence but still struggle with structural accuracy. Most research tends to focus either on beginner learners or general language acquisition issues, leaving a gap in understanding how intermediate learners experience syntactic and morphological difficulties in real learning contexts. Since intermediate learners are expected to develop more complex sentence structures and accurate word formation, analyzing their linguistic difficulties can provide more precise insights into structural challenges in Indonesian language learning. This gap highlights the importance of conducting empirical research that specifically examines syntactic and morphological difficulties among foreign learners at this level.

Based on these considerations, the present study aims to provide a systematic and empirical analysis of linguistic difficulties experienced by foreign learners in learning Indonesian, with a particular focus on syntactic and morphological aspects. By employing a descriptive quantitative approach, this research seeks to identify the most dominant structural challenges faced by foreign learners and to provide empirical evidence that can inform more effective pedagogical strategies in Indonesian language teaching. The study integrates theoretical perspectives from second language acquisition, syntax and morphology, and language pedagogy to offer a comprehensive understanding of linguistic difficulties in Indonesian as a foreign language.

The contribution of this study lies in three main aspects. First, it provides empirical data on specific syntactic and morphological difficulties experienced by foreign learners, which strengthens the existing literature on Indonesian language learning. Second, it integrates linguistic theory and pedagogical practice by connecting structural analysis with instructional implications for BIPA programs. Third, it offers practical recommendations for improving Indonesian language teaching through contextualized grammar instruction, communicative practice, and technology-supported learning. Through these contributions, the study is expected to support the development of more effective curricula and teaching strategies for foreign learners of Indonesian.

To achieve these objectives, the study is guided by two main research questions:

- 1) What syntactic difficulties do foreign learners experience in learning Indonesian?
- 2) What morphological difficulties do foreign learners experience in learning Indonesian?

These research questions provide a clear analytical focus for examining structural linguistic challenges and serve as the foundation for the methodological design and data analysis presented in the following sections. By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of foreign learners' linguistic difficulties and to provide evidence-based insights for improving Indonesian language teaching and learning practices.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to identify and analyze linguistic difficulties experienced by foreign learners in learning Indonesian, particularly in syntactic and morphological aspects. A descriptive quantitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to describe patterns of linguistic challenges based on empirical data obtained from respondents. This design allowed the researchers to systematically examine the frequency and distribution of syntactic and morphological difficulties experienced by foreign learners and to present the findings in a structured and measurable form. Through this approach, the study provides a clear overview of the most common linguistic problems encountered in Indonesian language learning at the intermediate level.

### **2.2 Participants and Data**

The participants of this study were foreign learners studying Indonesian as a foreign language at the intermediate level. A total of twenty-two respondents were selected using purposive sampling. This sampling technique was chosen because the participants had to meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, namely being foreign learners who were actively learning Indonesian and having intermediate-level proficiency. The selection of intermediate learners was important because they already possessed basic communicative competence but still faced structural challenges in sentence construction and word formation.

The data of this study consisted of responses obtained from a structured questionnaire designed to identify syntactic and morphological difficulties experienced by the participants. The questionnaire responses served as the primary data source, providing quantitative information on linguistic challenges related to sentence structure, conjunction use, word formation, affixation, and noun–verb distinctions in Indonesian language learning.

### 2.3 Research Instrument

The main research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire designed to capture various types of linguistic difficulties experienced by foreign learners. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions to obtain comprehensive data on syntactic and morphological challenges. Closed-ended questions were used to measure the frequency of specific linguistic difficulties, while open-ended questions allowed participants to provide additional explanations regarding the challenges they encountered.

The questionnaire was structured into two main sections, focusing on syntactic and morphological aspects of Indonesian language learning. The instrument included four key indicators of linguistic difficulties: syntactic difficulties in sentence structure, morphological difficulties related to word formation and affixation, difficulties in the use of conjunctions, and errors in distinguishing between nouns and verbs within sentence structures. These indicators were designed to ensure that the questionnaire captured the most relevant structural challenges experienced by foreign learners in learning Indonesian.

