



## English Communication Challenges among Indonesian Entrepreneurs: A Sociolinguistic Case Study

Sofyan Sukwara Akfan

Politeknik Negeri Fakfak, Fakfak, Indonesia

[sofyan@polinef.id](mailto:sofyan@polinef.id)

### ABSTRACT

This research examines how Indonesian entrepreneurs use English, focusing on grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. As language plays a key role in communication, non-native speakers often adjust their speech based on their native language. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, analyzing recorded interviews with 10 Indonesian entrepreneurs from diverse business sectors, including retail, services, and small-scale manufacturing. The findings reveal common grammatical errors, such as omitting plural markers (-s/-es), auxiliary verbs, and definite articles, which stem from structural differences between English and Indonesian. Pronunciation challenges include substituting the /v/ sound with /f/ and mispronouncing certain English phonemes. Additionally, vocabulary issues arise from direct translations from Indonesian, resulting in unnatural expressions. Entrepreneurs also engage in code-switching, switching between English and Indonesian to emphasize key ideas, express emotions, and navigate complex conversations. These patterns demonstrate the influence of the Indonesian language on English usage, emphasizing the need for targeted language training in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. By addressing these challenges, educators and trainers can develop tailored strategies to help Indonesian entrepreneurs improve their English communication skills, enhancing their business interactions and opportunities in global markets.

**Keywords:** *English Pronunciation; Indonesian Entrepreneurs; Linguistic Features.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the primary instruments through which humans communicate their thoughts, ideas, and emotions (Mailani et al., 2020). It plays a vital role in facilitating human interaction, serving as the foundation for a wide range of communicative acts, such as informing, requesting, directing, commenting, and expressing feelings. As Wardaugh (1992) states, "Languages allow people to say things to each other and express communication needs," underscoring the integral role language plays in facilitating both personal and social interactions (Flores, 2005). The role of language is further supported by a substantial body of literature that

emphasizes its influence not only on personal expression but also on social cohesion and functional communication in various spheres of life.

For instance, language development is influenced by early childhood experiences, where studies show that the quality of interactions between caregivers and children significantly shapes the development of language skills. Engaging in conversations and activities that promote linguistic exchange, such as reading and interactive discussions, fosters a rich linguistic environment (Isa et al., 2018; Law et al., 2018; Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020). These interactions, facilitated by parents and educators, are pivotal in building communication skills necessary for cognitive and social development. This process highlights how language is intertwined with cognitive growth, forming a crucial part of the foundation for future communication.

Moreover, language is an essential component in professional contexts, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, where effective communication can directly impact outcomes. Studies have shown that inadequate language services, such as poor interpreter availability, can compromise the quality of healthcare for patients with limited English proficiency (LEP), leading to misunderstandings and suboptimal care (Flores, 2005; Ramos et al., 2014). In this context, language not only serves as a medium for communication but also as a means to address disparities and ensure equitable service delivery.

Language also plays a key role in defining cultural identity and personal expression. It is through language that individuals convey complex ideas, emotions, and experiences, thereby strengthening social bonds and fostering inclusivity within communities. As Birhan (2019) notes, language is central to the transmission of cultural values and shared experiences across generations, reinforcing its role as a cornerstone of societal interaction.

In the context of business, language serves as both a functional tool and a cultural bridge. Entrepreneurs, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings like Indonesia, must navigate linguistic challenges to communicate effectively in a globalized world. While English is a key language in international business, the influence of the native language, such as Indonesian, often leads to variations in how English is used. This phenomenon, including grammatical errors, pronunciation challenges, and vocabulary interference, is crucial for understanding how Indonesian entrepreneurs adapt their language to meet the demands of professional communication.

Fishman (2004) argues that language choice is shaped by a variety of social and situational factors, including who speaks, what language is used, and in what context. This situational framework gives rise to different language varieties, such as formal and informal speech, slang, and technical jargon, which reflect the speaker's identity and the communicative purpose. Social factors, such as a speaker's status, education, and economic background, also influence language use, as individuals adapt their speech to fit their social context (Wattimena & Manara, 2016; Vari & Tamburelli, 2021). This understanding underscores the importance of recognizing the interplay between linguistic and non-linguistic factors in communication.

