# TRANSLATION COMPETENCE AND TRANSLATING PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM  SRIWIJAYA UNIVERSITY

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to find out the level of translation competence of the students of English Education Study Program of Sriwijaya University, to find out the strategies used by the students in translating texts from Indonesian to English and to identify the problems they encounter in translating texts. There were 36 students taken as the sample. A descriptive method was used in this study. The data were obtained by means of questionnaires, task, and interview. The findings showed that the subjects demonstrated pretextual level of translation competence. Spelling is accurate; source text is fully translated (only a few subjects did not translate it fully); text is long and strung-out because of use function words rather than lexicalizations; vocabulary is not varied; translation is structurally very close to the source text; and style is more "verby". The findings of this study showed that most subjects tried to identify the main idea of the text before beginning to translate. They tried to understand the meaning of the words from the context first. If they could not grasp the meaning of that words, they consulted monolingual dictionaries, but if still did not get the meaning, they then looked for the words in bilingual dictionaries. Some of them did it the opposite. The findings of this study showed that most subjects thought that vocabulary, sentence structure, and word choice were the most difficult problems for them when translating. Some of them got problems when translating due to their knowledge background of the text to be translated and culture involved in the text.

*Keywords: Translation, translation competence, translating problems*

Translation is an operation performed both on and in language. And until very recently, virtually all discussions of translation both in class and in print dealt primarily or exclusively with language. The ability to translate was thought of largely as an advanced form of the ability to understand or read a foreign language (Robinson, 2003:142). Even in our day, most of the best-known theorists of translation - J. C. Catford, Kornei Chukovskii, Valentin Garcia Yebra, Eugene A. Nida, Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet, Peter Newmark, Basil Hatim and Ian Mason - are linguists who think of translation as primarily or exclusively an operation performed on language (Robinson, 2003:142).

Translation is an activity comprising the interpretation of the meaning of a text in one language –the source- and in the other language-the target. Such activity must take into account a number of constraints, including context, the rules of grammar of the two languages, their writing conventions, and their idioms. Both the source language and the target one are important. Sometimes a translator will face some problems for example when a word like becak is to be translated. A becak is a three wheeled vehicle with a seat for two in the front, with the driver pedaling behind. If the translation pedicab is used, the impact is misleading, with pedi- of Latin origin and cab referring to a taxi. Clearly the equivalent tricycle is inappropriate because it refers to a child's three-wheeler. The word becak can be retained in the translation with an explanation. This is of course very different from using an Indonesian word to convey meaning when an English equivalent is readily available-say sepeda 'bicycle,' mobil 'car' and so on.

Another example found in the writer's class is "Pegawai telah menyiapkan laporan keuangan sejak minggu lalu." Here menyiapkan means menyusun since a financial report is organized not prepared to be organized. Those who do not have experiences in doing the translation will translate the sentence to be "The employee has prepared the financial report since last week." They just translate the sentence without considering the meaning received by the receptor language. A professional translator will translate the sentence to be "The employee has organized the financial report since last week." Another example is "Jari saya terluka". Here the students in my class translated the above sentence to be "My finger is wounded." They had no competence in rendering the meaning. The correct translation would be "I cut my finger." They just translated word to word.

Translation is ultimately a human activity which enables human beings to exchange ideas and thoughts regardless of the different tongues used. It is the process of changing speech or writing from one language (the Source Language (SL), the language out of which a translation is made) into another (the Target Language (TL), the language into which a translation is made), or the target-language version that results from this process (Richards, et. al., 1997: 389). In general, the purpose of translation is to reproduce various kinds of texts-including religious, literary, scientific, and philosophical texts-in another language and thus making them available to wider readers.

In other words, a translator has to analyze the sentence: to break it down into all the components that make it precisely what it is and to make judgment calls about how to render those components in the target language when doing a holistic translation of a text. His target language might have differences in grammar that confound the translation, or it might belong to a culture that is different from his culture in ways that again confound the translation. This analysis and this juggling act between grammars and cultures are part of every act of holistic translation, regardless of the languages (Napoli 2003: 30-31).

