

## A Contrastive Analysis of Inflectional Morphology in the Indonesian and English Languages

Zainuddin<sup>1\*</sup>, Moch. Subhan Yahya<sup>2</sup>

Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong Probolinggo<sup>1</sup>, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang<sup>2</sup>  
e-mail: [zainuddintutik@gmail.com](mailto:zainuddintutik@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This article examines the comparison of inflectional morphology systems between the Indonesian language and the English language, aiming to identify structural and functional differences in the formation of grammatical meaning in verbs and nouns. The study employs a documentary research method by collecting data from Indonesian and English language corpora. The data are analyzed using a descriptive-comparative approach based on structural morphology theory and language typology. The findings reveal that English has a productive and complex inflectional system in which word forms change obligatorily to indicate tense, person, and number. In contrast, Indonesian is primarily analytic and does not formally employ inflection. Instead, it relies on contextual information, auxiliary words, and other morphological processes such as reduplication to convey similar grammatical meanings. The discussion highlights that these differences reflect the fundamental typological characteristics of both languages. Furthermore, they influence sentence structure, meaning-making strategies, and practical applications in language learning and translation. English speakers must pay close attention to grammatical markers embedded in word forms, whereas Indonesian speakers depend more heavily on syntactic context and lexical cues. These distinctions also create challenges for second-language learners, particularly when transferring grammatical patterns from one language to another. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of understanding cross-morphological structures in linguistic research as well as in intercultural language applications, especially for improving comparative linguistic analysis, effective language pedagogy, accurate translation practices, and broader cross-cultural communication in multilingual contexts.

**Keywords:** Inflectional Morphology, Contrastive Analysis, Indonesian Language, English Language, Language Typology

**How to Cite:** Zainuddin. (2026). A Contrastive Analysis of Inflectional Morphology in the Indonesian and English Languages. *ASMARALOKA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Linguistik dan sastra Indonesia*, Vol 4 (Issue 1), 21-27. <https://doi.org/10.55210/asmaraloka.v4i1.645>

### Introduction

Morphology is a branch of linguistics that examines the internal structure of words and the processes through which words are formed (Khanetnok et al., 2023). One of its fundamental components is inflection, which refers to the modification of word forms to encode grammatical meanings such as tense, number, aspect, mood, and person without altering their lexical category (Kitwili et al., 2022). Unlike derivation, which may change the meaning or syntactic class of a word, inflection functions to maintain grammatical relationships within sentences. Therefore, inflection plays a crucial role in ensuring grammatical clarity, structural coherence, and interpretative precision in language use.

From a cross-linguistic perspective, languages vary significantly in how they encode grammatical meaning through morphological systems. Indonesian and English represent two typologically distinct languages with contrasting approaches to inflectional morphology. English is widely recognized for its relatively productive and systematic use of inflection, particularly in verbs and nouns, where morphological changes signal grammatical distinctions such as tense, agreement, and number. In contrast, Indonesian is generally categorized as an analytic language that relies minimally on inflectional morphology (Idaryani,

2025; Endarto, 2024). Instead of modifying word forms, Indonesian typically employs lexical items, temporal adverbs, particles, and contextual cues to express grammatical meanings.

This contrast reflects a broader typological distinction between synthetic and analytic languages. In English, grammatical information is often embedded within the word itself through affixation or internal modification, whereas in Indonesian, such information is distributed across separate lexical or syntactic elements. Consequently, similar grammatical functions—such as expressing time, plurality, or aspect—are realized through fundamentally different linguistic strategies. These differences highlight how languages can achieve comparable communicative goals despite employing distinct structural mechanisms, thereby offering valuable insights into the diversity of human language systems.

Beyond structural variation, differences in inflectional systems also influence how sentences are constructed and interpreted. In English, grammatical relations are closely tied to morphological marking and relatively fixed syntactic patterns. The presence or absence of inflectional markers can directly affect grammaticality and meaning. In contrast, Indonesian exhibits greater flexibility in sentence structure, as grammatical interpretation often depends on contextual information rather than obligatory morphological marking. This distinction suggests that morphological systems are closely interconnected with syntactic organization and pragmatic interpretation, shaping how speakers encode and decode meaning in communication (Carston, 2022).

