

Mother Tongue Barriers and Anecdote Text Writing in Indonesian as A Second Language: A Genre-Based Study of Papua Students

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ABSTRACT

Writing Indonesian anecdote texts presents challenges for Papuan students who use languages as their mother tongues. Linguistic differences, limited genre knowledge, and insufficiently contextualized instruction may affect their ability to produce coherent and complete texts. This study aimed to describe students' anecdote-writing competence, identify forms of mother-tongue interference, and examine the pedagogical relevance of a genre-based approach. A descriptive-exploratory design was employed at SMA Negeri Meepago, Papua, involving 48 Grade X students, one Indonesian language teacher, and the principal. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and unsupported student writing tasks, then analyzed thematically using ATLAS.ti 9 through initial, focused, and theoretical coding. The findings showed that 41 students (85%) demonstrated mother-tongue interference, including grammatical transfer, inverted word order, dialectal lexical intrusion, direct translation, omission of function words, and incomplete sentences. Moreover, 38 students (79%) displayed inadequate knowledge of anecdote structures, while only 40% achieved the minimum writing competency criterion. These difficulties were reinforced by lecture-centered teaching, limited genre modeling, and materials that were insufficiently connected to Papuan contexts. The study concludes that a culturally responsive genre-based approach is needed to provide explicit modeling, collaborative construction, and scaffolding, thereby improving students' linguistic accuracy, textual coherence, and mastery of anecdote writing.

INTRODUCTION

Text-based learning has become the cornerstone of Indonesian language education at the secondary level, with anecdote texts occupying a strategically significant position in the national curriculum. Structured around the generic stages of abstract, orientation, crisis, reaction, and coda (Hani et al., 2021), anecdote texts are valued not only for their capacity to cultivate a sense of humour and social critique but also for their potential to develop critical thinking and reflective literacy among senior high school students (Lubis et al., 2022; Adha et al., 2021). Nationally, studies indicate that while the capacity to produce anecdote texts is gradually forming, it remains at a moderate level and requires substantive reinforcement in

terms of both generic structure and linguistic features (Adha et al., 2021; Prabowo & David, 2022).

At the international level, the genre-based approach (GBA) rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has demonstrated robust effectiveness in enhancing learners' understanding of generic structures and lexico-grammatical features across a range of text types including recount, narrative, and academic essay in second and foreign language (L2/FL) contexts (Mingsakoon & Srinon, 2019; Nagao, 2022; Lubis et al., 2022; Alhammad, 2025). The GBA cycle comprising text modelling, deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction is known for its capacity to scaffold students across varied proficiency levels (Nagao, 2019; Zohbie & Bhowmik, 2024).

Despite documented progress in genre pedagogy, mother tongue interference remains one of the most persistent obstacles to L2 writing development. Empirical studies conducted across diverse bilingual and multilingual contexts confirm that L1 structures exert measurable influence on L2 written production, manifesting as grammatical transfer errors, word-order inversions, direct transliteration, and non-target lexical choices (Remoshan, 2021; Nair & Krish, 2021; Mushtaq et al., 2023; Manan et al., 2017; Nappu, 2023). These patterns erode both the accuracy and coherence of L2 texts and are particularly pronounced where the linguistic distance between L1 and L2 is substantial.

In the Indonesian context, national language policies have historically marginalised vernacular languages while establishing Indonesian as the sole medium of formal instruction, generating language identity tensions within indigenous communities (Marwah et al., 2025; Adeoye et al., 2024). Papua represents an especially complex case: the province is home to more than 200 distinct languages (Sumule & Iheanyi-Igwe, 2020), and students entering formal education frequently arrive with minimal exposure to written Indonesian. Research shows that the cultural and linguistic distance between local environments and the national education system contributes to measurable gaps in academic achievement and disproportionate dropout rates (Sumule & Iheanyi-Igwe, 2020). Preliminary evidence indicates that vernacular language use in early schooling can serve as a bridge toward Indonesian literacy acquisition (Sumule & Iheanyi-Igwe, 2020), yet existing scholarship has not systematically examined how Papuan students negotiate L1 structures when attempting to produce anecdote texts in Indonesian as L2 within a GBA framework.

Studies on anecdote texts in Indonesia have predominantly focused on structural analysis, material development, and digital module design rather than on the L1–L2 dynamics operating in multilingual, peripheralised regions such as Papua (Mukhlis & Asnawi, 2019; Lubis et al., 2022; Adha et al., 2021; Prabowo & David, 2022; Hani et al., 2021). This constitutes a significant gap in the literature that the present study seeks to address.

