



Linguistic and Textual Structure Representation in Biographical Writing: Insights from BIPA Learners

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The study aims to comprehensively map the ability of BIPA students from Timor-Leste in writing biographical texts, while identifying their strengths and weaknesses in several key aspects: clarity of content, writing structure, creativity and language style, adherence to theme, and spelling and grammar accuracy.

Methodology: Data were collected through a biographical writing task, which was assessed using a specially designed rubric. A mixed-method approach was applied: quantitative analysis was used to examine the distribution of ability levels across categories, while qualitative analysis explored detailed patterns of strengths and weaknesses for each aspect.

Main Findings: The findings show that most students achieved a medium level for clarity of content (57.5%) and writing structure (60%). However, creativity (65% low) and spelling and grammar (52.5% low) emerged as the main challenges. Specific difficulties were identified in the formation of derived words, the use of temporal conjunctions, and the construction of complex sentences.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study places biographical writing as an instrument for diagnosing the writing skills of BIPA students in the sociolinguistic context of Timor-Leste, a domain that is rarely explored. This approach allows for a more detailed mapping of students' strengths and weaknesses rather than just measuring final scores for pedagogical intervention. The implications suggest that BIPA teachers should prioritize fostering grammatical cohesion, enhancing creativity, and refining the reorientation section of biographical texts. The implementation of a scaffolding model progressing from guided examples to independent production is recommended to systematically develop students' writing competence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian has undergone significant development, not only functioning as a national language but also gaining prominence as an international language through the Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) program. The Language Development and Cultivation Agency, under the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, has been actively working with various countries around the world, including in Southeast Asia, to promote the teaching of BIPA. Among these countries, the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (RDTL) stands out as one of the most active in implementing BIPA instructions. This engagement is driven by historical and geographical proximity, as well as strategic needs in the areas of education, culture, and bilateral cooperation [1],[2].

As part of efforts to strengthen the role of Indonesian on the international stage, Indonesian language teaching for Other Language Speakers (BIPA) goes beyond oral communication and places significant emphasis on the development of academic skills, especially writing proficiency. In this context, the need for a more in-depth and structured Indonesian command among partner countries such as the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (RDTL) underscores writing skills as an important focus in the BIPA program. Writing instruction in BIPA is expected to support learners in expressing ideas coherently and with linguistic conventions, whether for educational purposes, cultural engagement, or professional collaboration between institutions.

In the teaching of Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA), writing skills play a strategic role, as they require mastery of vocabulary, grammatical structure, and organized thinking. In contrast to receptive skills such as listening and reading, writing is a productive skill that demands the formation of complex language to build logical and cohesive ideas [3], [4]. Therefore, writing proficiency in the context of BIPA (Indonesian for Foreign Speakers) teaching is recognized as an important indicator of effective language teaching, especially in academic and professional settings [5]. Many BIPA students often have difficulty expressing their ideas in writing. The challenges in learning Indonesian as a foreign language may come from several factors, including the influence of students' first language (L1), limited understanding of the target language, and ineffective language teaching [6]. Linguistic interference from the mother tongue can result in errors across the morphological, syntactic, and semantic domains. Such interference arises due to the strong influence of the L1 structure on the acquisition and production of the target language, often leading to systematic deviations from the use of standard Indonesian [7],[8]. In the context of students in the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (RDTL), these difficulties arise due to the influence of their first language, Tetum or Portuguese, which has a different grammatical structure and communicative style compared to Indonesian.

Writing a biography is a form of narrative text that requires the ability to construct events in chronological order, organize factual information in an interesting way, and consistently apply past tense forms throughout. For non-native speakers, the genre of biography presents a particular challenge as it demands grammatical accuracy and sensitivity to the narrative structure that characterizes the Indonesian language [9], [10], [11]. Thus, writing a biography serves as an appropriate instrument to comprehensively evaluate the writing skills of BIPA students.