To ensure the quality of the instrument, the questionnaire was carefully designed to reflect linguistic concepts related to syntax and morphology. The structure of the instrument allowed the researchers to obtain consistent and measurable responses that could be analyzed quantitatively.

### 2.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was conducted in several systematic steps to ensure clarity and consistency. First, the researchers prepared the questionnaire based on the identified linguistic indicators related to syntactic and morphological difficulties. Second, the questionnaire was distributed online using digital survey platforms such as Google Forms and SurveyMonkey to facilitate easy access for participants. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were provided with a brief explanation of the research objectives and the purpose of their participation.

Third, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire by responding to all items related to their linguistic experiences in learning Indonesian. The online distribution allowed respondents to complete the questionnaire independently and provided flexibility in data collection. Fourth, the completed responses were collected and compiled into a database for further analysis. This systematic procedure ensured that the data collection process was organized, efficient, and consistent with the research objectives.

### 2.5 Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis to identify patterns of linguistic difficulties experienced by foreign learners. The analysis focused on calculating frequency, percentage, and mean scores of each linguistic difficulty category. This approach allowed the researchers to determine the dominant syntactic and morphological challenges encountered by the participants.

The percentage of respondents experiencing specific difficulties was calculated using the following formula:

$$P = (N / T) \times 100$$

where:

P = Percentage of respondents experiencing difficulty (%)

N = Number of respondents experiencing difficulty

T = Total number of respondents

This formula was used to calculate the percentage of syntactic difficulties in sentence structures, conjunction use, and morphological challenges in word formation and affixation.

The analyzed data were then presented in tables and figures to facilitate clear interpretation of the findings. Frequency and percentage distributions were used to highlight the most dominant linguistic difficulties, while mean scores were calculated to provide a general overview of the level of challenges experienced by foreign learners. The statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS and Microsoft Excel to ensure accuracy and reliability in data processing.

To ensure methodological rigor, reliability testing of the questionnaire was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to measure internal consistency. The results of the reliability analysis confirmed that the instrument was suitable for data collection and analysis. Through this step-by-step analytical process, the study provides a systematic and transparent description of linguistic difficulties experienced by foreign learners in learning Indonesian.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Results

##### 3.1.1 Overview of Linguistic Difficulties

This section presents the empirical findings on syntactic and morphological difficulties experienced by foreign learners in learning Indonesian. The results are organized based on the two main linguistic aspects investigated in this study: syntactic difficulties and morphological difficulties. The findings are presented using tables and concise explanations to highlight the most dominant linguistic challenges identified from the responses of the twenty-two participants.

Overall, the results indicate that foreign learners experience considerable difficulties in both syntactic and morphological aspects of Indonesian. Syntactic difficulties are primarily related to sentence structure and the use of conjunctions, while morphological difficulties are associated with affixation, word formation, and confusion between nouns and verbs. These findings provide a structured overview of the linguistic barriers encountered by foreign learners at the intermediate level.

##### 3.1.2 Syntactic Difficulties

###### Sentence Structure

The first research question examines the syntactic difficulties experienced by foreign learners in learning Indonesian. The results show that sentence structure is one of the most challenging aspects for learners, particularly due to differences between Indonesian grammatical patterns and their native languages. Table 1 presents the syntactic difficulties related to sentence structure.

Table 1. Syntactic Difficulties in Sentence Structures

No	Types of Difficulty	Respondents (n=22)	Percentage (%)
1	Sentence structure (SPO)	18	81.8
2	Use of conjunctions	16	72.7
3	Compound sentences	15	68.1
4	Word placement	14	63.6
5	Use of punctuation	13	59.1
6	Interrogative sentences	12	54.5
7	Imperative forms	11	50.0

The findings indicate that sentence structure represents the most dominant syntactic challenge, with 81.8% of learners experiencing difficulties in understanding and applying basic Indonesian sentence patterns. This result shows that many learners struggle with constructing sentences using the Subject–Predicate–Object (SPO) structure, which is essential for grammatical accuracy in Indonesian. In contrast, imperative forms show the lowest difficulty level at 50.0%, indicating that simpler sentence forms are relatively easier for learners to understand.

