Contrastive Analysis of French and Indonesian: A Review of Phonology, Morphology, and Syntax

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Abstract
This study aims to analyze the similarities and differences between French language and Indonesian language through a contrastive analysis approach focusing on phonology, morphology, and syntax. At the phonological level, the main differences lie in the vowel and consonant systems, nasalization, stress patterns, and the pronunciation of final sounds. In terms of morphology, French exhibits a complex inflectional system, including verb conjugation and grammatical marking of gender and number, whereas Indonesian tends to be agglutinative, employing affixation without significant morphological changes based on gender or number. Syntactically, both languages generally follow a Subject–Predicate–Object (SPO) structure; however, they differ in noun phrase structure, article usage, agreement, and adjective placement. The findings indicate that these structural differences may cause linguistic interference in foreign language learning, particularly for Indonesian learners of French. This research is expected to contribute to the field of contrastive linguistics and foreign language teaching.

1. Introduction

Language is a structured sound symbol system and functions as a means of communication as well as a means of shaping social and cultural reality (Ocsis, et al, 2024; Salsabila et al, 2026). From a linguistic perspective, language is not only understood as a collection of vocabulary, but as a system that has internal rules at various levels, ranging from phonology, morphology, syntax, to semantics and pragmatics (Darwin, et al, 2021; Liyana, et al, 2025). Each language has unique typological characteristics, which are influenced by history, cultural development, and interaction with other languages. These differences in characteristics are the main focus in the study of contrastive linguistics, which is a branch of linguistics that compares two or more languages to systematically identify similarities and differences in linguistic systems.

In the context of globalization and international academic mobility, Foreign Languages have a strategic position as one of the international languages used in the fields of diplomacy, education, economics, and culture (Irma, et al, 2023; Nasution, 2025; Sahnan, 2024). In Indonesia, French language learning is developing at the secondary school and university levels as part of foreign language education (Indrayatti, et al, 2023; Paskori et al, 2024). However, the learning process is inseparable from the linguistic challenges that arise due to the difference in systems between French and Indonesian. Differences in language typology often lead to interference with the first language (B1) against the second language (B2), which has an impact on pronunciation errors, word formation, and sentence structure (Al Pansori, et al, 2025; Yasih, et al, 2025). Therefore, a comprehensive study is needed to understand in depth the structural contrast between the two languages.

French is a language from the Romance family that developed from Vulgar Latin and has characteristics as a flexible language (Ardila, 2020; Intan, 2021). According to Setiadi (2025), the main characteristic of flective language is the change in the form of words to show grammatical functions, such as verb conjugation based on time (présent, passé composé, imparfait, futur, and so on), mode (indicative, subjunctive, imperative), and conformity (accord) with the subject. In addition, the French language recognizes gender categories (masculine and feminine) as well as number marking on nouns and adjectives (Astiati, 2023). This grammatical structure shows a complex morphological system and is bound to strict rules of conformity. On the other hand, Indonesian is classified as an Austronesian family and is typologically categorized as an analytical-agglutinative language (Lukman, 2024). The Indonesian language does not recognize changes in the form of verbs based on time or subject, and does not have grammatical gender categories (Basaria, 2021). Time markers are generally

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expressed through lexical descriptions such as "already", "will", or "medium" (Megasari, 2020). The formation of grammatical meaning in Indonesian relies more on the process of affixation (prefixes, suffixes, infixes, and confixes) than changes in the internal form of words (Hanafi, 2026). Therefore, this typological difference between flexible language and analytical language is an important cornerstone in contrastive analysis.

Theoretically, contrastive analysis serves to predict potential difficulties in learning a foreign language by identifying areas of significant structural differences. Practically, the results of this analysis can be used as a basis for the development of teaching materials, learning strategies, and evaluation approaches in learning French as a foreign language (Français Langue Étrangère/FLE) in Indonesia. By understanding the points of contrast in phonology, morphology, and syntax aspects, educators can design more directional, adaptive, and contextual learning according to the linguistic background of the learners.