The contrast between Indonesian and English also has important implications for second-language acquisition and language teaching. Learners whose first language lacks extensive inflectional marking, such as Indonesian speakers learning English, often experience difficulties in mastering grammatical forms that require morphological changes. Conversely, learners accustomed to inflectional systems may encounter challenges when learning languages like Indonesian, where grammatical meaning is less explicitly marked. These differences indicate that challenges in language learning are not merely lexical or phonological but are deeply rooted in structural contrasts between languages. Therefore, a systematic understanding of how grammatical meaning is encoded in each language is essential for developing effective pedagogical strategies and instructional materials (Wright & Alhussaini, 2024).

From a theoretical linguistics standpoint, comparative studies of morphology contribute to broader discussions of language typology and linguistic universals. Although languages differ in their structural realization, they often share common functional goals, such as expressing tense, number, and aspect. However, previous studies on Indonesian and English morphology have tended to focus either on descriptive explanations of linguistic features or on pedagogical issues in isolation. Only limited attention has been given to integrating these perspectives within a comprehensive comparative framework grounded in morphological typology. As a result, there remains a gap in understanding how these two typologically distinct languages systematically encode equivalent grammatical meanings across different linguistic levels.

Addressing this gap is particularly important for advancing both theoretical and applied linguistics. A more integrated comparative analysis can provide deeper insights into how morphological systems operate within and across languages, as well as how such systems influence language learning, translation, and communication. Furthermore, examining Indonesian and English in parallel allows researchers to explore how universal grammatical functions are realized through language-specific strategies, thereby contributing to ongoing discussions on the relationship between form and meaning in human language (Rahmatova & Begmatova, 2025).

Based on these considerations, this study aims to conduct a descriptive-comparative analysis of inflectional morphology in Indonesian and English, with a particular focus on verbs and nouns. The study examines the forms, functions, and distribution of inflectional features in both languages in order to identify key similarities and differences. By doing so, it seeks to explain how comparable grammatical meanings are expressed through different morphological mechanisms and to highlight the implications of these differences for linguistic theory and language use.

In a broader context, this research is relevant to the increasing demands of globalization and intercultural communication, where interaction across languages with different structural systems is becoming more common. A clear understanding of morphological differences between Indonesian and English can support more effective language teaching, improve translation accuracy, and enhance cross-cultural communication. Additionally, the findings of this study may serve as a foundation for further typological research, particularly in relation to Austronesian languages that share analytic characteristics with Indonesian.

Overall, this study contributes to the field of linguistics by providing both empirical and theoretical insights into the nature of inflectional morphology across languages. By emphasizing the interaction between structural form and grammatical function, the research highlights the importance of comparative approaches in understanding linguistic diversity. It also reinforces the role of morphology as a key component in bridging theoretical analysis and practical application in language education and communication..

### **Method**

This study employs a documentary research approach by collecting data from academically reliable and accountable written sources to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings (Hinzke et al., 2023). The data were obtained from both English and Indonesian linguistic corpora, as well as authoritative grammar references.

For English, the data were drawn from the British National Corpus (BNC) and supported by established grammar references such as *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Depraetere & Langford, 2025). For Indonesian, the data were collected from the Indonesian Corpus, the online *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI), and formal grammar references including *Indonesian: A Comprehensive Grammar* (Sneddon et al., 2012). To ensure the use of up-to-date sources, this study also incorporates recent works on Indonesian linguistics published within the last decade, particularly those addressing morphological and typological features (Idaryani, 2025; Endarto, 2024).

The dataset consists of approximately 120 linguistic items, comprising 60 English and 60 Indonesian data points, which include verb and noun forms representing a range of inflectional and non-inflectional patterns. The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling, whereby data were selected based on specific criteria: (1) frequency of occurrence in formal language use, (2) representation of key grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, number, and person, and (3) relevance to comparative morphological analysis. This method ensures that the selected data are both representative and analytically relevant.

Data collection focused on identifying and classifying inflectional forms of verbs and nouns in both languages. In English, particular attention was given to regular and irregular verb forms as well as noun pluralization patterns, with classification based on inflectional variation such as suffixation and internal changes. In Indonesian, the analysis focused on base forms of verbs and nouns, along with non-inflectional grammatical markers such as *sudah*, *akan*, and reduplication, which function to convey grammatical meaning without altering the base form. To ensure contextual validity, example sentences were selected from formal written sources, including academic texts, news articles, and encyclopedic materials.