These findings suggest that the teaching of basic sentence structure requires greater emphasis, particularly in helping learners understand word order and grammatical relationships between sentence elements.

###### Use of Conjunctions

Another significant syntactic difficulty involves the use of conjunctions in sentence construction. Conjunctions play an important role in connecting ideas and forming coherent sentences, yet many foreign learners experience uncertainty in selecting appropriate conjunctions. Table 2 presents the difficulties in the use of conjunctions.

Table 2. Difficulties in the Use of Conjunctions

No	Conjunction	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	dan	17	77
2	tetapi	16	72
3	maka	16	72
4	karena	15	68
5	jika	15	68
6	sementara	14	63

The results show that “dan” (77%) represents the highest level of difficulty, followed by “maka” and “tetapi”, which are commonly used to express contrast and consequence. In addition, “karena” and “jika” (68%) also show a high level of difficulty, indicating confusion in expressing causal and conditional relationships. Less frequently used conjunctions such as *sementara* also contribute to learner uncertainty due to their multiple meanings and contextual usage.

These findings indicate that foreign learners face challenges in connecting clauses logically and selecting appropriate conjunctions according to context. As a result, syntactic competence in constructing complex sentences remains limited among many learners.

### 3.1.3 Morphological Difficulties

#### Word Formation and Affixation

The second research question focuses on morphological difficulties experienced by foreign learners in learning Indonesian. The results show that word formation and affixation represent major challenges, particularly in understanding prefixes and suffixes. Table 3 presents the morphological difficulties in word formation.

Table 3. Morphological Difficulties in Word Formation

No	Types of Difficulty	Respondents (n=22)	Percentage (%)
1	Use of prefixes	17	77.2
2	Root words	16	72.7
3	Word formation	16	72.7
4	Tense forms	16	72.7
5	Use of suffixes	15	68.1
6	Affirmation and negation	14	63.6
7	Plural forms	12	54.5

The findings reveal that prefix usage (77.2%) is the most difficult morphological aspect, indicating that learners struggle to understand how prefixes modify word meaning and grammatical function. Meanwhile, plural forms (54.5%) show the lowest difficulty level, although they still require attention in teaching.

These results demonstrate that the Indonesian affixation system remains a significant obstacle for foreign learners, especially in distinguishing between root words and derived forms such as *jalan-berjalan* and *masak-memasak*. This difficulty suggests that learners require more structured exposure to morphological patterns in Indonesian.

#### Noun-Verb Distinction

Another important morphological issue involves confusion in distinguishing between nouns and verbs with similar forms. Table 4 presents errors in noun-verb distinction.

Table 4. Errors in Distinguishing between Nouns and Verbs

Word	Type of Error	Number of Errors
membaca	verb used as noun	15
baca	noun used as verb	10
mendengar	verb used as noun	8
dengar	noun used as verb	7
menulis	verb used as noun	6
berbicara	verb used as noun	6
tulis	noun used as verb	5
makan	verb used as noun	5
bicara	noun used as verb	4
lihat	verb/noun confusion	4
suka	verb used as noun	4
bantu	noun confusion	4
kerja	verb/noun confusion	4
minum	verb used as noun	3
tonton	verb confusion	3
pikir	verb/noun confusion	3
lari	verb/noun confusion	3
bantuan	noun used as verb	2
berpikir/pikir	verb confusion	2

The results indicate several recurring errors, including: using verbs as nouns, using nouns as verbs, incorrect noun formation, confusion due to similar word forms, and errors in expressing actions or processes

These findings show that many foreign learners experience difficulty in identifying grammatical categories in Indonesian. The similarity of word forms often leads to incorrect sentence construction, which affects grammatical accuracy and clarity.

### 3.2. Discussion

This study set out to examine the syntactic and morphological difficulties experienced by foreign learners in learning Indonesian, as formulated in the two research questions. The findings provide clear empirical evidence that these difficulties are not peripheral but central to the process of acquiring Indonesian as a foreign language. In line with the research gap identified in the Introduction, which highlighted the limited empirical focus on structural linguistic challenges, the results demonstrate that both syntax and morphology constitute persistent barriers even at the intermediate level. This confirms that linguistic competence in Indonesian cannot be adequately explained without addressing structural dimensions of language.

