



Lexical Transfer in English (L3) Production within a Multilingual Immersion Setting

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ABSTRACT

Although lexical transfer has been widely investigated in bilingual contexts, relatively little attention has been given to multilingual immersion environment where Indonesian (L1), Arabic (L2), and English (L3) are systematically used for daily communication. The study aims to identify patterns of lexical transfer and their directionality in students' English (L3) production. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through observations, audio-recorded interactions, interviews, and questionnaires, and were analyzed qualitatively to identify patterns and directions of lexical transfer. The findings show that calques were the most frequent form of lexical transfer (58.82%), followed by borrowing (32.35%) and collocations (8.82%). The predominance of calques indicates that meaning based transfer was particularly salient in the observed data. This pattern is consistent with the predominance of L1 to L3 transfer, indicating that Indonesian plays a central role in conceptual mapping during English production, whereas L2 to L3 transfer occurred mainly in religious and institutional vocabulary. These findings suggest that language transfer is better understood as a manifestation of cognitive processing in multilingual environment rather than merely as a linguistic error, with the cognitively dominant language being more readily accessed during target language production.

Keywords: Lexical Transfer, Multilingual, Immersion

1. Introductions

Multilingual education has become increasingly prevalent as educational institutions seek to enhance learners' communicative competence through sustained exposure to multiple languages. One instructional approach widely adopted to achieve this objective is language immersion, in which the target language function not only as the medium of instruction but also as the primary language of everyday communication. By maximizing authentic language exposure, immersion programs are expected to facilitate learners' linguistics proficiency and communicative competence more effectively than conventional foreign language instruction (Porter & Castillo, 2023; Steele et al., 2017). In multilingual immersion settings, however, learners are exposed to and required to use several linguistic systems simultaneously, creating condition in which these languages may continuously interact during language comprehension and production.

Rather than operating independently, previously acquired language may influence the comprehension and production of additional languages, a phenomenon commonly referred to as Cross-Linguistic influence (CLI) (Jarvis, 2008; Ortega, 2009). Within multilingual settings, CLI reflects the dynamic interaction among a learner's linguistic system and may either facilitate or interfere among a learner's linguistic systems, may either facilitate or interfere with target language production. Such interaction is particularly relevant to lexical processing, as lexical access involves the activation of interconnected linguistic and conceptual representations across languages. Consequently, examining lexical transfer provides an important means of understanding how multilingual learners draw upon their existing linguistic resources when producing an additional language.

Within the broader frame work of CLI, this study specifically focuses on lexical transfer. According to Fuster & Neuser (2019), lexical transfer consists of two complementary dimensions: formal lexical transfer, which involves the transfer of lexical forms, and semantic lexical transfer, which concerns the transfer of conceptual meaning across languages. Formal transfer includes phenomena such as borrowing, whereas semantic transfer encompasses calques and collocational transfer. Because lexical production relies on interactions between formal and semantic representations stored in the multilingual mental lexicon (McManus, 2021), these forms frequently co-occur during multilingual language production. Accordingly, the present study operationalizes lexical transfer through three analytical categories: borrowing, calque, and collocational transfer; to capture both formal and semantic dimensions of lexical transfer.

Previous studies have extensively investigated CLI across a variety of bilingual and multilingual contexts. Research conducted in formal educational settings has predominantly examined classroom-based language learning and experimentally controlled tasks (Yan et al., 2023). In contrast, studies situated in non-formal contexts have mainly focused on bilingual families and bilingual communities, where language acquisition develops naturally through everyday interaction rather than through institutionally regulated language dominance and immersion experiences on multilingual speakers (Neveu & Gollan, 2024). These studies consistently demonstrate that CLI constitutes an inherent characteristic of multilingual language acquisition.