This research investigates the linguistic features of English used by Indonesian entrepreneurs, focusing on how they adapt their language in professional contexts. By exploring challenges related to grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which the Indonesian

language influences English usage among entrepreneurs. In particular, this research will highlight the role of code-switching, a common practice where individuals switch between languages based on contextual needs, as a strategy for enhancing communication in business interactions (Ahmad, 2023; Mona, 2024).

## METHODS

This research examines the linguistic features of English used by Indonesian entrepreneurs, focusing on grammatical, pronunciation, and vocabulary aspects. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to analyze these linguistic features, offering insights into how non-native speakers adapt English to their linguistic backgrounds. Previous studies, such as Syam, Gardner, and Cribb (2024), have examined the pronunciation features of Indonesian-accented English, identifying distinct phonetic patterns that affect intelligibility. This research aligns with those findings and aims to describe the grammatical structures, pronunciation patterns, and vocabulary choices of Indonesian entrepreneurs speaking English in a business context (Persulesy et al., 2024).

The primary data source consists of recorded interviews with 3 Indonesian entrepreneurs from three different business sectors: retail, small business, and services. Participants were selected based on their regular use of English in business interactions. All interviews were conducted in English to capture natural spoken language. The interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and transcribed verbatim, preserving the natural flow of conversation, including hesitations, filler words, and grammatical inconsistencies.

The data were analyzed through a process of thematic coding, focusing on three main linguistic aspects: grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. The grammatical analysis identified common errors, such as incorrect pluralization, misuse of auxiliary verbs, and omission of articles, which were compared with standard English grammar rules to identify patterns. The pronunciation analysis focused on deviations in pronunciation, including the substitution of /v/ sounds with /f/ and mispronunciations influenced by Indonesian phonetics. The vocabulary analysis involved identifying direct translations from Indonesian, the use of filler words, and how sentence structures from Indonesian influenced English word choices.

To ensure the validity of the data, the research employed member checking, where a selection of participants reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy. Additionally, the data were analyzed by two independent researchers to confirm the consistency of findings. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, and their consent was obtained before the interviews. For confidentiality, participants' names were anonymized in the final report.

This research focused solely on spoken English and did not examine written language skills. The findings may not be fully applicable to other professional fields outside of entrepreneurship.

## RESULTS

In this research, the researcher identified and analyzed the English utterances used during the interview, presenting the findings systematically. The examples of the cases are as follows:

### *The Interview 1*

A = The Reseacher; B = Entrepreneur 1

A: Hello, good evening Miss Susi.

B: Yeah, good evening.

A: okey, Can we start our interview?

B: yes, of course.

A: Okey, let me ask you some questions. what is your job right now?

B: Hmmm, I'm a trader.

A: Trader?

B: Huum.... yeah.

A: Okey. Next, what exactly do you do on your job actually?

B: Actually, I sell good such as sandals and shoes.

A: Can you tell me one of your unforgettable moments during your job?

B: My unforgettable moments, err... I can say it happend one year ago. Actually, its happend two days before Idul Fitri and you know there are many people come to the market and they eehmm they come to me and ask me eerrr how much the sandal, how much this shoes, how much the model like this and they don't buying to high to buy the sandal because its sem....ehm same the last time if we, if they want to wear the sandal or shoes in lebaran day so the must buy it right now eerr and they eemm accept the size and give me the money. Here your money, I want to take this, I want to take this and I got the money and you know eeerr when I see its about one, two, three, four, five, six. Six day, six day in a half of day I can get emmm money can emmm money such as emmm 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 until 10 juta (ten millions) and you know it make so speechless. Wow, I lost my power but I can add money with my own sweet and this make me so speechless. It's one of unforgettable moment when I sell shoes and sandal.

A: What is your planning in the future?

B: My planning in the future, esss.... ohhh what is..... aaaaa... sayyy... aaaaa. Of course I want to be a success woman. I hope I can be a carrier woman. I want to make my own shop with my name sashi shop or something like that and I want to make a big shop and to show this is my shop and like that.

A: Thank you very much for sharing your experience.

B: Okay, Thank you.

The Entrepreneur 1 reveal several important functions of code-switching in everyday communication, particularly in the context of trading. During the interview, the speaker strategically used code-switching to emphasize key points in the conversation.