## METHOD

This research was conducted by using qualitative method. This research used the typical qualitative method known as a case study, learning much from studying just one individual, one classroom, one school, or one school district (Fraenkel & Wallen 1990: 370).

The purposes of a case study vary, depending on how much is already known about a topic, the amount of previous empirical research conducted on it, the nature of the case itself, and the philosophy of the researcher. Yin (2003) cited in Duff (2008) suggests that there are three types of case study, categorized according to their main purpose: exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory.

> An *exploratory* case study (whether based on single or multiple cases) is aimed at defining the questions and hypotheses of a subsequent (not necessarily a case) study or at determining the feasibility of the desired research procedures. A *descriptive case* study presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its context. An *explanatory* case study presents data bearing on cause-effect relationships-explaining how events happened (Yin in Duff, 2008:31-32).

This research focused on descriptive and explanatory case study.

## The Nature of Translation

Translation is rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text (Newmark, 1988:5). Translation is an activity comprising the interpretation of the meaning of a text in one language –the source- and in the other language-the target. Translation is different things for different groups of people. For people who are not translators, it is primarily a text; for people who are, it is primarily an activity. Or, as Anthony Pym (1993: 131, 149-50) cited in Robinson (2003: 6) puts it, translation is a text from the perspective of "external knowledge," but an activity (aiming at the production of a text) from the perspective of "internal knowledge." Internal knowledge means that a translator thinks and talks about translation from inside the process, knowing how it's done, possessing a practical real-world sense of the problems involved, some solutions to those problems, and the limitations on those solutions (the translator knows, for example, that no translation will ever be a perfectly reliable guide to the original). While External knowledge means that A non-translator (especially a monolingual reader in the target language who directly or indirectly pays for the translation - a client, a book-buyer) thinks and talks about translation from outside the process, not knowing how it's done but knowing, as Samuel Johnson once said of the non-carpenter, a well-made cabinet when s/he sees one (Robinson, 2003: 6).

Every translation activity has one or more specific purposes and whichever they may be, the main aim of translation is to serve as a cross-cultural bilingual communication vehicle among peoples. In the past few decades, this activity has developed because of rising international trade, increased migration, globalization, the recognition of linguistic minorities, and the expansion of the mass media and technology. For this reason, the translator plays an important role as a bilingual or multi-lingual cross-cultural transmitter of culture and truths by attempting to interpret concepts and speech in a variety of texts as faithfully and accurately as possible. Translation must take into account a number of constraints, including context, the rules of grammar of the two languages, their writing conventions, and their idioms.

## The Quality of Translation

Translation is rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author The term quality of translation is used to refer to the desirability of properties or characteristics of a translated text or content. As stated in the nature of translation above that translation is rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text (Newmark, 1988:5), meaning that the product of translation must be meaningful to the reader. Readers need translation because they do not have the access to the source text. They expect that the product of translation is easily understood. This is one of the criteria for the quality of translation (Nababan, 2008:14).

Readers need not only having a translated text easily understood but also getting the message from the source text by reading the product of translation. Translators are expected to translate the source text by conveying the meaning of the source text into the target text accurately. Nababan (2008:14) stated that the sameness of messages

between the source text and the target text must be prioritized. Gouadec (2007) sets criteria for a good translation as follows:

a) **Accurate**: the contents of the translation must be true to the facts and to the interpretation of those facts within the limits of the domain or specialist field concerned. Ideally, the translation should not contain the slightest technical, factual or semantic error. In fact, zero-defect quality is very seldom achieved, mostly because there are approximations, omissions, ambiguities, and even errors in the original. But it remains every serious translator's ideal, and accuracy, at least, must be the rule.