#### 4.1 Syntactic Difficulties and the Limits of Structural Transfer

Addressing the first research question, the findings show that syntactic difficulties are primarily manifested in sentence structure and conjunction use. While previous studies have emphasized the role of first language transfer in explaining syntactic errors (Auni and Manan, 2023; Zarbali et al., 2024; Gross, 2022; Alfaifi and Saleem, 2024), the present results suggest that transfer alone is insufficient to account for the observed patterns. Instead, syntactic difficulties appear to result from a combination of transfer effects, limited structural awareness, and inadequate internalization of Indonesian grammatical rules.

This interpretation extends existing theories in second language acquisition, which argue that learning a new language involves restructuring prior linguistic knowledge rather than simply transferring it (Smith, 2022; Wu, 2022). The persistence of sentence structure errors among intermediate learners indicates that learners have not fully reorganized their internal grammatical system to accommodate Indonesian syntax. Consequently, syntactic competence should not be viewed merely as knowledge of rules such as the Subject–Predicate–Object (SPO) pattern, but as the ability to apply these structures flexibly in communication.

Furthermore, the findings on conjunction use reveal an important gap between form recognition and functional use. Learners often recognize conjunctions such as *dan*, *tetapi*, and *karena*, yet struggle to use them appropriately to express logical relationships between clauses. This supports earlier observations by Najamuddin (2020) and Jama (2023), but also suggests a deeper issue: learners' difficulty lies not only in selecting the correct lexical item but in integrating syntactic and discourse-level knowledge. In this sense, syntactic competence must be understood as extending beyond sentence-level accuracy to include the organization of meaning across clauses and discourse.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the argument presented in the Introduction that syntactic difficulties in Indonesian are not isolated errors but reflect broader challenges in structural language processing. They also provide a more nuanced explanation of syntactic development, highlighting the need to move beyond transfer-based explanations toward a more integrated understanding of learner cognition and linguistic knowledge.

#### 4.2 Morphological Difficulties and Their Structural Impact

In response to the second research question, the findings confirm that morphological difficulties represent a major challenge for foreign learners, particularly in relation to affixation and word formation. Consistent with previous research (Namsaeng et al., 2024; Matthews et al., 2023; Auni & Manan, 2023), the results show that learners struggle to understand and apply prefixes and suffixes, which are essential components of Indonesian grammar. However, the present study adds to this body of research by demonstrating that these difficulties persist at the intermediate level and significantly affect overall linguistic performance.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports the view that morphology is not merely a supplementary aspect of language but a core component of grammatical competence (Sandra et al., 2024; Gani, 2020). Indonesian relies heavily on affixation to express grammatical relationships and semantic distinctions, which increases the cognitive demands placed on learners. As a result, learners often experience difficulty in processing multiple layers of information, including root forms, affixes, and their functions within a sentence.

Importantly, the results reveal that morphological difficulties have direct implications for syntactic accuracy. Errors in affixation frequently lead to incorrect grammatical categories, which in turn disrupt sentence structure and coherence. This finding reinforces the theoretical position that syntax and morphology are interdependent systems (Smith, 2022; Wu, 2022). It also supports the argument advanced in the Introduction that these two dimensions must be examined together to fully understand linguistic difficulties in Indonesian language learning.

Moreover, the observed confusion between nouns and verbs suggests that learners have not yet developed a stable understanding of word classification in Indonesian. This issue reflects a deeper problem in morphological awareness, which limits learners' ability to produce grammatically accurate and semantically appropriate sentences. Therefore, morphological competence should be seen as foundational to both lexical development and syntactic organization.

#### 4.3 Integrating Findings: Toward an Interconnected View of Linguistic Difficulty

A key contribution of this study lies in its integrated analysis of syntactic and morphological difficulties. While previous studies have often examined these aspects separately, the present findings demonstrate that they are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Syntactic errors frequently originate from morphological misunderstandings, while morphological errors affect sentence structure and discourse coherence. This interconnectedness validates the theoretical framework outlined in the Introduction and provides empirical support for a more holistic view of language acquisition.

