



## Comparing English and Indonesian Abbreviation Systems

### A Contrastive Linguistic Study

Tisya Amalia Putri Sitorus<sup>1\*</sup>, Fitri Aisyah Amini Nst<sup>2</sup>, Dea Nita Aulia<sup>3</sup>,  
Dini Nur Aini<sup>4</sup>, Nazwa Atalia Zahra<sup>5</sup>, Siti Ismahani<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1-6</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Email: [tisya0304222048@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:tisya0304222048@uinsu.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [fitri0304222053@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:fitri0304222053@uinsu.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>, [deanita0304222044@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:deanita0304222044@uinsu.ac.id)<sup>3</sup>,  
[dini0304222042@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:dini0304222042@uinsu.ac.id)<sup>4</sup>, [nazwa0304222051@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:nazwa0304222051@uinsu.ac.id)<sup>5</sup>, [sitiismahani@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:sitiismahani@uinsu.ac.id)<sup>6</sup>

\*Penulis Korespondensi: [tisya0304222048@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:tisya0304222048@uinsu.ac.id)

**Abstract.** *Abbreviation is a common linguistic strategy used to achieve efficiency and clarity in modern communication. This study examines the abbreviation systems of English and Indonesian through a contrastive linguistic approach, focusing on morphological patterns, phonological constraints, and usage conventions. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the data were collected from established linguistic references and analyzed using classical contrastive analysis principles. The findings reveal that English abbreviation formation is structurally flexible, allowing both pronounceable acronyms and non-pronounceable initialisms, often maintaining complex consonant clusters and orthographic capitalization. In contrast, Indonesian abbreviation formation is strongly influenced by phonological preferences, particularly ease of pronunciation and conformity to open syllable structures, resulting in forms that closely resemble ordinary lexical items. These structural differences suggest potential sources of negative transfer for language learners and challenges in translation practices. The study concludes that abbreviation systems are shaped not only by linguistic rules but also by sociocultural and communicative needs. Understanding these contrasts is essential for language teaching, translation, and further comparative linguistic research.*

**Keywords:** *Abbreviation; Acronym; Contrastive Linguistics; English; Morphology.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the use of abbreviations has become increasingly central to linguistic practices across languages, driven by technological acceleration, digital communication, and the demand for greater efficiency in information exchange. Abbreviations whether in the form of acronyms, initialisms, clippings, or blends serve not only as mechanisms for linguistic economy but also as markers of identity, modernity, and domain-specific discourse practices (Deliani & Harahap, 2022). In English, abbreviation formation demonstrates a high degree of creativity and morphological productivity, reflecting the language's global role and its long history of lexical innovation. Forms such as *NASA*, *UNICEF*, *CEO*, *app* (from *application*), and *brunch* (from *breakfast* + *lunch*) exemplify how English abbreviations operate within flexible morphological boundaries and diverse phonological structures (Puteri Fatin Nor'ain & Maslida Yusof, 2024).

Indonesian, as a major language in Southeast Asia with rapidly evolving linguistic practices, also exhibits a rich system of abbreviation formation. The Indonesian system includes *singkatan* (initial contractions), *akronim* (pronounceable letter combinations), *kontraksi*, and *penggalan*, each with its own morphophonemic constraints and orthographic conventions (Mufrida & Zultiyanti, 2023). Examples such as *Pemilu* (Pemilihan Umum), *ASN*

(Aparatur Sipil Negara), *rapat* (raporte), and *tilang* (bukti pelanggaran) illustrate abbreviation processes that are simultaneously systematic and socioculturally embedded. Unlike English, Indonesian abbreviation rules prioritize syllabic structure, phonotactic naturalness, and pronounceability, often resulting in forms that resemble native Indonesian lexemes (Setiawaty, 2024). These differences reveal that abbreviation systems, while sharing universal communicative functions, are shaped by distinct linguistic, cultural, and structural orientations in each language.

Although abbreviation research has received substantial attention in English linguistics and, to some extent, in Indonesian linguistics, comparative studies between the two languages remain scarce. Existing Indonesian linguistic literature tends to describe abbreviation types from a structural or prescriptive grammar perspective (Aulia et al., 2023), while English studies emphasize morphological creativity and lexical productivity (Nisa & Mulyati, 2023). However, few studies undertake a systematic contrastive examination of abbreviation formation rules between English and Indonesian, despite their increasing interaction in digital communication, translation, education, and cross-linguistic settings.