However, relatively little research has examined multilingual immersion environments that integrate formal classroom instruction with institution regulated language use in everyday life. Unlike bilingual communities or conventional educational settings, Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) implement structured language policies that require students to use different languages across both academic and non-academic activities. Such environments provide continuous multilingual exposure and frequent language switching, making them particularly suitable for investigating lexical transfer and its directionality in authentic multilingual communication.

This present study addresses this gap by investigating lexical transfer in a multilingual immersion environment involving Indonesia (L1), Arabic (L2), and English (L3). These languages are systematically rotated on a weekly basis and are used throughout classroom instruction as well as students' daily interactions. Consequently, students are required to switch regularly from one language to another, creating conditions that potentially increase cross-linguistic interaction during language production.

Preliminary observations further revealed that many students experienced difficulty in switching languages during the weekly rotation. In addition, Arabic receives considerably greater instructional exposure than English because of the institution's religious curriculum, resulting in unequal language input across the three languages. This imbalance may influence the direction of lexical transfer during English production. Nevertheless, teachers generally interpret students' linguistic errors as indicators of limited English proficiency without considering the possibility that such errors may arise from natural cross-linguistic interaction in multilingual language processing.

Against this background, the present study investigates lexical transfer in students' English (L3) production within a multilingual immersion environment. Specifically, it aims to identify the patterns of lexical transfer and examine their directionality in multilingual language production. By investigating lexical transfer within an institutionally regulated multilingual immersion environment, this study extends previous CLI research beyond conventional bilingual classroom and naturally occurring bilingual communities. It provides empirical evidence on how multiple linguistic systems interact during English (L3) production and offers pedagogical insights for language instruction in multilingual educational settings, particularly Indonesian Islamic boarding schools.

2. Method

The study was conducted at an Islamic boarding school in Surakarta, Indonesia, that implements a total language immersion program using Indonesian (L1), Arabic (L2), and English (L3). The institution was selected purposively because it requires student to use different target languages according to a weekly language rotation supervised by language teachers and student language coordinators. This language policy creates continuous multilingual interaction across both academic and residential settings, making it an appropriate context for investigating cross-linguistic influence. Data collection was conducted from 1 October to 30 November 2025 through repeated visits to the boarding school.

The participants consisted of 61 Grade 11 and Grade 12 students, all of whom were involved in the observation phase. These two grade levels were selected because they had participated in the immersion program for a longer period than first-year students and had passed the initial adaptation stage, allowing more

stable patterns of English production to be observed. For the interview phase, six students were purposively selected based on three criteria: (1) active use of English in daily communication, (2) ability to communicate in Indonesian, Arabic, and English, and (3) participation in both formal and informal interactions. To strengthen data triangulation, interviews were also conducted with two English teachers and two student language coordinators responsible for supervising language use in the boarding school.

2.1 Data Collection

Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations focused on students' spoken interactions in both formal settings, such as classroom activities and institutional programs, and informal settings, including dormitory conversations containing potential instances of lexical transfer were documented through field notes and audio recordings with participants' consent.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences of multilingual communication and their perceptions of lexical transfer during English production. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim before analysis.

Document analysis included language policy documents, student language guidebooks, and institutional regulations governing language use. These documents provided contextual information and were used to support the interpretation of observational and interview findings through source triangulation.

2.2 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

During the data condensation stage, observation transcripts and interview data were reviewed to identify utterances containing lexical transfer. Each lexical transfer instance was coded using the framework proposed by Fuster & Neuser (2019), which distinguishes formal lexical transfer and semantic lexical transfer. Based on this framework, the analysis focused on three categories: borrowing, calque, and collocational transfer. The source language of each transfer was subsequently identified to determine its directionality from Indonesian (L1) or Arabic (L2) to English (L3).

The coded data were organized into analytical matrices containing transfer categories, transfer directionality, frequencies, percentages, and representative excerpts from participants' utterances. Although the study employed a qualitative approach, frequency counts and percentages were calculated to describe the distribution of lexical transfer patterns and to support qualitative interpretation.

Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting recurring lexical transfer patterns in relation to previous studies and the theoretical framework of Cross-Linguistic Influence. The trustworthiness of the findings was enhanced through methodological triangulation across observations, interviews, and documentary evidence, as well as member checking with selected participants to verify the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations.

3. Results and Discussion

This qualitative study investigated the forms and directionality of lexical transfer in students' English (L3) production within a multilingual immersion environment. The qualitative data were derived from observation transcripts of students' naturally occurring conversations, semi-structured interviews with students, language teachers, and student language coordinators, as well as supporting institutional documents. Analysis of these data identified three categories of lexical transfer occurring in the multilingual immersion setting.

Table 1. Type of lexical transfer

Aspect	Transfer Type	Frequency	Percentage
Lexical	Calque	20	58.82%
	Borrowing	11	32.35%
	Collocational Transfer	3	8.82%
	Total	34	100%

As shown in Table1, calque was the most frequent type of lexical transfer, accounting for 20 instances (58.82%). These instances involved literal translation of lexical meanings from Indonesian or Arabic into English, resulting in expressions that were grammatically acceptable but lexically unnatural. Borrowing was identified in 11 instances (32.35%), where lexical items from Indonesian or Arabic were directly incorporated into English without morphological or lexical adaptation. The remaining three instances (8.82%) were classified as collocational transfer, in which learners produced word combinations that were grammatically interpretable but inconsistent with conventional English collocations. Overall, these findings suggest that

lexical transfer in students' English production primarily reflects the transfer of conceptual and lexical patterns from previously acquired languages rather than isolated vocabulary substitution.

Table 2. Directionality of lexical transfer

Aspect	Direction	Frequency	Percentage
Lexical	L1 – L3	26	76.47%
	L2 – L3	8	23.53%
	Total	34	100%

Table 2 shows that lexical transfer was predominantly directed from Indonesian (L1) to English (L3). Of the 34 identified instances, 26 cases (76.47%) originated from Indonesian, whereas 8 cases (23.53%) reflected transfer from Arabic (L2) to English (L3). The predominance of L1-to-L3 transfer indicates that Indonesian, as the students' primary language and the language most frequently used in daily communication, exerted the strongest influence on English lexical production. Nevertheless, Arabic also functioned as a source language, particularly in the transfer of religious and institution-specific vocabulary commonly used within the boarding school environment. The individual categories of lexical transfer and their directionality are discussed in the following sections.

3.1 Calque

The findings indicate that calque was the most prevalent form of lexical transfer in students' English production, accounting for 20 of the 34 identified cases (58.82%). The observed calques were primarily characterized by the direct mapping of lexical and conceptual structures from the source language predominantly Indonesian (L1) onto English (L3). Most cases involved literal translation of Indonesian phrases and clauses into English, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Examples of Calque

Lexical Transfer	Target Expression
<i>So, you how?</i> (01/P1)	<i>How about you?</i>
<i>I am until tired</i> (08/P15)	<i>I am tired</i>
<i>Sleepy forever</i> (13/P20)	<i>Always sleepy</i>
<i>Schedule of bathroom</i> (14/P36)	<i>Shower schedule</i>

Although the intended meanings of these expressions remain comprehensible, they do not conform to conventional English lexical usage. Rather than reflecting incorrect vocabulary selection, these examples demonstrate semantic mapping from the learners' previous languages into English. This finding supports the distinction proposed by (Fuster & Neuser, 2019), who argue that lexical transfer operates not only at the formal level but also through the transfer of conceptual meaning and semantic representations.

The predominance of calque suggests that students relied heavily on conceptual patterns established in their first language when producing English. This interpretation is further supported by an interview with an English teacher (GB-10), who explained:

"Most students' errors are actually the result of habit. They still rely on the way they think and organize ideas through their first language."

The teacher also identified expressions such as *I think yes* instead of the more natural English expression *I think so*, which reflects a literal translation of the Indonesian expression *Saya rasa iya*. These examples indicate that learners possess the necessary English vocabulary but continue to organize lexical meanings according to Indonesian conceptual structures.