Several studies have shown that difficulties in writing biographies for foreign language learners are influenced by linguistic, cognitive, and affective factors [12], [13]. The main problems in the application of verbs, limited vocabulary, and obstacles in organizing prevalent ideas or concepts. Additionally, a lack of experience in writing in this particular genre and lack of confidence hinder the overall quality of writing [14], [15]. Understanding the cultural context in conveying personal information or curriculum vitae also plays an important role in the success of biographical writing [16], [17]. In designing the right writing instruction for BIPA (Indonesian for Foreign Speaker) students, it is very important to conduct an initial mapping of writing skills through diagnostic tests. This test serves to identify students' basic abilities, competency gaps, and areas that require focused attention in the learning process [18]. Through an initial analysis of students' writings, BIPA instructors can design more different, responsive, and contextually relevant instructional strategies that are aligned with students' language needs and developmental stages [19], [20].

BIPA instruction in Timor-Leste has distinct unique characteristics and features, largely due to the multilingual background of its students, who generally speak Tetun, Portuguese, and English [21]. This multilingual environment significantly affects the acquisition of the Indonesian language, especially in terms of vocabulary structure and word choice [22]-[24]. Social and cultural differences further contribute to the development of students' distinctive ways of thinking and information delivery [25], [26]. Therefore, writing instructions in this context should consider the local context thoroughly to enhance their relevance and effectiveness [27], [28].

While the teaching of BIPA in Timor-Leste has reached a relatively stable stage, a considerable research gap remains in examining learners' initial writing proficiency, particularly in specific genres such as biography [29], [30]. Existing studies have predominantly addressed general language skills, oral proficiency, or grammar-oriented instruction, whereas diagnostic analyses of writing ability especially within the distinctive sociolinguistic context of Timor-Leste remain scarce [31]. Addressing this gap is essential, as writing constitutes not only a productive skill that demands mastery of vocabulary, grammar, and text organization but also serves

as a medium for articulating socio-cultural perspectives [32]. Without a comprehensive diagnostic understanding of learners' writing profiles, instructional strategies risk being misaligned with their actual learning needs [33].

The urgency of this research lies in the multilingual backgrounds of learners in Timor-Leste, who are generally fluent in Tetun, Portuguese, and English. This linguistic repertoire, coupled with cultural differences, naturally influences their lexical choices, grammatical patterns, and storytelling styles when writing in Indonesian [34], [35]. This complexity demands learning designs that are contextually responsive, culturally sensitive, and supported by a strong linguistic foundation [36]. To answer these challenges, this study uses biographical writing as a diagnostic tool to assess the linguistic elements and text structure in students' writings. This approach allows for a thorough mapping of strengths and weaknesses, identifying patterns of difficulty, and providing input for designing targeted learning interventions. By positioning this analysis in the socio-cultural reality of Timor-Leste, this study seeks to produce applicable recommendations to improve the effectiveness of BIPA writing instruction.

This study aims to map the initial biographical abilities of BIPA level 2 students in Timor-Leste, identify the linguistic and structural challenges they face, and formulate pedagogical recommendations that integrate diagnostic findings with the local cultural context. The main research questions that guide this study are: What are the linguistic characteristics and structure of the texts in the biographies written by the students? What challenges hinder their ability to write effectively in this genre? And how can these insights be used to develop culturally relevant and pedagogically strong BIPA writing instruction?

The novelty of this research lies in the use of biographical writing as a diagnostic instrument in a sociolinguistic environment that is rarely explored, which offers a dual contribution: enriching the theoretical literature on learning genre-based writing for foreign language learners, as well as providing evidence-based practical strategies for BIPA teachers. Ultimately, the findings of this study are expected to support the creation of teaching materials, learning modules, and evaluation methods that are in accordance with the real profile of the learner's writing ability and socio-cultural background, thereby strengthening the role of the Indonesian language in international education.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used is qualitative, utilizing a descriptive approach to explore in depth the characteristics of the initial writing skills of BIPA students through the genre of biography [37], [38]. The descriptive approach with text analysis techniques focuses on linguistic elements (both lexical and grammatical) as well as the macrostructure of biographical texts, including orientation, series of events, reorientation, and character evaluation [39], [40]. The subject of the study was 40 BIPA level 2 students in Timor-Leste, all of whom participated in the Indonesian as a second language learning program. The technique used is purposive sampling with the consideration that participants already have a basic understanding of Indonesian and are in the early stages of developing advanced writing skills.