This integrated perspective also challenges traditional pedagogical approaches that treat grammar as a set of discrete components. As suggested by Kustaryo (2015) and Benzerroug (2021), effective language teaching requires the integration of linguistic, communicative, and contextual elements. The present findings extend this argument by showing that integration is not only pedagogically desirable but also linguistically necessary. Without a coherent understanding of how syntax and morphology interact, learners are unlikely to achieve full communicative competence.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the limitations of approaches that prioritize form recognition over meaningful use. Although learners may be familiar with grammatical forms, their inability to apply them in context suggests that deeper processing is required. This aligns with the arguments of Chatterjee and Halder (2022) and Brown (2020), who emphasize the importance of contextualized and communicative learning. However, the present study suggests that such approaches must be complemented by explicit instruction on structural relationships to be fully effective.

The persistent difficulties in syntax and morphology indicate that Indonesian language teaching for foreign learners must place greater emphasis on structural competence. Specifically, instructional practices should focus on integrating syntax and morphology, providing explicit explanations of grammatical relationships, and offering contextualized opportunities for practice.

At the same time, the findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of Indonesian as a foreign language by demonstrating that linguistic difficulties are shaped by a complex interaction of structural, cognitive, and contextual factors. This insight reinforces the need for further research that combines empirical analysis with pedagogical innovation, as suggested in the Conclusion.

In sum, the study not only answers the research questions but also advances the broader discussion on second language acquisition by highlighting the central role of structural competence in language learning. By aligning empirical findings with theoretical perspectives and pedagogical implications, the study offers a coherent and comprehensive account of linguistic difficulties in Indonesian language learning.

## 5. Conclusions

This study investigated syntactic and morphological difficulties experienced by foreign learners in learning Indonesian at the intermediate level. The findings reveal that foreign learners encounter significant challenges in constructing grammatically accurate sentences, particularly in the use of conjunctions, sentence structure, word formation, affixation, and the distinction between nouns and verbs. Among these difficulties, syntactic problems related to conjunction use and sentence construction emerged as the most dominant, followed by morphological challenges in affixation and word formation. These findings indicate that structural aspects of Indonesian remain a major obstacle for foreign learners, even at the intermediate level, highlighting the complexity of Indonesian linguistic features in second language acquisition.

The results contribute to the theoretical understanding of Indonesian as a foreign language by demonstrating that syntactic and morphological difficulties are closely related to learners' limited exposure to structural patterns and differences between Indonesian and their first language. The findings support previous studies emphasizing that grammatical complexity, particularly in sentence structure and morphological processes, plays a crucial role in shaping foreign learners' language acquisition outcomes. This study therefore strengthens the argument that linguistic analysis of learner difficulties is essential for developing effective teaching strategies in Indonesian language learning.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that Indonesian language instruction for foreign learners should place greater emphasis on explicit teaching of syntax and morphology. Teachers are encouraged to provide structured learning activities focusing on conjunction usage, sentence construction, affixation patterns, and word classification in Indonesian. In addition, contextualized practice, interactive exercises, and form-focused instruction can help learners better understand grammatical structures and reduce linguistic errors. The integration of systematic grammar instruction with communicative language teaching may improve learners' overall linguistic competence and support more effective Indonesian language learning in BIPA programs.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The relatively small number of participants limits the generalizability of the findings, and the focus on intermediate-level learners does not fully capture linguistic difficulties at other proficiency levels. Furthermore, the use of questionnaire-based data may not fully reflect learners' actual language performance in real communicative contexts. Therefore, future research is recommended

to involve larger and more diverse participant groups, including beginner and advanced learners, and to incorporate multiple data sources such as writing samples, speaking performance, and classroom observations. Future studies may also explore the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions designed to address syntactic and morphological difficulties in Indonesian language learning.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of understanding linguistic difficulties in Indonesian as a foreign language and emphasizes the need for more structured and linguistically informed teaching approaches. By addressing syntactic and morphological challenges through targeted instructional strategies, Indonesian language programs can better support foreign learners in achieving higher levels of grammatical accuracy and communicative competence.

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