The predominance of L1-based calque is consistent with the Unified Competition Model (Mac Whinney, 2005), which proposes that language production is guided by competing linguistic cues. When multiple languages are available, learners tend to rely on the linguistic system that is most strongly activated. In the present study, Indonesian remained the dominant source language during English production, despite learners' awareness of appropriate English forms.

Social context also appeared to facilitate lexical transfer. The boarding school's weekly language rotation required students to switch regularly between Arabic and English. During these transition periods, the previously activated language often remained cognitively accessible while the target language had not yet become fully activated, increasing the likelihood of literal lexical transfer in spontaneous communication.

3.2 Borrowing

Borrowing was the second most frequent form of lexical transfer, representing 11 cases (32.35%) of the total data. In this study, borrowing refers to the direct insertion of lexical items from Indonesian or Arabic into English utterances without phonological, morphological, or semantic adaptation.

Table 4. Examples of Borrowing

Borrowing from L1	Borrowing from L2
<i>KTI</i> (01/P1)	<i>How about you?</i> (02/P4)
<i>Sastrawan</i> (10/P27)	<i>Mahfudzat, nahwu, sarf</i> (10/P20)
<i>Tempe, Pare</i> (15/P38)	<i>Diwan</i> (12/P31)

The examples presented in Table 4 demonstrate that students continued to incorporate lexical items from languages already available in their multilingual repertoire during English production.

However, these instances should not be interpreted solely as linguistic errors. In many cases, borrowing functioned as a communicative strategy when no precise English equivalent was readily available, particularly for culturally, institutionally, or religiously specific concepts. Terms associated with Islamic education and boarding school life, for example, were frequently retained in their original forms because they carried meanings that were difficult to express accurately in English.

This finding is consistent with the activation–inhibition mechanism proposed in the Unified Competition Model (Mac Whinney, 2005). According to this framework, multilingual speakers continuously suppress one language while activating another. When English lexical representations are not yet fully established, learners compensate by retrieving lexical items from the language that is more readily accessible. Consequently, borrowing reflects not merely insufficient English proficiency but also a natural cognitive strategy for maintaining communicative fluency.

Interview data further support this interpretation. One participant (R1) explained that immediately after the weekly transition from Arabic to English, Arabic vocabulary often remained activated:

"Sometimes Arabic words still come to mind."

As a result, students occasionally produced expressions such as *hamam* instead of *bathroom* or *fullus* instead of *money*. These examples suggest that borrowing also serves to preserve semantic accuracy when lexical retrieval in English is temporarily inhibited.

The distribution of borrowing additionally reflects the functional differentiation of languages within the boarding school environment. Indonesian primarily contributed vocabulary related to everyday communication, whereas Arabic borrowing was largely restricted to religious and institutional domains. English, by contrast, functioned as the target language whose lexical system was still undergoing stabilization. Thus, borrowing illustrates not only cross-linguistic influence but also the complementary roles that Indonesian, Arabic, and English play within students' multilingual repertoire.

3.3 Collocational Transfer

Collocational transfer was the least frequent type of lexical transfer identified in the dataset, accounting for only three instances (8.82%) of the 34 lexical transfer cases. In this study, collocational transfer refers to the production of English word combinations that are grammatically acceptable but deviate from conventional patterns of lexical co-occurrence in native English usage. Examples are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Examples of Borrowing

Collocational Transfer	Language Target
<i>For asking consultation</i> (01/P2)	<i>To have a consultation</i>
<i>Making estimate for total arc</i> (12/P32)	<i>Making an estimate/ Estimating the total</i>
<i>Dividing side dish</i> (13/P24)	<i>Sharing/portioning side dishes</i>

Although the intended meanings of these expressions remain understandable, the lexical combinations are non-idiomatic and do not conform to conventional English collocational patterns. These examples illustrate how learners transferred lexical associations from previously acquired languages into English, resulting in combinations that are grammatically interpretable but pragmatically unnatural.