The present study is guided by three interrelated research questions. First, it examines the profile of Papuan students' ability to write anecdote texts in Indonesian as a second language (L2), particularly based on the assessment of generic structure and linguistic features. Second, it investigates the forms of mother tongue (L1) interference that appear in Papuan students' Indonesian anecdote texts and how these linguistic influences affect text quality. Third, it explores the extent to which a genre-based approach (GBA) contributes to reducing L1 barriers and improving students' ability to produce more effective anecdote texts.

Corresponding to these research questions, this study aims to achieve three main objectives. The first objective is to provide a comprehensive description of students' anecdote-writing competence by analyzing their use of generic structures and lexico-grammatical features. The second objective is to identify and classify various forms of L1 interference that influence the quality of students' Indonesian anecdote texts. The third objective is to analyze the effectiveness of a genre-based approach intervention in assisting students to overcome L1-related challenges and develop more coherent, accurate, and contextually appropriate anecdote texts. Through these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of second language writing development among Papuan students and provide pedagogical insights for Indonesian language instruction in multilingual educational contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive-explorative research design, a paradigm suited to examining educational phenomena in their natural context without experimental manipulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design allows for an in-depth portrayal of students' writing behaviour, teacher instructional practices, and the school's linguistic ecology, while enabling the identification of patterns and relationships through systematic qualitative analysis.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at SMA Negeri Meepago, a state senior high school located in the Meepago region, Papua Province, Indonesia. The school serves a multiethnic student population drawn from at least four major indigenous groups were the Mee, Moni, Dani, and Serui alongside smaller numbers of students from Biak, Toraja, and Javanese backgrounds. Participants comprised: (a) 48 students enrolled in Grade X (two parallel classes: X IPA and X IPS); (b) the school's sole Indonesian language teacher (Ibu Anastasia Kirstin P.), who holds an S1 qualification and has been teaching at this school for three years; and (c) the school principal (Bapak Otopianus Tebai, S.Pd.), serving since 2022.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were generated through four complementary instruments. First, a structured needs-analysis questionnaire was distributed to students and educational staff, covering students' language background (Section A), current Indonesian language instruction (Section B), writing barriers (Section C), specific challenges in anecdote text writing (Section D), and perceived needs for a new instructional model (Section E). School administrators responded to an additional section (Section F) soliciting institutional perspectives. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both the school principal and the Indonesian language teacher; transcripts were produced verbatim and subjected to analysis. Third, students were asked to compose an original anecdote text during a class session without scaffolding, providing authentic, unsupported writing samples that constituted primary evidence of students' current competence and L1 interference patterns.

Data Analysis with ATLAS.ti

All qualitative data is interview transcripts, questionnaire open-responses, and student writing samples were imported into ATLAS.ti (Version 9). The analytical procedure followed three iterative stages aligned with Saldaña's (2021) coding framework. In the initial coding phase, data segments were assigned descriptive codes inductively, close to the language of the participants. In focused coding, these initial codes were grouped into higher-order categories reflecting theoretically significant constructs: L1 interference types, genre knowledge, instructional method effectiveness, and learning environment factors. Finally, theoretical coding enabled the identification of relationships among categories, visualised in ATLAS.ti's network view. This produced an integrated conceptual network that illustrates the multi-directional relationships between mother tongue dominance, genre understanding deficits, instructional limitations, and student writing outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Language Background and Ecology: A Multilingual Context

Questionnaire data reveal that Indonesian is the official medium of classroom communication at SMA Negeri Meepago; however, this institutional status does not reflect students' actual linguistic repertoire. Principal Otopianus Tebai confirmed that the school population represents at least four ethnic and linguistic groups, with only approximately 10 students (21%) coming from non-Papuan backgrounds (Toraja and Javanese). The remainder are indigenous Papuan students for whom regional vernacular languages are Mee, Moni, Dani, and others constitute the primary language of home and community life.

The Indonesian language teacher, Ibu Anastasia, characterised students' general Indonesian proficiency as: "*lancar tapi kadang terbolak-balik*" (fluent but sometimes inverted/disordered) with a key barrier being "*kurang terstruktur*" (lack of structural organisation). She further noted that students frequently mix dialectal features into their Indonesian, though full regional language code-switching is rare in formal classroom settings. Crucially, the teacher a Javanese native speaker possesses no proficiency in any local Papuan language, creating an asymmetric bilingual classroom in which students must navigate Indonesian exclusively without access to L1-mediated scaffolding.

The principal corroborated these observations, noting that while students can use Indonesian for basic communication, their comprehension of standard Indonesian particularly abstract vocabulary and complex syntactic structures remains limited: "*walaupun mereka bisa mendengar, walaupun mereka bisa mengucapkan, tetapi untuk pemahamannya masih kurang*" (even though they can hear and produce utterances, their comprehension is still insufficient). This combination of surface oral fluency masking deep comprehension deficits is consistent with Cummins' (1979) classic distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), and it represents a particularly acute challenge when students are expected to produce genre-structured written texts such as anecdote.