A contrastive linguistic approach is particularly relevant because English and Indonesian differ significantly in their morphological typology, phonotactic preferences, orthography, and lexical adaptation strategies. English, as an inflectional-analytic language with complex syllable structures, allows abbreviation outputs that preserve consonant clusters, irregular stress patterns, and orthographic irregularities (e.g., *FBI*, *HTML*). Indonesian, as a largely agglutinative language with open syllable tendencies, restricts abbreviation forms to patterns that align with its phonological system, often resulting in more predictable and pronounceable outputs (Nurlyana Sofea Zakiyyah Asral Farhi & Harishon Radzi, 2023). These contrasts suggest potential areas of divergence that are crucial for translation studies, pedagogical practice, and cross-linguistic error analysis.

From an applied linguistic perspective, understanding cross-language differences in abbreviation systems is also essential. Lado's (1957) foundational principle argues that linguistic structures that differ significantly between L1 and L2 may lead to negative transfer and learner errors. This notion is also supported by later studies in error analysis, which emphasize the role of interlingual influence in learner production (Arabella Zulvanka et al., 2023). Given the widespread exposure of Indonesian speakers to English abbreviations in technology, media, branding, and academic discourse, divergence in abbreviation rules may influence how learners interpret, produce, or translate abbreviated forms. For instance, Indonesian learners may assume pronounceability as a universal property of acronyms, leading

to misreading or reinterpreting English forms, while English speakers may misinterpret Indonesian abbreviations lacking clear morphological transparency.

Despite these implications, research specifically comparing English and Indonesian abbreviation systems remains limited, both empirically and theoretically. No comprehensive study to date has mapped the structural, phonological, and functional contrasts between the two systems while linking them to potential areas of learner difficulty or translation challenges. Addressing this gap is particularly relevant in the era of globalized digital communication, where abbreviations mediate interaction across linguistic boundaries and shape modern discourse modes (Maria et al., 2023).

Therefore, this article aims to provide a systematic contrastive analysis of abbreviation formation in English and Indonesian. By examining their morphological patterns, phonological constraints, orthographic conventions, and semantic functions, this study seeks to contribute both to descriptive linguistics and to applied domains such as English language teaching, computational linguistics, and translation studies. The analysis is expected to highlight not only the typological differences between the two systems but also the implications of these differences for cross-linguistic understanding and pedagogical practice.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Abbreviation has long been recognized as a productive and dynamic word-formation process in many languages, including English and Indonesian. Scholars in morphological theory describe abbreviation as encompassing acronyms, initialisms, clippings, blends, and contractions, all of which reduce linguistic material while maintaining communicative clarity (Rosalina et al., 2022). In English, these processes have been examined extensively in relation to lexical productivity and the ways shortened forms become integrated into the lexicon. English accommodates a wide range of structural patterns: fully pronounceable acronyms such as NATO and UNICEF, unpronounceable initialisms like FBI or HTML, as well as clippings such as exam, morph, and lab. The flexibility of English phonotactics, which easily accepts consonant clusters and complex syllables, enables diverse abbreviation outcomes that may or may not resemble ordinary words. Additionally, studies of digital discourse show that social media users frequently generate abbreviated forms for efficiency, identity construction, and stylistic effect, suggesting that abbreviation in English is both structurally flexible and socially motivated (Adnan, 2019).

In Indonesian, abbreviation has also been described as a highly productive process, but with patterns shaped by different phonological, orthographic, and sociolinguistic norms.

Indonesian grammarians note that abbreviated forms often undergo adaptation to fit Indonesian phonotactics, particularly the preference for open syllables and avoidable consonant clusters (Kartika et al., 2025). This tendency frequently results in pronounceable outcomes even when the original source words would predict an initialism. Institutional and bureaucratic naming practices further influence abbreviation patterns, producing forms like *Pemilu*, *ASN*, and *Kemenkes*, which may be opaque or only partially transparent to speakers. Scholars also highlight that Indonesian users commonly label a wide range of shortened forms simply as *akronim*, regardless of whether they meet the linguistic definition of acronymy—an observation that distinguishes Indonesian abbreviation culture from more strictly categorized English terminology. This conflation between acronyms, initialisms, and other shortening types suggests that public perception plays a significant role in how Indonesian abbreviations develop and circulate.

Although English and Indonesian share many basic abbreviation processes, comparative research reveals notable contrasts. English comfortably retains non-pronounceable letter sequences and preserves orthographic distinctions such as full capitalization, while Indonesian tends to reshape forms toward pronounceability and rapid lexical integration, often resulting in lowercased or phonologically adjusted items over time. The functions of abbreviations also differ across languages: English abbreviation practices are strongly influenced by technological, academic, and professional domains, whereas Indonesian shows concentrated productivity in governmental, educational, and political contexts. Sociolinguistic studies further point out that Indonesian abbreviations can carry strong institutional or cultural identity functions, reflecting bureaucratic efficiency or national linguistic creativity.