The data analysis employed a descriptive-comparative method to examine the morphological forms and grammatical functions of inflection in Indonesian and English. The analysis was conducted through several systematic steps: (1) classifying data into verbs and nouns, (2) identifying morphological patterns such as affixation, internal changes, and reduplication, (3) analyzing grammatical functions in context, and (4) conducting direct comparisons between corresponding categories in both languages. To strengthen the analytical foundation, the study adopts theoretical frameworks from structural morphology and language typology, including the form–function perspective, the classification of inflectional processes (Haspelmath, 2024), and the analytic–synthetic typological distinction (Gladden, 2016). These frameworks are applied as analytical tools to interpret how the two languages encode grammatical meaning through different morphological strategies.

To ensure analytical reliability, the classification and interpretation of data were conducted consistently based on predefined categories, and representative examples were selected to reflect recurring linguistic patterns. This systematic procedure enhances the transparency, validity, and reproducibility of the analysis.

### **Result and Discussion**

The inflectional morphology systems of the Indonesian language and the English language demonstrate significant differences in terms of form, frequency of use, and the depth of their grammatical functions (Idaryani, 2025). Based on data obtained from linguistic corpora and written academic sources, it was found that English possesses a more complex, systematic, and productive inflectional system than

Indonesian. These differences directly influence sentence structure, grammatical accuracy, and the strategies used to convey grammatical meaning in each language. In addition, they shape how speakers encode temporal relations, plurality, aspect, and agreement within communication.

Inflection in English includes changes in verb forms according to tense, aspect, and grammatical subject (person), as well as changes in noun forms according to number (singular/plural). For example, the verb *go* changes into *went* for the past tense, *gone* for the past participle, and *goes* for the third-person singular present form. Likewise, regular verbs such as *walk* become *walked* to indicate past action. These changes are part of an internal inflectional system that is obligatory in English sentence construction (Topal, 2024). Without such grammatical marking, sentences may become ungrammatical or ambiguous. For instance, the sentence *She go to school* is considered grammatically incorrect because the required subject-verb agreement marker is absent.

By contrast, Indonesian does not generally alter word forms to indicate tense or number. Verbs such as *pergi* (“go”) remain in the same form across different temporal contexts. Temporal information is instead conveyed through adverbials or particles such as *sudah* (already), *akan* (will), or *sedang* (currently/in progress). For example, the sentence *Dia sudah pergi* expresses past meaning without any modification to the base verb. Similarly, *Dia akan pergi* signals future action, while *Dia sedang pergi* indicates an ongoing event. This demonstrates the analytic character of Indonesian as a language that depends more on lexical and contextual elements than on morphological inflection (Depraetere & Langford, 2025). Such flexibility also means that interpretation often relies heavily on discourse context and shared understanding between speakers.

In terms of nominal inflection, English marks plural forms with suffixes such as *-s* or *-es*, as seen in *cat* → *cats* and *bus* → *buses*. Some nouns also undergo irregular morphological changes, such as *child* → *children*, *man* → *men*, and *foot* → *feet*. These plural markers are grammatically important because they explicitly encode quantity. In contrast, Indonesian commonly uses reduplication as a morphological strategy to express plurality, such as *anak* → *anak-anak* or *buku* → *buku-buku*. However, reduplication in Indonesian does not always strictly indicate plural quantity because plural meaning can often be conveyed through context or quantifiers such as *banyak* (“many”), *beberapa* (“several”), or numerals (Haryanto, 2025). For example, *banyak anak* already communicates plurality without requiring reduplication.

These differences are summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Comparison of Inflectional Morphology in English and Indonesian

Inflectional Aspect	English Language	Indonesian Language
Verb – Tense	<i>go</i> → <i>went</i> / <i>gone</i>	<i>pergi</i> → <i>sudah pergi</i>
Verb – Person	<i>go</i> → <i>goes</i> (3rd person singular)	<i>pergi</i> / <i>akan pergi</i>
Noun – Number	<i>cat</i> → <i>cats</i> / <i>child</i> → <i>children</i>	<i>anak</i> → <i>anak-anak</i> / <i>banyak anak</i>
Grammatical Affixes	Suffixes ( <i>-ed</i> , <i>-s</i> , <i>-en</i> )	Reduplication or auxiliary words
Productivity of Inflection	High, obligatory in sentence structure	Low, context-dependent
Morphological Typology	Synthetic morphology	Analytic morphology

The patterns observed in Table 1 show that English consistently uses morphological modification to encode grammatical meaning, particularly through affixation (e.g., *-s*, *-ed*) and irregular stem changes (*go* → *went*, *child* → *children*). These forms appear systematically across the analyzed dataset, indicating that inflection is a regular and obligatory feature in English grammatical structure. In contrast, the Indonesian data demonstrate that grammatical meanings such as tense and number are expressed without changes to the base word form. Instead, Indonesian relies on lexical markers (e.g., *sudah*, *akan*) and contextual interpretation, as seen in constructions such as *pergi*, *sudah pergi*, and *banyak anak*.