ATLAS.ti Network: Key Code Families and Their Relationships

ATLAS.ti analysis of the full corpus identified four primary thematic families and 17 subordinate codes. The network reveals three directional pathways through which L1 influence operates in the Papuan anecdote-writing context.

Table 1. ATLAS.ti Code Families, Codes, and Frequency of Occurrence

Code Family		Subordinate Codes	Frequency (N=48)
L1 Interference Patterns		Grammatical transfer errors; Inverted word order; Dialectal lexical intrusion; Direct transliteration; Omission of function words; Incomplete sentence structures	41 students (85%)
Genre Knowledge Deficits		Partial structure recognition; Absence of coda/reaksi; Underdeveloped crisis element; Confusion of anecdote and recount; Weak abstract formulation	38 students (79%)
Instructional Constraints		Lecture-dominant pedagogy; Insufficient genre modelling; Absence of local-context examples; Curriculum-context mismatch; Low KKM attainment (40%)	Teacher & principal interviews
Learner Affective Factors		High self-confidence in oral interaction; Low anxiety about L1 exposure; Limited topic-generation capacity; Preference for teacher-guided structure; Desire for contextualised learning	Student questionnaires

The ATLAS.ti network further shows that L1 Interference Patterns and Genre Knowledge Deficits are mutually reinforcing: students who lack secure knowledge of anecdote generic structure are more likely to resort to L1-based narrative templates, which in turn produces texts that deviate from the Indonesian anecdote schema. Instructional Constraints act as a distal antecedent to both deficit categories, while Learner Affective Factors operate as a moderating variable — students' relatively high self-confidence mitigates anxiety-related interference but does not compensate for structural and linguistic knowledge gaps.

Mother Tongue Interference in Student Anecdote Texts

1. Grammatical and Structural Transfer

Analysis of student writing samples reveals consistent patterns of L1-influenced grammatical transfer. The most prevalent form is verb-final word ordering, reflecting Papuan language syntactic structures (SOV and verb-last tendencies) that diverge from Indonesian's predominantly SVO pattern. Students frequently produced constructions such as predicate-subject inversions and omitted copulas, articles, and conjunctions that are obligatory in formal Indonesian writing. These findings are consistent with transfer errors documented in comparable multilingual contexts (Remoshan, 2021; Mushtaq et al., 2023; Nappu, 2023).

The teacher's questionnaire responses confirm that students' writing is characterised as “kurang bisa menulis secara terstruktur” (insufficiently able to write in a structured manner), with paragraph coherence rated as “*masih kurang*” (still lacking). Sentences within student texts frequently lack logical connectors, producing juxtaposed clauses rather than causally sequenced narrative paragraphs a hallmark of L1-influenced discourse organisation.

2. Lexical Code-Mixing and Dialectal Intrusion

A second interference category involves lexical borrowing from regional dialects and languages. The teacher notes that students mix dialectal elements into their Indonesian writing, though these are described as “*bukan bahasa daerah, hanya logatnya*” (not [full] vernacular language, just the accent/dialect). Examination of student text samples confirms this pattern: words drawn from Mee or related regional languages appear within otherwise Indonesian-medium sentences, disrupting lexical coherence.

A student respondent explicitly acknowledged this challenge: “*Yang saya perbaiki adalah salah huruf itu saya lebih kuasai supaya saya tidak bingung dalam menuliskan sesuatu*” (What I need to improve is spelling, so I am more confident and not confused when writing things). This metalinguistic awareness of spelling and phonological interference frequently a symptom of L1 phonemic influence aligns with findings on phonological transfer in L2 writing contexts (Nair & Krish, 2021).

3. Generic Structure Incompleteness

The third and most educationally consequential interference pattern involves students' partial or absent realisation of anecdote generic stages. While students demonstrate familiarity with the concept of a structured story (“*paham*”) understood, according to teacher questionnaire item 16), they consistently fail to produce texts with all five canonical stages. Sample texts show students producing orientasi (orientation) and limited krisis (crisis) sections but omitting or truncating reaksi (reaction) and koda (coda). The abstrak (abstract) stage a distinctive feature of the anecdote genre that provides a title-level framing of the social purpose is absent from most student texts.

This structural incompleteness reflects what the teacher identifies as the primary pedagogical challenge: “*masih susah menyusun kalimat yang benar sesuai struktur*” (still difficult to compose grammatically correct sentences in accordance with structure). It suggests that students are applying a default narrative template likely derived from oral storytelling conventions in their vernacular languages rather than the genre-specific schema required for anecdote text in formal Indonesian. This finding is consistent with Mingsakoon and Srinon (2019), who found that L2 students default to L1 narrative schemas when genre-specific instruction is insufficient.