First, code-switching was used to highlight memorable experiences. When recalling an unforgettable moment at work, Miss Susi switched to English to emphasize the significance of her financial achievement, saying, "*I was speechless! I worked so hard, but I earned ten million rupiahs in just a few days!*" This language shift reinforced the emotional impact of her experience.

Second, code-switching was used to express aspirations and ambitions. When discussing her future plans, Miss Susi switched to English to convey her determination, stating, "*I want to be a successful woman. I want my own big shop – Sashi Shop!*" This switch indicated that she used English to underline the importance of her dreams and goals.

Lastly, code-switching served as a tool for emphasis in communication. By changing languages at crucial moments, Miss Susi ensured that the listener grasped the core meaning of her experiences and ambitions.

### *The Interview 2*

#### **A = The Reseacher; B = Entrepreneur 2**

A: Good evening Mr. Mario...

B: Good evening too Mr. Sofyan..

A: Can we start our interview?

B: Sure

A: What is yor job now?

B: aaarr, my job now is a bussinessman eerr. I have a litle store like eerrr there is eeerrr eeerr photocopy machine and then there is aaa sell like a drink. Seperti alat ATK (alat tulis kantor) begitu. Campuranlah. (Such a tool office stationeries) also, many else)

A: Okey, so what exactly do you do on your job?

B: Errr, what exactly I do in my job aaa of course aaa looking for money, get money and then memenuhi kebutuhan hiduplah pastinya. (to fulfill our needs absolutely)

A: Can you tel me one of your unforgettable moments during your job?

B: eerr, unforgettable moment when in my job eerrr may be it's eerr it's funny may be because the unforgattable moment in my job when there is a beatifull girl come inside in my litle store and then melayani sesuka hatilah. (Serving by heart). May be like that.

A: What is your planning in the future?

B: eeerrr my planning in the future eeerr may be eeerr I'm going to open the new staf may be in my store like eerr to make a photo studio may be. But it's still a planning, if I get the a new expends may be a I will open it. Only still a planning.

A: Thank you very much for sharing your experience.

B: Okay, Thank you. too

During the interview to Entrepreneur 2, Mr. Mario, an entrepreneur, strategically used code-switching to emphasize key aspects of his experiences and aspirations. When recalling an unforgettable moment at his store, he switched to English to highlight a humorous experience, saying, "*There was a beautiful girl who came into my store, and I served her with all my heart!*" This shift in language underscored the excitement and significance of the moment, making the conversation more engaging.

Similarly, when discussing his future plans, Mr. Mario used English to express his determination, stating, "*I want to expand my business. I want to open a photo studio!*" This switch reinforced the seriousness of his ambitions, indicating that English was a tool to highlight his goals. Additionally, he employed code-switching to emphasize key points, ensuring clarity in his statements. For example, when discussing his motivation, he stated, "*Of course, I do this to earn money and fulfill my needs!*" By alternating between languages at crucial moments, Mr. Mario effectively conveyed emotions, reinforced his aspirations, and ensured that his message was clearly understood. His strategic use of code-switching in the interview not only added emphasis to his words but also made his storytelling more dynamic and engaging.

### *The Interview 3*

#### **A = The Researcher; B = Entrepreneur 3**

A: Good evening, Mr Fauzi.

B: Yeah, Good evening.

A: How are you today?

B: Good Good

A: Can we start our interview?

B: Yeah, absolutely.

A: What is your job right now?

B: eerrr, right know I have printing bussiness

A: What exactly do you do in your job?

B: eeerr, we do eerrr sometimes we accept some order for our clien because right now is eeerr I think is a great a opportunity to have a printing bussiness because there are so many students does not to have any printing device in their home so we open for them.

A: Can you tell me of your unforgettable moments during your job?

B: Well, during my job may be its couple weeks ago eemm I'm get lost. I don't know where is the exactly address we should toward. I think this is really unforgettable moments but not also unforgettable but its a painful moment because where should you go or where you should go somewhere.

A: What is your planning in the future?

B: My planning because eerrr our based for eeer printing bussinesss just a little space, so I have must a planning to enlarge my place and adding some staf so it can easier to produce some money.