These differences show that French learning by Indonesian speakers has the potential to face challenges in various linguistic aspects. Without an adequate understanding of the systemic contrasts of the two languages, the learning process can be less effective because teachers do not have a clear map of difficulties. Therefore, contrastive analysis is important not only as a theoretical study in comparative linguistics, but also as a pedagogical basis in the development of teaching materials, learning strategies, and language evaluation.

Therefore, this study aims to perform a comprehensive contrastive analysis of French and Indonesian, focusing on phonological, morphological, and syntactic aspects. This study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the structural differences between the two languages and explain their implications for potential interference in French learning by Indonesian speakers. In addition, the results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of applied linguistics studies and improve the quality of foreign language learning in Indonesia. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the contrastive between French and Indonesian at the level of phonology, morphology, and syntax. This research is expected not only to enrich the study of contrastive linguistics, but also to make a real contribution to improving the quality of French language learning in Indonesia through a deep understanding of the differences in the linguistic systems of the two languages.

2. Method

The Method section describes in detail how the study was conducted, including conceptual and operational definitions of the variables used in the study, Different types of studies will rely on different methodologies; however, a complete description of the methods used enables the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of your methods and the reliability and the validity of your results, It also permits experienced investigators to replicate the study, If your manuscript is an update of an ongoing or earlier study and the method has been published in detail elsewhere, you may refer the reader to that source and simply give a brief synopsis of the method in this section. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method based on the framework of contrastive analysis. Restrictive analysis is an approach used to compare two or more languages to identify similarities and differences between them (James, 1986). This approach was chosen because the research aims to describe and systematically compare the structure of French and Indonesian at the level of phonology, morphology, and syntax. Through contrastive analysis, this study seeks to identify the similarities and structural differences between the two languages, as well as examine the potential interference that may arise in the learning of French by Indonesian speakers.

The source of research data is in the form of linguistic data obtained from official grammar references, grammar books, dictionaries, and scientific literature relevant to the study of linguistics of both languages. French data is taken from standard grammar books and Français Langue Étrangère (FLE) materials, while Indonesian data refers to standard grammar and official language guidelines. In addition, this study also utilizes journal articles and academic studies that discuss the language typology, phonology, morphology, and syntax of the two languages as supporting sources for analysis. Data collection techniques are carried out through documentation studies and text analysis. Researchers identify and collect representative examples of language structures, then group them based on phonology, morphology, and syntactic categories. The data that has been collected is then recorded and classified systematically to facilitate the comparison process.

Data analysis is carried out through several stages, namely describing the structure of each language at each linguistic level, comparing elements that have similarities and differences, and identifying significant forms of contrast. Furthermore, the results of the comparison are interpreted to explain its pedagogical implications in learning French as a foreign language in Indonesia. The analysis process is carried out qualitatively by emphasizing the depth of interpretation of the linguistic system, not on quantitative measurements. To maintain the validity of the data, this study applies source triangulation by comparing various credible and up-to-date linguistic references. The framework of structural linguistic theory and language typology is used as a basis for interpretation, so that the results of the analysis have theoretical consistency. Through this procedure, this research is expected to be able to provide a comprehensive overview of the structural comparison of French and

