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Expressing Times in Indonesian and English: A Contrastive Study

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Abstract

This paper deals with the differences and similarities of how Indonesian and English speakers asking about or informing time. By using data collected intuitively and empirically tested with other native speakers, and compared with their English equivalents, it is found that in spite of their few similarities, both languages that belong to different language family group, show a lot structural and pragmatic differences with regard to asking about and informing times, of either precise and non-prise ones.

Introduction

Time is an important entity in any language. By expressing time, the speakers of world languages can locate more precisely the length and the time of the state and action of the utterances happen or occur in speech situation. However, as the reflection of of language individuality, every language has different ways of expressing time. The differences in expressing time are clearly visible in the use of language in various linguistic levels, lexically as well as grammatically. The time expression also involves how the language speakers asking about time to their interlocutor(s). This paper will try to compare the differences of time expressions in Indonesian and English, two languages that belong to different language group. Indonesian belongs to Austronesian, while English belongs to Indo-Germanic family.

This research is considered having important role in order to study or master both languages. In one hand, English is undeniably the most important international language nowadays. This language is used as an international language or a lingua franca by people all over the world for communicating everything either in formal as well as less or informal situations. Meanwhile, Indonesian is a national and an official language used in Indonesia, and a lingua franca for various ethnic groups living over the Archipelago. This language is also taught in several overseas universities as compulsory or optional subjects. According to [Muliastuti \(2019,1\)](#) Indonesian is taught in at least 45 countries in secondary and tertiary education.

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Several of them are United States, Canada, Vietnam, Russia, South Korea, Japan, and Germany. In Australia, Indonesian is the fourth most popular languages to study See also (Wijana, 2022, 238). These facts indicate that the two languages are very important to study by both learners, Indonesian and English as well.

However, the big structural differences between them, will cause a lot of problems for both learners to master them. As such, the comparative studies which enable to give accurate descriptions of their structural differences will bridge the gap and make ease the both learners to master the two genetically unrelated languages. However, it is certainly impossible to describe all structural aspects of English and Indonesian, due to the limited time and writer's ability to do so. As such, in this occasion, as mentioned by the title, I will focus my attention on the differences of these two languages expressing time that includes how to ask and inform it. This matter so far has not been seriously studied by constructivists.

Previous Study

As the most widely used world language, there must be a lot of studies have been done by linguistic scholars in attempting to compare various linguistic phenomena found in English other languages for applied studies, mainly translation, interpretation, and contrastive studies. Several articles placed on comparative text book entitled *Languages and Cultures in contrast and Comparison*, try to study differences of English cleft sentences and its translation in Norwegian and Spanish by using J.K. Rowling's novel translation as source of data (Gundel, 2008, 70-86), the differences of semantic concept of word *abroad* in English and other European languages with its equivalent *aburokyry* in Akan, a language used in Ghana (Fretheim and Amfo, 2008, 174-190). There is also an article which tries to compare the difference position of adverbials in French and Dutch (Magnus, 2008, 90-119). Inspired by Dardjowidjojo (1986, 57-68), Wijana (2021a, 99-113) tries to compare the active and passive perspective of English and Indonesian which often impede both language learners to master the languages they study. Wijana (2021b) and (2021c) are respectively attempts to compare passive voices found in Indonesia, Javanese, and Balinese; and Indonesian and Balinese and Javanese cognates.

Theoretical Frame Work

The facts that there are big differences between the language structures the learners studied in the text books and the language used by the community members are often surprising for anyone who try to master the second language. For example, Indonesian speakers who learn English mostly confuse to understand the expression *Do you have time?* when they live overseas because they only learn the other way of asking it *What time is it?* Studying English in Indonesia will rarely know that the zero in 12.05 can be expressed O (the fifteenth letter), twelve O five, which in Indonesian can only be expressed as *kosong* 'zero' or *nol* 'zero', *12 kosong lima* or *12 nol lima* which both mean 'twelve past five', but it is unacceptable to be expressed using the letter name *12 O lima. Theoretically, to be able to use the language properly, any language speaker should master two kinds of competence, i.e linguistic competence and communicative competence (Richards et als. 1985, 49; Hymes, 1974, 75).