A: Thank you very much for sharing your experience to me

B: You're welcome

During the interview to Entrepreneur 3, an entrepreneur in the printing business, strategically used code-switching to emphasize key aspects of his experiences and aspirations. When recalling an unforgettable moment at work, he switched to English to highlight a challenging experience, saying, "*A couple of weeks ago, I got lost. I didn't know exactly where to go.*" This shift in language underscored the emotional weight of the experience, making it more engaging and relatable. Similarly, when discussing his future plans, Mr. Fauzi used English to express his aspirations, stating,

"I must plan to enlarge my place and add more staff so it will be easier to produce money." This switch demonstrated the importance of his goals, reinforcing his determination to expand his business. Additionally, code-switching served as a tool for emphasis in communication. By alternating between languages at crucial moments, Mr. Fauzi ensured that his ideas were clearly conveyed, particularly when explaining why he saw printing as a great business opportunity, saying, "Right now, I think it is a great opportunity because many students do not have printing devices at home, so we open for them." His use of code-switching not only added depth to his storytelling but also highlighted the significance of his entrepreneurial journey.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the data above, the researcher analyzed it by classifying the linguistic features in those people who had the same occupation as the employee in a corporation below:

**Table 1.** The Grammatical Aspects

No.	The Aspect	The Findings	English in Standard
1.	<b>The omission of -s/-es in Plural Noun</b>	I can say <b>it</b> happend one year ago.	I can say <b>it's</b> happened one year ago.
		<b>six day</b>	<b>six days</b>
		You know, it <b>make</b> so speechless.	You know, it <b>makes</b> me so speechless.
		It's one of unforgettable <b>moment.</b>	It's one of unforgettable <b>moments.</b>
		I think this is really unforgettable <b>moments</b>	I think this is really unforgettable <b>moment.</b>
2.	<b>The omission of 'To Be' as auxiliary verbs</b>	<b>It's</b> can easier to produce some money.	<b>It</b> can easier to produce some money.
		I want to take this, I want to take this	<b>I want to take them or I want to take two of them.</b>
		I'm get lost	I get lost
		so I have <b>must</b> a planning to enlarge my place.	so I have a plan to enlarge my place.
		I hope I <b>can</b> be a carrier woman	I hope I <b>will</b> be a carrier woman
3.	<b>The use of "to be" that proceeded by the subjects in present sentences.</b>	there are so many students does <b>not to have</b> any printing device in their home so we open for them.	there are so many students does <b>not have</b> printing device in their home so we open for them.
4.	<b>Verbs preceded by modal auxiliaries</b>		
5.	<b>The use of 'have to' in negative sentence.</b>		

6.	The use of 'I'am' as possessive adjective 'my'	I'm sell good such as sandals and shoes.	My position is the owner of sandals and shoes
7.	The use of articles "a, an and the"	I have printing bussiness	I have a printing bussiness
8.	The use of fillers.	aaaa, eerrr, humm	

Based on the list, it can be described that there are many aspects in the grammatical aspect that influence Indonesian speakers (entrepreneur) talk in English in this Research. To make it easier, the researcher will show three of them that mostle used by Indonesian speakers according to their profession as an entrepreneur.

1. The omission of -s/-es in Plural Noun

This factor is caused by the structure of language in referring to plural noun between English and Indonesian language is different. Generally, in English, it should be added -s or -es in the noun itself to indicate that noun is plural, whereas Indonesian language, it should not.

2. The use of 'I'am' as possessive adjective 'my'

To the researcher's, it's because they can not differenciate what is subject and what is possessive adjective. Also, this factor is caused by their first language in which there is no differenciation in pronounce the word "saya".

3. The use of fillers

On recording that the researcher's have obtained from respondens, he founds there are 3 fillers that mostly used to help them in expression their idea about smomething. It's because they had lack of vocabulary, so while looking for another word that come in their minds they use a filler.