According to Biskup (1992) classification of lexical collocations, the examples presented in Table 5 primarily belong to the verb + noun (V + N) pattern. In the expression *for asking consultation*, the learner combined the verb *ask* with the noun *consultation*, whereas English more naturally uses expressions such as

ask for advice or *have a consultation*. This pattern reflects a direct transfer of lexical associations from the learner's first language.

Similarly, the expression *making estimate for total arc* demonstrates partial grammatical acceptability but lacks conventional collocational structure. Native English speakers would typically produce *make an estimate* or *estimate the total cost*. Likewise, *dividing side dish* reflects the influence of the learners' conceptualization in L1, whereas English conventionally uses *share a side dish*. These examples demonstrate that grammatical accuracy alone does not guarantee natural language production, as acceptable collocations are largely determined by usage conventions within the target language.

The relatively small number of collocational transfer cases may be interpreted from two perspectives. On the one hand, it suggests that students' lexical difficulties were more frequently associated with literal translation (calque) than with inappropriate lexical combinations. On the other hand, the limited frequency does not imply that collocational transfer is insignificant. Rather, it indicates that even when learners successfully retrieve appropriate English vocabulary, they continue to encounter difficulties in combining lexical items into natural and idiomatic expressions.

These findings are consistent with the view of Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008) that collocational knowledge forms part of the semantic organization of the multilingual mental lexicon. Because lexical representations across languages are interconnected, activation of a lexical item in one language may automatically activate its habitual collocational pattern in another language. Consequently, multilingual learners frequently transfer collocational patterns from previously acquired languages into the target language.

From a pedagogical perspective, collocational transfer highlights that developing English proficiency involves more than learning individual vocabulary items or grammatical structures. Learners must also acquire conventional lexical combinations that characterize natural language use. Therefore, English instruction in multilingual immersion settings should emphasize collocational awareness and formulaic expressions alongside vocabulary and grammar to foster more idiomatic and communicatively appropriate language production.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that lexical transfer in students' English production was predominantly influenced by Indonesian (L1), particularly in semantic transfer through calque and collocational transfer. By contrast, borrowing reflected lexical activation from both Indonesian and Arabic (L2), especially during the weekly language rotation that required students to alternate between languages. These findings suggest that lexical transfer in multilingual immersion is shaped not only by linguistic similarity but also by language dominance, patterns of language use, and the cognitive activation of multilingual lexical representations.

3.4 Directionality of Lexical Transfer

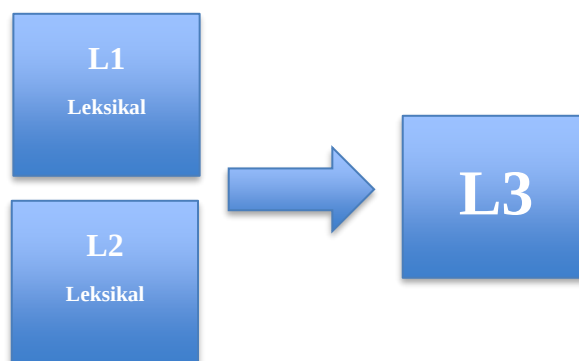


Figure 1. Visual of Lexical Direction

The directionality of lexical transfer identified in this study involved three interacting languages: Indonesian (L1) as the learners' first language, Arabic (L2) as the second language used within the boarding school environment, and English (L3) as the target language. The direction of transfer was determined by manually examining the observation transcripts and identifying the lexical source underlying each transfer instance. The frequency of transfer from L1 and L2 into English (L3) was then calculated to determine the dominant source language.