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Indonesian and its contribution to the development of more effective and contextual foreign language learning strategies.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study and interprets them in relation to the research questions, relevant literature, and broader educational implications. It should demonstrate both analytical depth and scholarly engagement. The results and discussion section must include the following key elements: In the Results section, summarize the collected data and the analysis performed on those data relevant to the discourse that is to follow. Report the data in sufficient detail to justify your conclusions. Mention all relevant results, including those that run counter to expectation; be sure to include small effect sizes (or statistically nonsignificant findings) when theory predicts large (or statistically significant) ones. Do not hide uncomfortable results by omission. Do not include individual scores or raw data with the exception, for example, of single-case designs or illustrative examples. In the spirit of data sharing (encouraged by APA and other professional associations and sometimes required by funding agencies), raw data, including study characteristics and individual effect sizes used in a meta-analysis, can be made available on supplemental online archives. Discussing the implications of the results should be reserved for presentation in the Discussion section. Contrastive analysis was carried out to identify differences in the linguistic system between French and Indonesian that have the potential to cause interference in the process of acquiring a second language. This study covers three main levels, namely phonology, morphology, and syntax. Each structural difference is analyzed to predict the likelihood of mistakes learners make.

3.1. Contrastive Analysis of the Field of Phonology

To describe the phonological differences between French and Indonesian in a more systematic way, it is necessary to map the sound elements that are the main source of differences and potential interference. Phonological analysis includes not only segmental phonemes such as vowels and consonants, but also suprasegmental aspects such as pressure, rhythm, and syllable structure. The incompatibility of the sound system of these two languages can affect the learner's ability to perceive and produce speech. French has a more complex inventory of vowels, including nasal vowels and front round vowels that do not exist in Indonesian. Differences are also seen in the point and manner of articulation of several consonants, the complexity of the consonant groups, and the pressure patterns based on rhythmic groups. In contrast, Indonesian tends to be simpler, with an open syllable structure and relatively consistent spelling–pronunciation relationships.

These differences can cause interference in the form of sound substitution, addition of auxiliary vowels, articulation errors, as well as inaccuracies in rhythm and pressure in the pronunciation of French by Indonesian learners. In order to provide a clearer and more structured picture of these phonological differences, Table 1 presents a comparison of the main aspects in the phonological contrastive analysis of the two languages.

Table 1. Contrastive Analysis of French and Indonesian Phonology

No.	Aspects	French	English	Example	Potential Interference	Contrast Analysis
1.	Nasal vowel	Ada (/ɑ̃/, /ɔ̃/, /ɛ̃/)	None	*Enfant /ɑ̃fɑ̃/ bon /bɔ̃/*	Pronounced /anfan/, /bon/	BI does not have phonemic nasal distinctions
2.	Sound /ʁ/	The consonant uvular	None (/r/ alveolar)	*rue*	Pronounced /ru/	Difference in articulation points
3.	Vocals /y/	Ada (front round vowel)	None	*tu*	Pronounced like /u/	Not in BI vocal inventory
4.	Gugus consonant	Relatively complex	Simpler	*structure*	Auxiliary vocal addition	Adjustment of the syllabic structure
5.	Word pressure	End of rhythmic group	Relatively even	*parler*	Unnatural rhythm	Differences in prosody systems

Phonologically, French and Indonesian show significant differences in sound inventory, vocal system, syllabic structure, and rhythm and pressure patterns. The French language has a more complex phoneme system, including the presence of nasal vowels such as /ɑ̃/, /ɛ̃/, /ɔ̃/, and /œ̃/, which are not found in Indonesian (Ferdyani, et al, 2023). In addition, there is the front round vowel /y/ and the uvular consonant /ʁ/ which also has no equivalent in the Indonesian phonological system. This is in line with the results of research conducted by Masthuroh (2025) which states that the absence of these phonemes causes learners to tend to substitute with sounds that are closest to the first language, for example /ɑ̃/ realized as /an/ or /y/ as /u/. This process is a form of articulatory adjustment due to the limitations of phonological representation in the first language. The difference lies not only in the inventory of sounds, but also in the suprasegmental phonological characteristics. French applies pressure at the end of the rhythmic group (accent de groupe), while Indonesian has a relatively even pressure distribution and is not contrastive (Berliana, 2024). As a result, Indonesian learners' speech often sounds flat or does not follow the natural rhythm pattern of the French language. In addition, Trisna (2023) said

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that in her research, the French language recognizes typical phonological phenomena such as *liaison* (the connection of sounds between words), *élision* (the elimination of certain vowels), and the existence of unpronounced letters (*silent letters*). These phenomena demand high phonological sensitivity because pronunciation does not always align with orthographic forms. In contrast, Bahasa Indonesia has a relatively consistent relationship between spelling and pronunciation (phonemics), so learners tend to rely on the principle of "read as written" when producing French.