Table 2. The Pronunciation Aspects

No.	The Aspects	The Pronunciation in English
1.	The pronunciation of 'v' (voiced labiodental fricative) sound becomes 'f' (voiceless labiodental fricative) sound.	Evening /'i:vniŋ/
		Have /həv/
		Very /veri/
		Future /'fju:ʃər/
2.	The tendency to pronounce voiceless palatal fricative (ʃ) into voiceless alveolar fricative (s).	Shop /ʃɑp /
		Shoes /ʃuz/
		Sandals /sændəz/
3.	The pronunciation of 'the' that precedes consonant	The people /ðɪ' pi:pəl/
		The new /ðɪ nu /
		The list / ðɪ list /
4.	The tendency to pronounce the English word as its word.	Bussiness /'bʌsɪnəs/
		Printing /'prɪntɪŋ/
		I think /aɪ θɪŋk/
		Device /di'vaɪs/
		Buying /'baɪ:ŋ /
		Market /'mɑ:kət/
		Accept /æk'sept/
		Size /'saɪz/
Model /mɑdəl/		



With /wɪθ/  
 Money /'mʌni/  
 Success /sək'ses/  
 Carrier /əraɪzɪŋ/  
 Thank You /θæŋk ju:/

The analysis of pronunciation aspects in the interview reveals several linguistic features that reflect common pronunciation tendencies among non-native English speakers. One notable feature is the substitution of the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ with the voiceless labiodental fricative /f/, as observed in words like *evening*, *have*, *very*, and *future*. This tendency alters the articulation of words, affecting their phonetic accuracy (Carruthers, 2006). Additionally, there is a pattern of replacing the voiceless palatal fricative /ʃ/ with the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/, as seen in words such as *shop*, *shoes*, and *sandals*, which may influence intelligibility in communication (Lesley, 2014). Another pronunciation aspect is the articulation of *the* before a consonant sound, where it is pronounced as /ði/ in phrases like *the people*, *the new*, and *the list*. Furthermore, there is a tendency to pronounce English words in a manner that closely resembles their spelling rather than their standard phonetic form. This is evident in words such as *business*, *printing*, *device*, *accept*, *size*, *money*, and *success*, which may lead to non-standard pronunciation (Maiza, 2020). Similarly, some words, including *carrier* and *thank you*, exhibit phonetic variations influenced by native linguistic patterns. These findings highlight specific phonological challenges faced by speakers and provide insights into areas where pronunciation improvements can be targeted for clearer and more effective communication (Saito, 2014).

Indonesian has a relatively straightforward phonemic inventory, as illustrated in Figure 1. Weinberger (2015) observed that these phonemes are present in most native Indonesian dialects. However, Soderberg and Olson (2008) argued that bilabial and palatal approximants (/w/ and /j/), which are not included in Figure 1, should also be considered part of the Indonesian phonemic inventory.

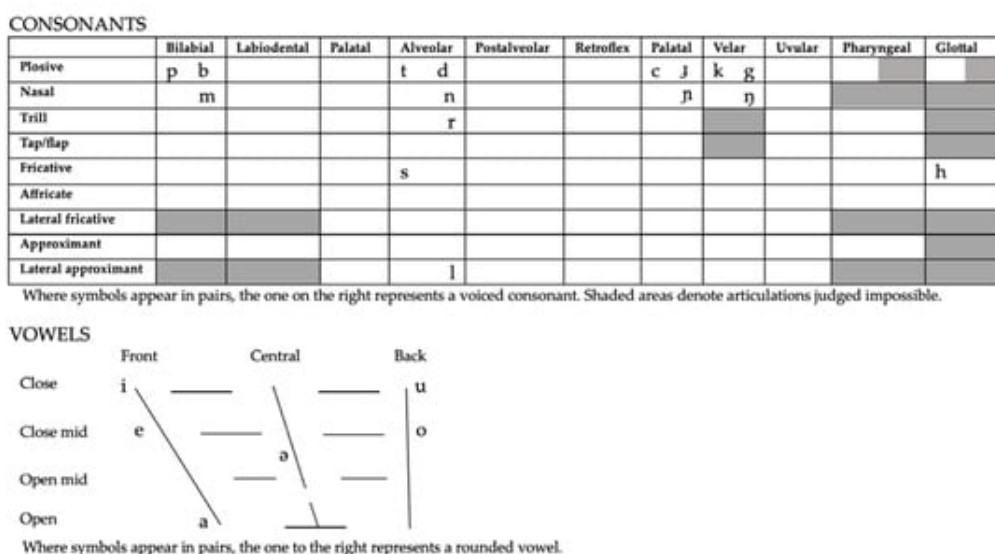


Figure 1. Phonemic inventory of Indonesian (Weinberger 2015).