The main instrument is a biography writing task, in which participants are asked to write about either real or fictional figures, with the freedom to choose the subject and writing style. This approach allows the collected data to reflect their authentic writing abilities. The analytical assessment rubric (Table 1) is adapted from previous studies on the assessment of narrative and biographical texts, based on the analytic rubric framework from Teaching Commons, DePaul University, which enables each criterion to be assessed separately with performance level descriptions, along with adjustments by experts for the BIPA context. The instrument has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.87, indicating high internal consistency.

Table 1. Biography Text Analytical Assessment Rubric

Aspects	4 - Excellent	3 - Good	2 - Enough	1 - Less
Content Clarity	Complete and detailed information about the figures	Good information but lack depth	Unclear or incomplete information	Information is very minimal and unclear
Writing Structure	Very neatly arranged; There is a clear introduction, content, and closing	Neatly organized, there are few shortcomings	Less organized structure; Introduction or Unclear Closing	No clear structure
Creativity & Language Style	Interesting and creative style; Varied language	Good style but limited variety	Ordinary style; less attractive	Monotonous and unattractive style
Theme Compatibility	Perfectly in keeping with the theme of the biography	Theme-appropriate with few deviations	Almost appropriate but with many deviations	Doesn't match the requested theme
Spelling & Grammar	No spelling or grammatical errors	Small, unobtrusive mistakes	Many mistakes affect understanding	Many serious errors are very annoying

Data collection was carried out by collecting participants' written works and assessing them using rubrics. Data analysis is carried out through the following stages: 1) Categorized each participant's score in the five aspects of the rubric into Low (1), Medium (2), and High (3–4) categories; 2) Calculate the frequency distribution and percentage of each category in each aspect; 3) Identify participant performance trends in each component of the assessment; 4) Interpret the relationship between linguistic elements, the macro structure of the text, and the quantitative findings of the rubric.

To ensure validity, the assessment was conducted by two experienced BIPA instructors and one senior researcher in the field of language error analysis. This process ensures that the interpretation of the data is objective, credible, and academically accountable. The data obtained from students' biographical writing tasks were then analyzed in two stages: (1) quantitative analysis by calculating frequency and percentage distributions for each assessment aspect, and (2) qualitative analysis to explore patterns of strengths and weaknesses based on rubric indicators. The results of both analyses are presented in the Results and Discussion section.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the biographical writing skills of BIPA students from Timor-Leste was carried out using a special assessment rubric for biographical texts. The findings of the quantitative analysis are displayed in the form of frequency and percentage distributions (Table 2). Meanwhile, the qualitative analysis provides a deeper understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses, summarized in Table 3. In general, students' writing ability is in the medium category. The aspect of content clarity and writing structure showed relatively good achievements, while creativity, adherence to themes, and spelling and grammar were the weakest areas.

Table 2. Distribution of Biography Text Writing Skills

Aspects	Low (%)	Medium (%)	Height (%)
Content Clarity	0	57.5	42.5
Writing Structure	15	60	25
Creativity & Language Style	65	22.5	12.5
Theme Compliance	17.5	72.5	10
Spelling & Grammar	52.5	35	12.5

Based on the distribution of writing skills in Table 2, a qualitative analysis was carried out to identify patterns of students' strengths and weaknesses in each aspect of assessment. This analysis aims to provide a detailed overview of the areas that have been controlled and the aspects that need improvement, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses

Aspects	Strength	Debilitation
Content Clarity	Positive diction, chronological narrative	Lack of in-depth detail
Writing Structure	Clear orientation and sequence of events	Underdeveloped reorientation
Creativity & Language Style	Some variations of the narrative	Less innovative language styles
Theme Compliance	Focus on the characters	Often widening off topic
Spelling & Grammar	The form of the root word is quite precise	Weak grammatical cohesion, errors of temporal conjunctions

The assessment of BIPA students' ability from Timor-Leste to write biographical texts (Table 2) shows that the majority were able to construct biographies chronologically with sufficient clarity of content. As many as 57.5% of students were in the medium category and 42.5% in the high category. This indicates that most students can select relevant information and present it sequentially, although depth of description and supporting detail remain limited. Table 3 confirms that the main strength lies in the use of positive diction and clear chronological narratives, while the weakness is the lack of elaboration that could enrich the reader.