Linguistic competence relates with the ability to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences. Meanwhile, communicative competence refers to the ability to use these sentences in proper contexts, where, when, and to whom. As such, communicative competence is including several abilities or knowledges, such as: 1) knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary, 2) knowledge of rules of speaking that includes the abilities to begin and conversations, to know what topics to discuss in different types of speech events, to

choose the address forms should be given to different persons to communicate with, 3) knowledge about how to express and respond different types of speech acts, such as requests, apologies, thanks, invitations, etc, 4) knowledge about how to use language appropriately.

Without any significant differences, [Coulthard \(1985, 137\)](#) differentiated between grammatical competence and sociolinguistic competence. The first concerns with the knowledge and skill required to understand and express the literal meaning of utterances, and the second does with the appropriateness of meaning and appropriateness of form. In the later development, the communicative competence is associated with the use of language in real contexts. All utterances the speakers produce are essentially product of speech acts ([Leech, 1983, 13-14](#); [Wijana, 2021d, 17](#)). Expressing time is one of complicative communicative aspect which is different across languages, and will clearly reflected in the structure and pragmatic use of language, let alone between languages belonging to the genetically different family group, such as English and Indonesian

Methods

This research used a qualitative method to explore the many sorts of questions asked by professors to pupils as well as the consequences such questions had. In addition, a qualitative approach was employed for this study, and discourse analysis was one of the traditions used to analysed the interaction between the participants. It analysed the transcript of the class and sorted the students' statements into the appropriate groups. This study used classroom observation and interview as its data collection procedure. The classroom observation was strengthened by the use of a stick note to describe and specify the type of questions that were performed by four teachers in ELT interaction in the classroom.

The interview was used to look out for responses as effects that were directly expressed by students. After that, the author had an unstructured interview with the instructors in order to learn more about the process and to ask the teachers some questions that related with the process. This was done so that the writer could determine how the teachers handled the various sorts of questions asked in class. The interview was taped by the author so there would be no chance of misinterpretation during such an essential phase. The author of this research had the ability to collect data by directly seeing the subject of the study behave, act, or accomplish a given item, as well as by speaking face-to-face with the participant in the study. Furthermore, this study analysed by summarize, present the results, and then draw some conclusions from them.

A summary of the number of occurrences of each characteristic was then provided by the author after the data from the checklist observation had been sorted into either the convergence or divergence features. The data were then shown in a table by the author so that it could be made clear what sorts of questions were asked by teachers in ELT classes. The author then transcribed the audio tape after conducting an unstructured interview in order to get an extra response from the instructor. The data that the author collected were first transcribed into written form, and then the data were identified, chosen, and also classed or extracted depending on the analysing requirements that were pertinent to the subject matter of this study. At long last, the data had been extracted, and the detailed narrative displayed the results. As a native speaker of Indonesian, sentences expressing how Indonesian speakers asking about and informing time are collected intuitively, and their grammaticality are empirically tested with other native speakers. These sentences are further compared with their English equivalents whose grammaticality and appropriateness are also checked with Indonesian English lectures and

some natives, and based on my experience for two years lived-in English-speaking countries. The comparison is done to find out the structural and pragmatic similarities and differences of how the two languages, Indonesian and English, expressing time.

Results and Discussion

I will divide my research findings into two parts. The first is related with how the two languages, Indonesian and English asking about the time, and the second is done with how they are informing the time.

Asking about Time

Indonesian and English have quite different way of asking time. Everything related with number Indonesian uses word *berapa* which literally means 'how many'. For example, sentence like *Ini nomor berapa?* 'What number is it', *Rumahmu nomor berapa* 'what number is your house?'. However, in English, for this purpose the speakers use *what* which literally in Indonesian mean s 'apa'. See (1) and (2) below:

- (1) Ini nomor berapa?
This numbers how many
'What number is it'
- (2) Rumahmu nomor berapa?
How's your number how many
What number is your house.

In English *how many* which literally correspond to 'berapa' is only used for asking about quantity, as shown in (3) and (4) below:

- (3) How many children do you have?
- (4) How many times do you take a bath a day?

How many in (3) and (4) have their equivalent *berapa* in Indonesian. Consider (5) and (6) below:

- (5) Berapa anak kamu punya.
How many child you have?
'How many children do you have'
- (6) Berapa kali kamu mandi sehari
How many times you take a bath one day
How many times do you take a bath a day

This complication also happens with regard to asking about time. English Speakers use *what*, and Indonesian speakers use *berapa* 'how many'. Compare (7) and (8) below:

- (7) What time is it?
- (8) Jam berapa ini
Time/hour how many this
What time is it?