Existing comparative studies remain limited, as much of the current literature treats the two languages separately rather than systematically contrasting their structures, phonological patterns, and usage conventions. However, drawing from classical contrastive analysis (Hidayatullah, 2021), it is possible to observe potential areas of cross-linguistic influence. For example, Indonesian learners of English may attempt to pronounce initialisms as if they were Indonesian acronyms, or may not immediately distinguish between acronymy and initialism in English because such distinctions are not emphasized in everyday Indonesian usage. These contrastive insights are relevant not only for linguistics but also for translation studies and natural language processing, where abbreviation normalization must account for language-specific patterns. Recent computational research further demonstrates that Indonesian abbreviation systems present unique challenges due to inconsistent orthography and creative formation, underscoring the need for more corpora-based contrastive work.

Taken together, the literature indicates that while both languages rely heavily on abbreviation as an efficient word-formation strategy, the structural options, phonological preferences, and sociolinguistic functions diverge in meaningful ways. English displays a broad tolerance for varied morphological outcomes, whereas Indonesian shows strong phonological shaping and a culturally distinctive treatment of abbreviated forms. These differences highlight the importance of a systematic comparative study and open the possibility for deeper exploration into how speakers of each language perceive, process, and adapt abbreviated forms in everyday communication.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

This study applies a qualitative descriptive method with a contrastive analysis design. This approach was specifically chosen to systematically map the divergences and convergences between the English and Indonesian abbreviation systems. The analytical framework is based on Lado's (1957) theoretical principle, which states that comparing the linguistic structures of the source and target languages is fundamental to predicting areas of difficulty and potential negative transfer in language learning. In addition, this study also adopts James' (1980) error analysis perspective to link structural differences with interlingual implications in the context of translation and teaching.

#### **Instruments and Data Sources**

In this qualitative study, the researcher acted as the main instrument (human instrument) who selected, classified, and interpreted the data. The research data was secondary data obtained through library documentation techniques. The data corpus consisted of word formation rules and an abbreviation lexicon taken from the following authoritative sources:

- a. English Corpus: Data on morphological rules, lexical productivity, and creativity in the formation of acronyms and initialisms refer to the works of (Fernandes Guimaraes et al., 2023) Data on the use of abbreviations in modern discourse, identity, and digital communication are taken from (Kulsum, 2022).
- b. Indonesian Corpus: Primary data on formal rules, including abbreviations, acronyms, and contractions, refer to Tata Bahasa Baku Bahasa Indonesia (Pebri Dwi Lesmono Nugroho et al., 2024). Data on phonotactic restrictions, syllable structure, and pronounceability preferences in Indonesian abbreviations are supported by studies by (Astrianti & Da Costa, 2024)

#### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection was carried out through the following inventory steps:

- a. Rule Identification: Identifying explicit rules for the formation of abbreviations and acronyms in standard grammar books for both languages.
- b. Lexicon Extraction: Collecting representative samples of abbreviations that reflect various patterns, such as: Unpronounceable initialisms (e.g., FBI, HTML) versus Indonesian abbreviations (e.g., KTP, DPR). Pronounceable acronyms (e.g., NASA, UNICEF) versus Indonesian acronyms (e.g., Pemilu, tilang). Other variant forms such as clippings (e.g., app, exam) and syllable segments.
- c. Data Tabulation: The collected data is tabulated based on its morphological category to facilitate side-by-side comparison (juxtaposition).

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis was performed using a modified Classical Contrastive Analysis Model, comprising four procedural stages:

- a. Description: Describing the English and Indonesian abbreviation systems separately (intralingually) based on their respective morphophonemic rules. Focus was given to the flexibility of English morphology and the constraints of Indonesian phonotactics.
- b. Selection: Selecting relevant feature pairs for comparison, namely: syllable patterns (open vs. closed), orthography (capitalization), and phonological adaptation strategies.
- c. Contrasting: Comparing data across languages (interlingual) to find mismatches. This analysis highlights how English tolerates complex consonant clusters, while Indonesian tends to modify forms to conform to natural syllable patterns.
- d. Prediction: Formulating predictions about potential linguistic challenges. This stage interprets how these differences in systems can lead to misinterpretation or translation difficulties, in accordance with the theory of negative transfer.