b) **Meaningful**: the message must be meaningful in the target language and culture even though concepts or their interpretations may vary from one culture to another. This has a number of implications:
- concepts or connotations that become meaningless in the target culture have to be deleted;
- concepts or connotations may no longer be perceptible in the target culture, simply because they were implicit in the source material and the implicit meaning fails to surface in the other culture or language;
- concepts or connotations may require additional clarification in the target culture;
- concepts or connotations may take on a different meaning, become nonsensical or even offensive in the target culture - as in the well-known examples of products whose names carry obscene, vulgar or ridiculous connotations in the target culture.

c) **Accessible**: Any person using the translation must be able to clearly understand the information and the message conveyed. For the translator, this may mean having to adapt both the contents and the register of language to the end-user's level of technical competence. Just like any other medium of communication, the translation must be readable, coherent, logical and (preferably) well written.

d) **Effective and ergonomic**: the translation must be effective both in terms of communicating a message and of making sure that the message fulfils its initial purpose (and nothing but that purpose). It must in fact fulfil both its initial purpose and any subsequent purpose(s) that its end-users or beneficiaries might consider.

e) **Compliant with** any applicable constraint in terms of:
- target communities' linguistic and cultural standards and usages
- rules and regulations: the objects, devices or processes referred to in the translation may for instance be subject to specific national laws or regulations, which the translator must take into account,
- official standards concerning terminology or technicalities,
- physical limitations: the number of characters may be limited, for instance.
- functional constraints: a translated Web site must, for instance, remain accessible, all the links must be active and the site must be easy to navigate.

f) **Compatible with** the defense of the client's or work provider's interests since the translator is, to all intents and purposes, the client's service provider cum agent cum adviser or partner. Working in the interest of the client means, as already stated,

making sure the translation achieves the desired effect (helping to convince, assist, explain, enable use, inform, prompt purchase, assuage, seduce, etc.), while avoiding any undesirable effects (causing anger or irritation on the part of the buyer confronted with incomprehensible user instructions, causing mirth where emotion would be expected, etc.).

To achieve an acceptable and effective translation, the translator must take into account:
a) the cultural context within which the message will be received and interpreted
   - the culture being national, corporate or local,
b) the end-users' value systems - failing which the translation will be rejected outright,
c) the most effective way of arguing points, presenting information, organizing contents according to the aim to be achieved - failing which the translation will not fulfill its purpose,
d) commonly accepted rhetorical and stylistic conventions in the target culture - failing which, the message will be seen as 'alien'. This may pervade the whole message or be visible in certain aspects, as for instance, when the translation fails to comply with a specific company style guide,
e) language stereotypes (i.e. standard terminology and phraseology) - failing which, the translation will be felt to have been written by an 'outsider' (because the use of the appropriate terms and phrases is seen as the hallmark of technical competence and a sign that the writer or speaker belongs to the narrow circle of 'specialists' in a given field).

More importantly, the translator must produce an efficient and cost-effective translation. The decisions involved may have little to do with 'translation' in the traditional sense. Efficiency and cost-effectiveness may, for instance mean omitting a section of the source document, summarizing thirty pages in ten lines or so, adding a section to provide information that is not present in the original document but is known by the translator to be vital for the end-user in the target culture, providing a five-page translation for a two-page source document or vice-versa, translating only such items of information as are relevant to the end-user's needs or re-organizing a whole set of documents, etc. All this, of course, requires professional competence of the highest order.

The translation must be able to be accessed by the reader easily in understanding the meaning of the source text. Although there will no be a perfect translation like what Nababan (2008:15) stated that the quality of translation is very subjective since it is measured by different people with different point of few, still it has to be easily conveyed by the reader who really depends on the translation in comprehending the source text.