In Indonesian the use of *apa* 'what' following *jam* 'time, hour' is intended to mean 'the type, brand' of the watch/oclock the interlocutor wears or has, such as shown by conversation (9) below:

- (9) + Jam apa ini?
Time what this
what type of watch is this
- Ini jam omega
This hour/time Omega
It is Omega

Meanwhile, if the word *berapa* 'how many' used preceding jam 'time/hour' is intended to mean how many hours or how long. See example (10) below:

- (10) + Berapa jam kamu tidur sehari?
how many time/hour you sleep a day
How many hours/long do you sleep a day
- 8 jam
eight hour/time
eight hours

In spite of *What time is it?* which is equivalent with Indonesian *Jam berapa ini?* English also has another way expressing it. The expression used to express this intention is *Do you have time?* which is literally equal to Indonesian *Apakah kamu punya waktu/jam?* English expression *Do you have time?* has become idiomatic sentence for asking time. However, sentences like *Apakah anda punya jam* 'Do you have a watch' atau *Apakah anda bawa jam* 'Do you bring watch' have not yet become idiomatic expression for expressing such an intention, eventhough in very rare cases it can pragmatically happens. However, in English conversasion such as (11) is very common:

- (11) + Do you have time?
- It is eight o'clock

The literal translation of *Do you have time?* in Indonesian *Apakah Anda punya/ada waktu* is used to express other intention because these expressions correspond to 'Do you have time to spare' or 'Do you have time leisure time?'. See example (12) below:

- (12) + Apakah Anda punya/ada waktu?
Do you have time?
Do you have (leisure) time
- Ya, hari jum'at
Yes, day Friday
Yes, on Friday

In formal ocassions Indonesian has word pukul 'strike' to use for asking about time. See (13) below:

- (13) + Pukul berapa rapatnya?
Strike how many metting the
What time is the meeting?
- Pukul 10.00
Strike 10.00
10.00 o'clock

In informal situation (13) is expressed using jam like (14) below:

- (14) + Jam berapa rapatnya?
Hour/time how many meeting the
What time is the meeting?

Informing Time

Any language has many ways to inform time. However, it can simply be differentiated into two types, i.e. informing precise/exact time and informing non precise/non exact time. These issues will be discussed respectively in the following sections:

Informing Precise Time

There are several differences in expressing precise time in Indonesian and English. In Indonesia, the precise time can be expressed using number from *satu* (1) 'one' to *dua puluh empat* (24) 'twenty four', depending on the time intended by the speaker. See dialog (15) and (16) below:

- (15) + Jam berapa ini
Time/hour what this
What time is it?
- Jam 7
Time/hour seven
It is seven o'clock
- (16) + Pukul berapa pertandingannya?
Strike how many match the
What time is the match?
- Pukul 15.00
Strike 15.00
3 pm

In Indonesian it is possible to inform time using number more than twelve, as shown in (16). The other examples are (17) dan (18) below:

- (17) Pertandingan dijadwalkan pukul 17.00.
Match the is scheduled strike 17.00.
The match is scheduled at 5 pm.
- (18) Kelas akan dimulai jam 13.00.
The class will start at 13.00
The class will start at 1 pm.

Informing time in English is impossible using numbers higher than twelve (12). For this purpose, English uses pm (*post meridiem*) which is differentiated with am (*ante meridiem*). See (19) and (20) below:

- (19) The soccer match will be broadcasted live at 2 am.
(20) The boxing championship will be live in channel 10 at 3 pm.

Sentence (20) is impossible to express as (21):

(21) *The boxing championship will be live in channel 10 at 15.00. To differentiate English am and pm, Indonesian use part of the day like *pagi* 'morning', *siang* 'noon', *sore* 'evening', *malam* 'night', etc. See (22) to (25) below together with their glossing or free translations:

- (22) Sekarang pukul 6 pagi
Now strike 6 mornings
Now, it is 6 am

- (23) Sekarang jam 11 siang.

- Now hour 11 noon
Now, it is 11 am.
(24) Sekarang pukul 11 malam
Nowstrike 11 night
Now, it is 11 pm.
(25) Sekarang jam 5 sore
Now hour/time five evening
Now, it is 5 pm.

Informing Non-Precise Time

Non-precise time informing happens when there is additional minute information must be given to the precise time. The minute additional information can be related to amount of time has been already passed or has to be reached to achieve the precise time information. Accordingly, this section will be divided into 2 subsections which respectively will describe "less additional information" and "past additional information".