Instructional Conditions and KKM Attainment

The teacher employs a combination of lecture (*ceramah*) and group discussion methods, supplemented occasionally by project-based tasks. While she rates these methods as “sudah” (already effective) in a general sense, she simultaneously reports that repeated explanation is required and that comprehension remains incomplete: “*kalau mereka belum paham, pasti saya gunakan penjelasan berulang tetapi tetap saja kebanyakan belum memahami maksud penjelasan*” (if they don’t understand, I repeat the explanation, but most still don’t understand the meaning of the explanation). This self-contradictory appraisal points to a gap between perceived method adequacy and actual learning outcomes.

The most telling indicator of instructional insufficiency is the KKM (minimum competency criterion) attainment rate for writing competence: only 40% of students meet the minimum threshold. This figure is substantially below national averages and indicates that the majority of students at this school are not achieving functional L2 writing competence under current pedagogical conditions. Both the principal and the teacher explicitly request a locally contextualised teaching module: the teacher calls for materials “*yang sesuai dengan keadaan siswa*” (appropriate to the students’ condition), while the principal states that the school urgently needs modules adapted to local student capacity and cultural context.

Students’ own preferences, as captured in the questionnaire, align with a GBA-compatible pedagogy: they express a desire for teacher-guided step-by-step instruction, writing topics linked to daily life in their local region, and clearer explanation of text structure. One student wrote: “*harapan lebih mudah adalah pas guru-guru mengajar dan termenjelaskan itu harus main kuis / tempat bertanya kepada kita*” (my hope for easier learning is when teachers explain, there should be quizzes / opportunities to ask questions), reflecting a desire for interactive, scaffolded engagement rather than passive reception.

Genre-Based Approach as Pedagogical Response

The convergent findings from interview, questionnaire, and writing sample data make a compelling case for the adoption of a systematic genre-based approach tailored to the Papuan multilingual context. The SFL-grounded GBA cycle offers precisely the scaffolded, explicit, culturally contextualisable instruction that this population requires. In the modelling phase, teachers can select or construct anecdote models drawn from Papuan social and cultural contexts incorporating familiar settings, characters, and social phenomena thereby reducing the cognitive load associated with processing L2 texts about unfamiliar cultural referents. In the deconstruction phase, explicit metalinguistic teaching of anecdote generic structure and lexico-grammatical features directly addresses the genre knowledge deficits identified by ATLAS.ti analysis. Joint and independent construction phases provide graduated, monitored practice that allows for targeted error correction and L1 interference remediation.

These propositions are strongly supported by international evidence: Lubis et al. (2022) demonstrated significant improvement in anecdote writing quality following GBA implementation at a senior high school level; Nagao (2022) and Alhammad (2025) confirmed comparable effects in EFL contexts; and Mingsakoon and Srinon (2019) specifically documented generic structure improvement in L2 anecdote/recount writing through SFL-based instruction. The present study extends this evidence base to a severely under-researched

multilingual context Papua where the combination of linguistic marginalisation, cultural distance, and inadequate locally contextualised resources creates an acute need for principled genre pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

This study has documented a complex intersection of mother tongue interference, genre knowledge deficits, and instructional inadequacy that together account for the low anecdote-writing performance of Grade X students at SMA Negeri Meepago, Papua. Through ATLAS.ti-supported thematic analysis of interviews, questionnaires, and student writing samples, the study identified three principal L1 interference mechanisms grammatical and syntactic transfer, dialectal lexical intrusion, and generic structure default and showed how these are compounded by prevailing lecture-centred pedagogy that fails to provide adequate genre modelling or culturally contextualised scaffolding. The 40% KKM attainment rate in writing competence serves as a stark empirical index of the mismatch between national curriculum standards and the linguistic and cultural realities of Papuan students.

On theoretical grounds, the findings contribute to the international scholarship on L2 writing and genre theory by providing empirical evidence from a multilingual peripheral context that has been systematically overlooked in the literature. The data confirm that L1 interference in anecdote text writing is not limited to surface-level grammatical errors but extends to the schematic structuring of texts, a finding that calls for pedagogical responses at the level of genre, not merely form. On practical grounds, the study provides a strong empirical rationale for the design and implementation of a GBA teaching module anchored in Papuan sociocultural contexts, and for the training of Indonesian language teachers in Papua in SFL-informed genre pedagogy.

Future research should undertake a quasi-experimental evaluation of a locally developed GBA module with this population, track longitudinal changes in writing quality, and examine the potential role of vernacular language scaffolding in the early stages of genre instruction. Policy-makers are urged to recognise the inadequacy of one-size-fits-all national curricula for Eastern Indonesian contexts and to commission the development of differentiated, culturally responsive instructional materials for schools serving indigenous Papuan communities.

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