The findings indicate that students predominantly activated Indonesian (L1) during English production, particularly in semantic transfer, as reflected in the high frequency of calque and collocational transfer. This pattern suggests that Indonesian remained the most readily accessible language for conceptual mapping into

English despite students' continuous exposure to Arabic and English within the immersion program. As the learners' first language and the language most frequently used in everyday communication, Indonesian provided the strongest conceptual foundation for lexical retrieval during L3 production.

These findings contrast with previous studies conducted in university multilingual contexts. For example, De Bruin et al. (2023) and Saraç (2021) reported that learners' additional languages frequently served as the primary source of cross-linguistic influence in L3 production. The present findings suggest a different pattern in multilingual immersion settings, where first-language dominance remains prominent despite intensive institutional exposure to additional languages. This difference indicates that language exposure alone may not determine the direction of lexical transfer. Instead, language dominance, patterns of daily language use, and the cognitive accessibility of lexical representations appear to play more substantial roles in multilingual language production.

Borrowing, however, exhibited a different pattern. Unlike calque and collocational transfer, borrowing originated not only from Indonesian (L1) but also substantially from Arabic (L2). Arabic borrowings were particularly evident during the weekly language transition, when Arabic lexical representations remained highly activated in working memory as students shifted to English. Interview data further supported this interpretation, with participants reporting that Arabic vocabulary often persisted during the initial stages of English use.

By contrast, borrowing from Indonesian appeared to be relatively constrained by the boarding school's language policy. Because the use of Indonesian during designated English-speaking periods was subject to sanctions imposed by language coordinators, students tended to suppress direct Indonesian lexical insertions. Consequently, the observed transfer patterns reflect the interaction of multiple factors, including the cognitive dominance of the first language, the functional role of Arabic within religious and institutional contexts, and the influence of social regulation within the multilingual immersion environment.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the direction of lexical transfer in multilingual immersion cannot be explained solely by the amount of exposure to the target language. Rather, lexical transfer emerges from the dynamic interaction between language dominance, cognitive activation, communicative context, and institutional language practices, supporting current perspectives on multilingual lexical processing within Cross-Linguistic Influence research.

4. Conclusion

This study investigated the forms and directionality of lexical transfer in students' English (L3) production within a multilingual immersion environment where Indonesian (L1), Arabic (L2), and English (L3) are systematically used in both classroom instruction and daily communication. The findings revealed that calque was the predominant form of lexical transfer, followed by borrowing and collocational transfer. The predominance of calque indicates that students primarily relied on conceptual and semantic mappings from previously acquired languages rather than merely transferring isolated lexical items. These findings suggest that lexical transfer reflects the interaction of multilingual lexical representations during language production instead of simply indicating insufficient English vocabulary.

The analysis of transfer direction further demonstrated that lexical transfer occurred predominantly from Indonesian (L1) to English (L3), whereas transfer from Arabic (L2) was comparatively limited and largely associated with religious and institutional terminology through borrowing. Although Arabic constitutes an important language of instruction within the boarding school, Indonesian remained the most cognitively accessible language for conceptualizing and producing English. This finding suggests that language dominance and conceptual accessibility exert a greater influence on lexical transfer than institutional exposure alone.

The findings also extend current research on Cross-Linguistic Influence by providing evidence from a multilingual immersion context that differs from the university and conventional classroom settings examined in previous studies. Rather than functioning solely as linguistic errors, the observed transfer patterns illustrate how multilingual learners draw upon previously acquired linguistic knowledge when producing an additional language. Lexical transfer therefore represents a natural outcome of multilingual cognitive processing and offers valuable insights into the organization of the multilingual mental lexicon.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings imply that English instruction in multilingual immersion programs should move beyond vocabulary memorization and grammatical accuracy. Greater attention should be given to developing learners' semantic awareness, collocational competence, and idiomatic language use, as these aspects were found to be particularly susceptible to cross-linguistic influence. Recognizing lexical transfer as a developmental feature of multilingual language learning may also help teachers distinguish

between systematic transfer and ordinary language errors, thereby enabling more appropriate instructional strategies in multilingual educational settings.

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