## **4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

This study reveals that although English and Indonesian employ abbreviation as a common strategy for linguistic economy in modern communication, the systems governing their formation and use differ substantially at morphological, phonological, orthographic, and sociolinguistic levels. These findings demonstrate that abbreviation is not merely a mechanical process of shortening words, but a language-specific phenomenon shaped by structural constraints and cultural practices. At the level of basic function, both languages utilize similar shortening mechanisms, including acronyms, initialisms, and truncation. This similarity confirms that abbreviation serves a universal communicative need for efficiency. However,

significant contrasts emerge in how these mechanisms are realized. English exhibits a high degree of morphological and phonological flexibility. It accepts both pronounceable acronyms such as *NASA* and *UNICEF* and non-pronounceable initialisms such as *FBI* and *HTML*, which must be articulated letter by letter. The complexity of English syllable structure allows for consonant clusters and phonotactic patterns that do not necessarily resemble ordinary lexical words. Orthographically, capitalization is consistently preserved, functioning as a marker of formality, institutional authority, and professional identity, particularly in academic, technological, and scientific domains.

In contrast, Indonesian abbreviation practices are strongly constrained by phonological preferences for ease of pronunciation. Abbreviations in Indonesian tend to conform to open syllable structures and avoid complex consonant clusters, resulting in forms that resemble natural lexical items, such as *Pemilu*, *tilang*, and *Kemenkes*. As a result, the boundary between acronyms and other types of abbreviations is often blurred in actual language use, as speakers commonly label all shortened forms as acronyms without reference to formal linguistic classifications. This tendency reflects a rapid lexicalization process, whereby abbreviations are treated as independent vocabulary items rather than temporary or marked shortened forms. The findings also indicate that abbreviation productivity is closely tied to sociolinguistic context. Indonesian abbreviations are especially prevalent in bureaucratic, governmental, educational, and political settings, reflecting the administrative and institutional orientation of public discourse. English, by contrast, shows a high density of abbreviations in digital technology, science, and global culture, corresponding to its role as a dominant language in international communication and innovation. These patterns illustrate how communicative needs and social structures shape the evolution of abbreviation systems in each language.

From a contrastive linguistics perspective, these structural differences have important implications for second language acquisition. Indonesian learners of English may experience negative transfer by assuming that all English abbreviations are pronounceable as ordinary words, leading to mispronunciation of initialisms. Conversely, English speakers learning Indonesian may struggle to interpret Indonesian abbreviations, which are often morphologically opaque and do not consistently preserve initial letters. These difficulties support Lado's theory that structural differences between languages are a major source of learning problems in second language acquisition. Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of explicitly addressing abbreviation systems in language teaching, particularly in EFL contexts in Indonesia. Awareness of language-specific rules governing abbreviation formation can help learners avoid errors and misunderstandings. Beyond pedagogy, the results

are also relevant to translation and computational linguistics, where accurate interpretation and normalization of abbreviated forms require sensitivity to language-specific patterns. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that abbreviations reflect a complex interaction between linguistic structure, cultural norms, and contemporary communicative demands, rather than functioning solely as tools for word shortening.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study set out to compare the abbreviation systems of English and Indonesian from a contrastive linguistic perspective. The findings demonstrate that although both languages employ abbreviation as a strategy for linguistic efficiency, their systems differ substantially in terms of morphological flexibility, phonological constraints, and sociolinguistic orientation (Anto & Hulu, 2019). English abbreviation formation is characterized by high structural tolerance. The language allows both pronounceable acronyms and non-pronounceable initialisms, often preserving complex consonant clusters and orthographic conventions such as capitalization. These features reflect the strong role of written norms, institutional identity, and global communication practices in shaping English abbreviations. As a result, abbreviations in English do not always conform to natural pronunciation patterns but remain widely accepted due to conventional usage (Cooper et al., 2023).

In contrast, Indonesian abbreviation formation is strongly influenced by phonological considerations, particularly ease of pronunciation and conformity to open syllable structures. Indonesian abbreviations tend to be adapted into forms that resemble ordinary lexical items, leading to rapid lexicalization and frequent loss of transparency to the original source words (Dharmawan et al., 2024). Furthermore, the distinction between acronyms and other types of abbreviations is less strictly maintained in everyday Indonesian usage, indicating that social perception plays a major role in abbreviation development. From a contrastive linguistic standpoint, these differences have important implications for language learning and cross-linguistic communication. Structural mismatches between the two systems may lead to negative transfer, especially for Indonesian learners of English who may expect all abbreviations to be pronounceable. Likewise, English speakers may experience difficulty interpreting Indonesian abbreviations due to their morphophonemic restructuring (Febriasari & Rahmawati, 2020).

Overall, this study confirms that abbreviation systems are not merely technical linguistic phenomena but are deeply shaped by language structure, cultural norms, and communicative needs. A clearer understanding of these contrasts can contribute to more effective language

teaching, translation practices, and further comparative linguistic research involving abbreviation systems across languages.

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