In terms of syllable structure, Indonesian tends to use an *open Consonant–Vocal* (CV) pattern, while French allows for more complex structural variations, including consonant clusters and closed syllables (Azzahra, 2023). This difference also affects the fluency of learners' articulation, especially in the pronunciation of words that contain double consonants or final consonants that are not fully pronounced. Overall, the phonological contrast between these two languages has direct implications for the emergence of errors in articulation, intonation, rhythm, and syllable pressure placement. Therefore, the phonology aspect needs to receive special attention in teaching French for Indonesian learners, especially through sound perception exercises and phoneme production that are not found in the first language.

3.2. Contrastive Analysis of the Field of Morphology

In the study of morphological contrasts, it can be seen that the structural differences between French and Indonesian are fundamental and systematic. The French language applies a fusional morphology system, in which changes in the form of words indicate grammatical categories such as persona, number, gender, and times, especially in verbs, nouns, and adjectives. Meanwhile, Indonesian is agglutinative and does not mark these categories through changes in word forms, so that the basic forms of words remain relatively the same. These morphological differences have a direct impact on the possible mistakes made by Indonesian learners when producing French, such as the use of verb forms that do not correspond to the subject, gender neglect, and inaccuracies in adjectives. To provide a more structured picture and facilitate the identification of potential errors, Table 2 presents a comparison of the main morphological aspects between French and Indonesian as well as the predictions of errors that are common to learners.

Table 2. Contrastive Analysis of French and Indonesian Morphology

No.	Aspects	French	English	Sample Data	Contrast Analysis	Error Prediction
1.	Verb conjugation	Changes according to the subject	Unchanged	*Je parle / Nous parlons*	France fusional, BI does not mark persona	*Nous parle*
2.	Timestamp	Morfologis (tense)	Lexical	*J'ai mangé*	BI does not change the verb form	Using the present for all the time
3.	Gender	Maskulin & feminin	None	*le livre, la table*	BI does not have a grammatical gender	Wrong article
4.	Agreement adjectiva	Gender & total	Unchanged	*intelligent/intelligente*	No alignment in BI	Adjective forms are not adjusted
5.	Morphological type	Fusional	Aglutinative	*parler → parlons*	Differences in word formation systems	Generalization of basic forms
6.	Aficionados	Limited	Productive	*me- + read → read*	Differences in derivation systems	Transfer pola BI

At the morphological level, the difference between French and Indonesian is fundamental and systematic. French is classified as a fusional language that marks grammatical categories such as persona, number, gender, and time through changes in the form of words (inflection). Every change in grammatical categories is generally accompanied by morphological changes inherent in verb forms, adjectives, and nouns. On the other hand, Indonesian tends to be agglutinative and does not mark these categories through inflection. Verbs in Indonesian do not change their form based on the subject, and the language does not recognize a grammatical gender system.

According to Rusmawati (2020), the morphological complexity of the French language is evident in the verb conjugation system. The verb form changes according to the persona and number of subjects, for example *je parle*, *nous parlons*, and *ils parlent*. In addition, adjectives and some nouns undergo changes in form based on gender and number, such as *petit* (masculine) to *petite* (feminine), or change from singular to plural. This system shows that syntactic relations in French are highly dependent on morphological marking. In contrast, in Indonesian, plurality is generally expressed through reduplication (e.g. *books*) or the addition of a number word, without changing the basic form of the noun. Adjectives also do not undergo changes in form based on gender

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or number. Similarly, verbs remain in one form regardless of subject differences, as in the sentence *I eat*, *we eat*, or *they eat*. This difference in mechanism reflects a significant grammatical contrast between the two languages.