These data-driven patterns indicate that English encodes grammatical information primarily through word-form modification, whereas Indonesian distributes grammatical meaning across separate lexical and contextual elements. This empirical observation supports the typological distinction proposed by Haspelmath (Haspelmath, 2024), in which English aligns with synthetic morphology, while Indonesian reflects an analytic morphological system. From the perspective of communicative function, the English inflectional system allows grammatical information to be compressed into a single word. This makes

sentence structures denser and often more explicit, but also more dependent on morphological precision. For example, the word *walked* simultaneously communicates lexical meaning and past temporal reference. By contrast, Indonesian offers greater flexibility in sentence structure but relies more heavily on context for interpreting time, aspect, or quantity. This reflects a fundamental difference in grammatical organization between the two languages, as discussed by Bybee in relation to the interaction between morphological form and communicative function (Bybee, 2023).

The use of inflection also has important implications for second-language learning. Native speakers of Indonesian often experience difficulties in understanding and applying English verbal inflections because they are accustomed to a grammatical system that does not depend on word-form changes. For example, distinctions among *go*, *went*, and *gone* do not have direct morphological equivalents in Indonesian. Similarly, plural endings such as *-s* may be omitted by Indonesian learners because plurality in their native language is frequently context-based. Ellis notes that differences in morphological systems can become major barriers in second-language acquisition, particularly when the learner's first language and target language rely on opposite grammatical strategies (Ellis, 2022). Structurally, inflection in English also affects syntactic arrangement. Word order in English interacts closely with verb forms (Idaryani, 2025). A sentence such as *She goes to school* becomes ungrammatical if the verbal inflection does not agree with the subject (*She go to school*). In Indonesian, however, the equivalent sentence *Dia pergi ke sekolah* does not require any verb change regardless of subject category. This gives Indonesian greater structural flexibility while reducing dependence on morphological agreement.

In pragmatic and discourse contexts, inflection may also influence communicative nuance. Past forms in English can explicitly indicate event sequencing, as in *He had eaten before she arrived*. In Indonesian, the same meaning depends more on time expressions or narrative sequencing, such as *Dia sudah makan sebelum dia datang*. This shows that the function of inflection is not only grammatical but also pragmatic because it contributes to how speakers organize events in discourse (Mel'čuk, 2006). The limited role of inflection in Indonesian does not mean that the language is less efficient. On the contrary, in many communicative situations, Indonesian analytic structure enables quick and economical interaction, especially in informal speech. This is consistent with Gladden's view that inflectional systems must be understood within the ecological context of each language. What is efficient in one linguistic system may not apply in another (Gladden, 2016).

Interestingly, although Indonesian has minimal inflection, it possesses other highly productive morphological processes, especially derivational affixation such as *ber-*, *me-*, *di-*, and *-kan*. These affixes change lexical meaning or grammatical category rather than marking tense or agreement. Therefore, Indonesian morphology balances limited inflection with rich derivational productivity (James Neil Sneddon, K Alexander Adelaar, Dwi Djenar, 2012). The data also indicate that English inflection is more systematic and obligatory in formal written communication, whereas Indonesian often leaves tense or plurality to contextual interpretation even in formal discourse. For example, Indonesian may use *mereka makan siang* without explicit past marking, while English requires *they ate lunch* to clearly indicate past action. This comparison demonstrates that inflection cannot be separated from the functional and social context of language use.

In bilingual communication and translation, these differences may create misunderstanding if not properly understood. Translators must recognize that grammatical meaning is not always carried by equivalent word forms. Sometimes meaning is embedded morphologically, while in other cases it emerges through syntax or discourse context. Based on data analysis and theoretical interpretation, it can be concluded that the fundamental differences between Indonesian and English inflectional morphology reflect deeper contrasts in how the two languages organize grammatical meaning. Although both languages communicate similar grammatical information such as time, quantity, and aspect, the linguistic strategies they employ are substantially different.

As a practical implication, understanding these differences is essential for language teaching, translation, and applied linguistic studies. Language teachers, translators, and researchers need to recognize that meaning does not arise solely from word forms but also from language-specific grammatical structures and communicative strategies. Therefore, these findings reinforce the importance of morphological typology in developing a more comprehensive cross-linguistic understanding and reaffirm the significance of structural and functional approaches in linguistic analysis, as emphasized by scholars such as (Mel'čuk, 2006) and Bybee (Bybee, 2023).