In terms of writing structure, 60% of students were in the medium category, 25% high, and 15% low. This suggests that the macrostructure of the text orientation, sequence of events, and reorientation is generally understood. However, the reorientation remains a weak point, with many students closing texts briefly without offering strong evaluations, moral messages, or reflections. This aligns with [41], who emphasize that mastering discourse structure in second language learning requires special focus on conclusions, as these help readers internalize the intended message.

Creativity and language style represent the weakest aspect, with 65% of students in the low category and only 12.5% in the high category. This reflects limited expressive exploration and reliance on general vocabulary. While some attempted narrative variations, most styles were monotonous and less innovative. Table 3 illustrates these weaknesses, which are consistent with claims that second language learners need exposure to authentic texts and expressive practice to enrich writing skills [42]-[44].

Theme adherence shows that 72.5% were in the medium category, 17.5% low, and 10% high. Although focus on the main character is generally maintained, deviations in topic occur. Table 3 indicates such deviations are often influenced by cultural backgrounds, where personal narratives or less relevant details are incorporated. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this reflects the transfer of storytelling styles from students' native language and culture into the target language, a common phenomenon in second language acquisition [45]-[47].

Spelling and grammar posed the most significant challenges, with 52.5% of students in the low category and only 12.5% in the high. Frequent errors include word formation, temporal conjunctions, and complex sentence construction. Table 3 confirms that while root word use was relatively accurate, grammatical cohesion remained weak and conjunctions inconsistent. These findings are consistent with the literature on second language acquisition, which stresses that morphosyntactic mastery requires longer acquisition time than vocabulary learning [48], [49],

Generalization When viewed as a whole, learning to write biographies in the BIPA program has proven to be effective in forming skills in compiling information sequentially and understanding the structure of texts [50], [51]. The data in Table 2 shows that in terms of clarity of content and writing structure, the majority of students have reached the medium to high category. However, in the aspects of creativity, theme adherence, and spelling and grammar, the distribution of values shows the need for more intensive learning interventions.

Based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative findings, BIPA teachers can focus improvement on three key areas: Grammatical cohesion: the exercise focuses on the formation of affixed words, variations sentence construction, and the use of proper temporal conjunctions. Development of language creativity: through exposure to the text, a model rich in language styles, accompanied by writing tasks that encourage vocabulary exploration and narrative variation. Text reorientation improvement: guide students to close the writing with a reflection or moral message that reinforces the reader's impression. Scaffolding-based *learning models* can be applied to support this mastery gradually, starting from giving examples, guided exercises, to producing independent texts. This study places biographical writing as an instrument for diagnosing the writing skills of BIPA students in the sociolinguistic context of Timor-Leste, a domain that is rarely explored. This approach allows for a more detailed mapping of students' strengths and weaknesses rather than just measuring final scores. This research is limited to one class level and one type of text, so it does not allow comparisons across skill levels or other writing genres. A broader analysis of the type of narrative, description, or argumentative text can provide a more comprehensive picture of the development of writing skills.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the ability to write biographical texts of BIPA students from Timor-Leste, it can be concluded that learning to write biographies in the BIPA program is effective in training the skills of compiling information chronologically and understanding the macrostructure of the text. The facts in Table 2 show that the majority of students are in the medium to high category for the aspects of clarity of content (100% moderate-high combined) and writing structure (85% medium-high combined). This indicates the success of learning in building an understanding of biographical flow and organizing ideas. However, the analysis in Table 3 reveals that creativity and language style (65% of the low category), theme adherence (17.5% low), and spelling and grammar (52.5% low) are still areas that require further learning interventions. The dominant errors include the formation of remunerated words, the use of temporal conjunctions, and the construction of complex sentences, while in the aspect of creativity, vocabulary limitations and narrative variations are the main obstacles. Thus, the research objective to map the strengths and weaknesses of BIPA students' writing skills has been achieved. These results not only answer the research problem, but also contribute to the development of Indonesian learning strategies for foreign speakers, especially in the sociolinguistic context of Timor-Leste. The facts obtained strengthen the literature on second language acquisition which states that mastery of grammatical structure and language creativity requires a longer acquisition time than mastery of basic discourse structure.

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