The implications of these differences can be seen in the tendency of French learners to generalize the basic form of verbs or ignore the required agreement adjustments. Because in their first language there is no such morphological obligation, learners often use one verb form for a variety of subjects or contexts of the time. In addition, the lexical system of marking time in Indonesian through words such as *already*, *moderate*, or *will* encourage learners to retain one form of verb in French without making appropriate tense changes. Thus, the morphological contrast between French and Indonesian not only shows typological differences, but also explains the main source of errors in conjugation, gender usage, and grammatical correspondence in Indonesian learners. Therefore, the morphological aspect is one of the areas most susceptible to interference and requires intensive pedagogical attention in French language learning.

3.3. Syntactic Field Contrast Analysis

In the field of syntax, French and Indonesian both use the basic Subject-Predicate-Object (SPO) or SVO pattern. This similarity provides an initial advantage for learners because the basic structure of sentences relatively does not pose significant difficulties. However, behind these similarities there are a number of significant structural differences that have direct implications for the language acquisition process. These differences often lead to errors in the production of French by Indonesian learners, such as the omission of grammatical elements, inaccuracies in the order of words, and the neglect of numerical and gender correspondence. To make it easier to identify and understand these potential errors, Table 3 presents a comparison of the main syntactic aspects between French and Indonesian as well as the predictions of errors that are common to learners.

Table 3. Contrastive Analysis of French and Indonesian Syntax

No.	Aspects	French	English	Sample Data	Contrast Analysis	Error Prediction
1.	Basic pattern	SVO	SVO	*Je mange du riz*	The basic structure is the same	Minimal initial errors
2.	Article	Mandatory	None	*Je vois le chat*	BI does not know articles	Article removal
3.	Negation	ne + verba + pas	no + verb	*Je ne comprends pas*	Dual vs single structure	Loss of ne
4.	Subject	Explicit Wire	Removable	*Il pleut*	BI is often without a subject	Omission subject
5.	Nominal phrases	Article + N + Adj	N + Adj	*Une grande maison blanche*	Distribution of different adjectives	Improper order
6.	Agreement	Available (number & gender)	None	*Les chats noirs*	No alignment in BI	Plural form is not customized

Research by Arsiyana (2017); Devina (2022); Wiboolyasarin (2025) shows that although the basic structure of clauses in French and Indonesian both follows the SVO pattern, the distribution of constituents such as the position of pronouns and objects differs significantly between the two languages, for example, the prepositional object is before the verb in French but after the verb in Indonesian. In the results of the research, Arrasyid (2022) stated that the French language has a strict agreement system between the subject and the predicate, where the verb form must adjust to the persona and number of subjects. In addition, the French language requires the presence of an explicit subject in every clause, including in impersonal constructions such as *Il pleut*. On the other hand, Indonesian allows the omission of the subject if the context is clear and does not recognize changes in the form of verbs based on the subject. These differences often cause learners to omit the subject or not adjust the verb form in French. Another aspect that stands out is the use of articles. In French, an article is a mandatory element attached to the noun, either in the definite (*le, la, les*) and indefinite (*un, une*) forms. The Indonesian language does not have a grammatical article system, so learners often omit these elements when forming nominal phrases in French.

The structure of negation also shows fundamental differences. The French language uses a double negation pattern *ne... pas* that flank the verb, while the Indonesian language only uses one negation marker such as *no* or *not* before the predicate (Arsiyana, 2017; Hopper, 2025). Since there is no direct structural equivalent in the first language, learners often omit one of the elements of negation in French, specifically *the ne particle* in the spoken variety. In addition, the placement of object pronouns in French follows a special rule, that is, it is before the verb, as in the construction of *Je le vois*. This pattern is different from the Indonesian language which places the object after the verb (*I see him*). The difference in the position of these sentence elements requires syntactic restructuring that is not simple for the learner. In nominal phrases, the distribution of adjectives is also different. French allows adjectives to be placed before or after nouns depending on the type and nuances of their meaning, while in Indonesian adjectives generally follow nouns (Tobing, 2020). These variations in position often lead to word order errors or unnatural use of structures.