Several studies have explored these pronunciation challenges. Maiza (2020) identified difficulties among students in pronouncing consonants such as /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, and /dʒ/, attributing these issues to factors like language interference

and phonological system differences. Similarly, Lesley (2014) discussed how phonological and prosodic differences between languages can lead to persistent pronunciation errors. Saito (2011) emphasized that mispronounced phonemes are a primary cause of communication breakdowns among non-native English speakers. Further research by Saito and Shintani (2016) highlighted that comprehensibility, accentedness, and fluency play critical roles in pronunciation clarity, showing how instruction can help mitigate phonetic challenges. Additionally, Saito and Saito (2016) found that explicit pronunciation instruction can significantly improve non-native speakers' ability to communicate clearly.

**Table 3.** The Vocabulary Aspects

No.	The Aspect	The Findings	The Appropriate Vocabularies
1.	The use of vocabularies in Indonesian language style.	A : Okay. e... How are you today? B : E... <b>I'm good</b>	A : Okay. e... How are you today? B : E... <b>I'm doing fine today. / I'm fine today.</b>
		There is a beatifull girl <b>come inside</b> in my litle store.	There is a beatifull girl come to my mini store.
		A = Okay, thank you very much for sharing your experience. B = Yes, <b>thank you, too.</b>	A = Okay, thank you very much for sharing your experience B = Yes, <b>you're welcome.</b>

In examining vocabulary usage, this research identifies a notable influence of Indonesian language structures on English expressions. For instance, when the interviewer inquired, "How are you today?", the respondent promptly replied, "I'm good." While this response is grammatically correct, it is often perceived as informal in American English and can imply contentment or sufficiency, as in declining an offer ("I'm good" meaning "No, thank you") based on English Language & Usage which taken from English.stackexchange.com, A more customary reply in American English would be, "I'm well, thank you." This instance exemplifies cross-linguistic influence, where structures from a speaker's native language affect their use of a second language (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). Understanding such influences is crucial for effective second language acquisition and highlights the importance of context-appropriate language use. Here the illustrate:

A : How are you?

B : I'm good. [**Misunderstood the question.**]

Because *good* as an adjective means: having moral excellence or admirableness.

A : How are you?

B : I'm doing fine / I'm fine. [**correct**]

Furthemore, fine is an adjective which means: being satisfactory or in satisfactory condition. Another example, when the interviewer said the gratitude 'thank you very much' to the respondent, he said 'thank you, too.' It should be answered 'you're welcome.' These are caused of what the respondents said shows the spontaneous words that they translate into English words, but still influenced by Indonesian language as their second language.

## CONCLUSION

The linguistic features of English used by Indonesian entrepreneurs, often referred to as "Indo-lish," highlight three key aspects: grammatical structures, pronunciation patterns, and vocabulary usage. In terms of grammar, Indonesian entrepreneurs frequently rely on the present tense, even in contexts where past or future tenses are required. This pattern may be influenced by the lack of explicit tense markers in Indonesian, leading to direct translations and omissions of auxiliary verbs. Additionally, Indonesian speakers often overuse the definite article "the" in situations where "a" or "an" would be more appropriate, reflecting the absence of articles in Indonesian. In terms of pronunciation, Indonesian speakers tend to replace the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ with the voiceless /f/, a substitution that reflects the phonetic inventory of Indonesian. Furthermore, the frequent use of fillers such as "errr" and "hmmm" indicates pauses in speech, which is typical in second language acquisition as speakers search for appropriate words.

Vocabulary usage also demonstrates a strong influence from the Indonesian language, with many entrepreneurs using direct translations that do not always align with standard English expressions. This linguistic interference can reduce clarity and complicate communication, underscoring the need for more targeted language training that focuses on these specific challenges. In addition, code-switching emerged as a strategic tool for Indonesian entrepreneurs to emphasize key points, express emotions, and communicate complex ideas. This finding suggests that code-switching is not only a method of navigating linguistic limitations but also a way to assert personal identity and strengthen communication.

While these findings provide valuable insights into the linguistic challenges faced by Indonesian entrepreneurs, further research is needed to expand the sample size and explore how these challenges manifest in different professional sectors and geographical contexts. Additionally, future studies could examine written language usage to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how Indonesian entrepreneurs engage with English in various business settings.

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