### Conclusion

This comparative study of inflectional morphology in the Indonesian language and the English language confirms the existence of significant typological differences in the encoding of grammatical meaning. English, as a morphologically more synthetic language, demonstrates a complex and productive inflectional system in which grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, number, and person are systematically expressed through obligatory modifications of word forms, particularly in verbs and nouns. These inflectional processes contribute directly to grammatical precision, syntactic agreement, and semantic clarity. In contrast, Indonesian, as a predominantly analytic language, does not employ inflection in the same formal manner. Instead, grammatical meanings are primarily conveyed through contextual cues, lexical markers, auxiliary particles, word order, and reduplication. This indicates that Indonesian organizes grammatical information through syntactic and lexical strategies rather than through bound inflectional morphemes.

The findings of this study have important implications for language pedagogy, translation studies, bilingual communication, and applied linguistics. The contrast between obligatory inflection in English and context-dependent grammatical marking in Indonesian may create challenges in second-language acquisition, particularly for learners transferring grammatical patterns from one linguistic system to another. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of these morphological differences is essential for developing effective teaching strategies, improving translation accuracy, and strengthening cross-linguistic analysis. By applying a descriptive-comparative approach within a language typology framework, this study reinforces the importance of structural and functional perspectives in linguistic research, demonstrating how typologically distinct languages achieve similar communicative purposes through fundamentally different grammatical mechanisms.

### References

- Bybee, J. (2023). *What Is Usage-Based Linguistics?* The Handbook of Usage-Based Linguistics, 7–29.
- Carston, R. (2022). Words: Syntactic structures and pragmatic meanings. *Synthese*, 200(6), 430.
- Depraetere, I., & Langford, C. (2025). *Advanced English grammar: A linguistic approach*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Ellis, N. C. (2022). Second language learning of morphology. *Journal of the European Second Language Association*, 6(1).
- Endarto, I. T. (2024). *Indonesian English: A Linguistic Identity in a Global Tongue*. UGM Press.
- Gladden, M. E. (2016). A typology of posthumanism: A framework for differentiating analytic, synthetic, theoretical, and practical posthumanisms.
- Haryanto, Y. (2025). *Kajian Ilmu Bahasa 2: Sintaksis dan Semantik*.
- Haspelmath, M. (1995). Word-class-changing inflection and morphological theory. In *Yearbook of Morphology 1995* (pp. 43–66). Springer.
- Haspelmath, M. (2024). Inflection and derivation as traditional comparative concepts. *Linguistics*, 62(1), 43–77.
- Hinzke, J.-H., Gevorgyan, Z., & Matthes, D. (2023). Study review on the use of the documentary method in the field of research on and in schools in English-speaking scientific contexts.
- Idaryani, I. (2025). Verb matters: Exploring morphological and syntactic differences between English and Indonesian language system. *Journal of English Language and Education*, 10(4), 606–619.
- James Neil Sneddon, J. N., Adelaar, K. A., & Djenar, D. (2012). *Indonesian: A comprehensive grammar*.
- Khanetnok, P., Srihamongkhon, K., Daengsaewram, S., & Thabkhoontod, R. (2023). Morphology: Word formation in linguistics. *International Journal of Sociologies and Anthropologies Science Reviews*, 3(1), 83–92.
- Kitwili, G. G., Ligembe, N. N., & Kiura, M. K. (2022). Morpho-syntactic properties of Kisukuma nouns. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELSS)*, 7(3), 116–134.
- Mel'čuk, I. A. (2006). *Aspects of the Theory of Morphology* (Vol. 146). Walter de Gruyter.
- Rahmatova, G. O., & Begmatova, B. M. (2025). Linguistic universals and their cross-linguistic study. *SHOKH Library*, 1(13).
- Topal, I. H. (2024). Turkish EFL learners' knowledge, perception, and production of suprafixes as part of lexical competence. *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(3), 1530.

- Wright, C., & Alhussaini, A. (2024). Is non-redundant inflectional morphology easier to learn? An investigation of processing instruction role in processing redundant English verbal inflections. *Journal of the European Second Language Association (JESLA)*, 8(1), 66–82.
- Zingler, T. (2022). Infixation in the Americas: A cross-linguistic survey. *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 88(2), 171–228.