**Translation Competence and Level of Translation Competence**

PACTE has found only four explicit definitions of translation competence. First, Bell (1991: 43) defines translation competence as "the knowledge and skills the translator must possess in order to carry out a translation". Second, Hurtado Albir defines it as "the ability of knowing how to translate" (1996: 48). Third,  Wilss says translation competence calls for "an interlingual supercompetence [...] based on a

comprehensive knowledge of the respective SL and TL, including the text-pragmatic dimension, and consists of the ability to integrate the two monolingual competencies on a higher level" (1982: 58) (Orozco and Albir, 2002: 376).

Fourth, PACTE research group (Orozco and Albir, 2002: 376), defines translation competence as "the underlying system of knowledge and skills needed to be able to translate." This definition is completed with four affirmations, namely that (i) translation competence is actualized in different ways in different situations, (ii) it consists basically of operative knowledge, (iii) strategies play a basic role in translation competence and (iv) as in any kind of expert knowledge, most translation competence processes are automatic.

Campbell (1998) defined three levels of translation competence as follows:

**Substandard**

First, the level is characterized by inaccurate spelling. Source text is not fully translated and target text is short; function words are often omitted so that text contains high proportion of content words, especially noun; translation is rather indirect because of efforts to cope with poor target language repertoire.

**Pretextual**

Second, the level is marked by these characteristics. Spelling is accurate; source text is fully translated; text is long and strung-out because of use of function words rather than lexicalizations; vocabulary is not varied; translation is structurally very close to the source text; style is more 'verby'.

**Textual**

Third, the level is marked by these characteristics. Spelling is accurate; source text is fully translated; text is short and syntactically dense through the use of lexicalizations; style is more nominal, and words are longer and more varied; the text is structurally more distant from the original because of grammatical shifts and indirect translation of source text words.

**Translation Problems**

Translation is not a matter of simply repeating the original text in another language but of searching for stylistically acceptable equivalence by taking the cultural context into consideration which can, of course, lead to important 'adaptations'.

It is widely accepted that translation can be viewed as problem solving: in the process of producing a translation the translator encounters problems of various sorts and uses a set of tools and resources to solve them. Possible problems can involve detecting properties of the source and target audiences, determining the extent of the translation brief, designing the structure of the translated document, etc.

However, problems that occur most frequently in translation of practically every sentence are those of choosing the right target word for rendering source word X in context Y. One type of word-choice problems occurs in translation of terminology: the translator may lack knowledge about the exact translation of term X in domain Z. Another type of problems concerns the choice of words from the general lexicon: the translator knows a word and the standard set of its translations, but cannot find a target word that is suitable for the current context. The obvious way to find a solution for the word-choice problem is by consulting dictionaries.

However, dictionary lookup may fail in both cases: a term can be missed in available dictionaries, while translation equivalents for general words suggested in the dictionary may not be usable in the target context. In the worst possible case, a dictionary can mislead the translator by listing a term or source expression with its translation, whilst the translation is NOT used in the target language in the suggested way.

Initiative plays a major role when translating from a language that says less to a language that says more; the translator needs to make good choices and adding meaning becomes an obligation rather than a risk. It is enjoyable to speculate on how to avoid making the distinctions that are, a priori, necessary in the target language and how to reduce or neutralize meanings. There is hardly ever a solution here (with the exception once again of the great 'translator's note,') and the translator is always forced to add extra meaning to the text and not always satisfactorily so opting, in the absence of a hypernym that corresponds to the general term in the source language, for a hyponym which is probably far too precise. It is interesting to note that while 'seat', for example, may be a hypernym for all terms such as 'armchair', 'chair', 'settee', and 'stool'. Every language has its richness and its gaps which are not always easy to manipulate. As Jakobson wrote in Venuti (2000:116) "Languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey".

**Semantics and Pragmatics**

Semantics and pragmatics are the two main branches of the linguistic study of meaning. Semantics is the study of the "toolkit" for meaning: knowledge encoded in the vocabulary of the language and in its patterns for building more elaborate meanings, up to the level of sentence meanings. Pragmatics is concerned with the use of these tools in meaningful communication. Pragmatics is about the interaction of semantic knowledge with our knowledge of the world, taking into account contexts of use (Griffiths, 2006:1).