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Overall, although both languages share the basic pattern of SVO, the internal mechanism of sentence structure in French is much more tied to formal grammatical rules than in Indonesian. This contrast shows that surface similarity does not always guarantee ease of acquisition, because differences in agreement systems, articles, negations, and position of sentence elements remain the main source of syntactic interference for Indonesian learners.

3.4. Learner Interference Analysis

Based on the structural differences that have been described, it is predictable that various forms of interference in the production of French by Indonesian learners can be predicted. This interference is generally in the form of omissions of grammatical elements, misunderstandings, and generalizations of the basic form of verbs.

Table 4. French and Indonesian Language Interference Analysis

No.	Target Structure (France)	Learner Production	Error Types	Causes
1.	*Je suis étudiant.*	*Je étudiant.*	Omission verba	Transfer structure BI
2.	*La table est grande.*	*Le table est grand.*	Gender agreement error	There is no gender in BI
3.	*Nous parlons français.*	*Nous parle français.*	Conjugation errors	No verb change in BI
4.	*Je ne comprends pas.*	*Je comprends pas.*	Elimination of the element of negation	Structural simplification
5.	*Un livre intéressant.*	*Livre intéressant.*	Article removal	BI has no articles

Broadly speaking, the more striking the structural differences between the first language, namely Indonesian, and the target language, namely French, the higher the likelihood of interference in the second language learning process. Fundamental differences in the language system encourage learners to indirectly transfer the patterns and rules of the first language into the language being studied, because the system has already been embedded and has become the main reference in language (Faiza, 2021).

The most prominent differences are seen in the realm of morphology and syntax. In the field of morphology, French demands changes in the form of words based on grammatical categories such as persona, number, time, and gender, while Indonesian does not recognize such an inflection system. In addition, the agreement between nouns, adjectives, and articles in French is a challenge for Indonesian learners who are not familiar with the mechanism. In terms of syntax, the obligation to use articles, the application of double negation, and the need to explicitly list the subject show that the sentence structure of French is more bound to formal rules than Indonesian which tends to be more flexible. In terms of syntax, the obligation to use articles, the application of double negation, and the explicit marking of subjects demonstrate that French sentence structure is more constrained by formal grammatical rules than Indonesian, which tends to exhibit greater flexibility.

3.5. Implication

This finding implies the need for more structured pedagogical approaches in teaching French syntax, particularly for Indonesian learners.

3.6. Limitation

This study is limited to a contrastive linguistic analysis of selected features and does not encompass pragmatic, discourse-level, or sociolinguistic dimensions

4. Conclusion

The contrastive analysis between French and Indonesian reveals significant structural differences in phonology, morphology, and syntax that can lead to interference in second language acquisition. In phonology, differences in sound inventory such as nasal vowels, front rounded vowels, uvular consonants, and the phenomena of liaison and elision create pronunciation challenges for Indonesian learners. In morphology, the contrast between the fusional system of French and the agglutinative system of Indonesian leads to errors such as ignoring verb conjugation, gender agreement, and article usage. In syntax, although both languages follow an SVO pattern, French applies stricter grammatical rules, often resulting in errors like omission of required elements, structural simplification, and incorrect word order. Overall, the greater the differences between the two languages, the higher the potential for interference; therefore, a systematic contrastive teaching approach that focuses on common error patterns is essential to improve the effectiveness of French language learning for Indonesian speakers.

Author Contributions

All authors have equal contributions to the paper. All the authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/ or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

AI were used only to improve readability and language under strict human oversight; no content, ideas, analyses, or conclusions were generated by AI.

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