Less Addition information

Mostly less addition minute informations are placed after the main time information in Indonesian. For this purpose, the word *kurang* 'less' is used. See (26) and (27) below in which the main time 7 (tujuh) precedes *seperempat* 'a quarter' :

- (26) Ia akan datang pukul 7 kurang seperempat.
He will arrive strike 7 less a quarter
He will arrive at a quarter to seven.
(27) Pertandingan akan dimulai pukul 9 kurang sepuluh.
Match will start strike 9 less ten
The match starts at ten to 9

In English the less addition minute information is placed prior to the main time information. Consider (28) and (29) below:

- (28) It is twenty to seven
(29) It is a quarter to ten.

In Indonesian 30 minutes less can be expressed by *setengah* 'half' for informing less minute to the main time. In English *half* can only be used to express past addition minutes. See (30), (31) and (32) below:

- (30) Ini jam setengah 9.00
This hour/time half 9.00
'It is 8.30'
(31) Ini pukul setengah 11.00.
This strike half 11.00
'It is 10.30'
(32) Sekarang sudah setengah 1.00.
Now already half 1.00
Now, it is already half past twelve.

To express less additional information, the word *setengah* 'half' cannot be used preceding the main time because (33), (34), and (35) are unacceptable in Indonesian:

- (33) *Sekarang sudah sembilan setengah.

(34) *Ini pukul 11.00 setengah

(35) *Sekarang sudah 1.00 setengah.

The word o'clock is not used for informing non precise time because sentences like **It is 8 30 o'clock*, **It is ten thirty o'clock*, and **It is already half past twelve o'clock* are not acceptable. However, in Indonesian the occurrence of word jam 'hour' before the time expressions is still possible. So, their translational expressions like *Ini pukul/jam 8.30*, *Ini pukul/jam 10 tiga puluh*, dan *Ini sudah jam/pukul setengah satu* are still acceptable.

Past addition Information

Past addition informations always placed after main time information in Indonesian. In informal situations the past minute information just places after with or without the word *lebih* 'more' or *lewat* 'past'. See (36), (37), and (38) below:

(36) Sekarang sudah pukul 7 (lebih) 30.

Now, already strike 7 (more) 30.

'Now, it is already 7.30'

(37) Sekarang jam 8 (lewat) 45.

Now, hour/time 8 (past) 45.

Now, it is 8 (past) 45

(38) Sekarang jam 9.20

Now hour/time 9.20

Now, it is nine twenty.

The minute addition time cannot precede the main time information. Sentences (39), (40), and (41) are unacceptable in Indonesian:

(39) *Sekarang sudah 30 menit lewat 7.

(40) *Sekarang 45 menit lewat 8.

(41) *Sekarang 20 menit lewat 9.

In English, the past minute addition can be placed prior or after the main time information. So, all four sentences below are acceptable in this language. Sentences (42) and (44) place the addition minute information prior, while (43) and (45) put them after.

(42) It is half past nine

(43) It is nine thirty.

(44) It is half past ten pasts

(45) It is ten thirty.

Comparing (36), (37) and (38) with (43) and (45), it seems that this structure constitute the closest pattern between Indonesian and English, and consequently would be the easiest pattern to master by both learners.

Conclusion

Time expressions can simply be distincted into two types. Those are time asking and time informing expression. The later can further be differentiated into precise and non precise time informing, either less or past to the main time information. As far as time expressions are concerned, Indonesian and English have quite different structures the time is asked about or informed. The differences are not merely related to their structural patterns, but the use of Indonesian lexical items, such as *berapa* 'how many' *jam* 'hour/time', *pukul* 'strike', *kurang*

'less', *lebih* 'more/past', *lewat* 'past', and *berapa lama* 'how long' in one hand, and their complicated pragmatic English correspondence *what*, *time*, *hour*, *o'clock*, *past*, *to*, and *how long* in the other. With regard to time asking, Indonesian uses *berapa* 'how many' which correspond to 'what' in English. *Berapa* which is used for asking about length of time corresponds to *how long*. For informing precise time *jam* corresponds to English *o'clock*. Finally for informing non precise time, Indonesian only uses expressions which place the additional time information prior to the main time. While, English has two ways for expressing additional minute information, prior and after the main time expressions.

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