Comparison between two analytical frames, the semantic and the pragmatic, has a certain complexity because pragmatics itself is usually considered to be a branch of semantics concerned with meanings in their particular context or under certain presupposed conditions. If you are dealing with meaning and there is no context to consider, then you are doing semantics (literal meaning), but if there is a context to be brought into consideration, then you are engaged in pragmatics. Pragmatics is the study of utterance meaning. Semantics is the study of sentence meaning and word meaning.

**DISCUSSIONS**

This research found out that the level of translation competence of students was pretextual; they tried to understand the main idea first before starting to translate and found the difficult words only after they could not guess their meanings from context; and their main problem was vocabulary, sentence structure, and word choices due to their lack of practice and experience. While other research entitled *Cultivating Translation Competence: Teaching and Testing* done by Haiyan in 2006 found out that Translation Testing (TTS) should be regarded as an effective and indispensable method in training student translators. Instructors might regularly use TTS to help diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses, to assess their progress, and to assist in evaluating

their achievements. In addition, TTS can also be frequently used as a source of information in evaluating the effectiveness of different approaches to Translation Teaching (TT). Another study done by Pamela Faber (1998) on *Translation Competence and Language Awareness* found out that a student with a good command of two languages often begin translation studies with an erroneous concept of the translation process and what it involves. This is partly due to naive ideas about meaning and language. One of the most important tasks for the teacher is to foster awareness in students of how language works through a wide variety of activities which ultimately lead them to understand translation better.

In addition, this research has the similarity with the first other research saying that experience makes the translation better, this research found out that the subjects made errors in translation due to their lack of experience while the first other research trained the subjects to foster their ability in translation. This research found out that vocabulary, sentence structure, and word choices were the main problems when translating while the second other research presented that though a student with a good command of two languages often begin translation studies with an erroneous concept of the translation process and what it involves due to lack of experience. In other words, mastering two languages is not enough without practicing doing translation work.

## CONCLUSIONS

Following the analysis of the results for each of the instruments utilized in this study, a conclusion need to be drawn about the success of the study. Based on the findings and the interpretation of this study, it can be concluded as follows:

First, the results of the translation task show that the subjects demonstrated pretextual level of translation competence. Spelling is accurate; source text is fully translated (only a few subjects did not translate it fully); text is long and strung-out because of use function words rather than lexicalizations; vocabulary is not varied; translation is structurally very close to the source text; and style is more "verby". In particular, the results showed that most of the subjects were able to complete the translation in comprehensible English. Though they made errors in some points, still their translation works could be comprehended easily. Almost all subjects did well on Text Length (TL), Token Misspelt (TM), Word Shifted (WS), More Verbs (MV), and Content/Function Words (CF). Some subjects did well on Average Word Length (AWL) and Word Omitted (WO). The most common errors the subjects made were Lexical Variety Ratio (LVR) and Word Directly Translated (WDT). However, despite the numerous errors, the majority of the subjects were able to complete the translation in comprehensible English.

Second, most subjects tried to identify the main idea of the text before beginning to translate. They tried to understand the meaning of the words from the context first. If they could not grasp the meaning of those words, they consulted monolingual dictionaries, but if they still didn't get the meaning, they then looked for the words in bilingual dictionaries. Some of them did it the opposite. When asked which dictionary they preferred to use, almost all subjects answered bilingual dictionaries.

Finally, most subjects thought that vocabulary, sentence structure, and word choice were the most difficult problems for them when translating. Some of them got problems when translating due to their knowledge background of the text to be

translated and culture involved in the text. The subjects thought differently. The level of difficulty of the text was mainly based on their own view on the text. Their answers ranged from 2 to 8 but it was interesting to know that those who translated quite well thought the text was difficult giving 7 or 8 for the level of difficulty, while those who did not thought the text was easy giving 2 to 3 for the level of difficulty.

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