Strategies in Solving Equivalent-related Problems in Translation: Implications to Cross-cultural Understanding

Rusdi Noor Rosa*

English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: Rusdi Noor Rosa, E-mail: rUSDinoorrosa@fbs.unp.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Translation is intended to reproduce a text in another different language. The term “reproduce” implies that a translated text or target text (TT) should be equivalent in meaning with its source text (ST); in other words, a TT is not a newly created text. Translation is needed to accommodate people’s limited access to a variety of information due to failure to understand a foreign language. Therefore, accurate translation is required to avoid any possible misleading information given to target language (TL) readers. Accuracy in translation is a prolonged debate among translation scholars since accuracy is both subjective (Andersen, 1998; Almutairi, 2018) and relative (Mossop, 2001; Sofyan & Tarigan, 2019). Nevertheless, accuracy is not an unsolved problem in translation. Using the idea of nothing absolute in translation (Newmark, 1988), accuracy can be achieved under certain conditions. To reveal such conditions, a number of studies on translation accuracy have been conducted. Vossoughi and Ghelichkhani (1996) found the applicable role of componential analysis to achieve translation accuracy. In addition, componential analysis is helpful to bridge the gap for culture differences (Chen-Chen & Jin-Zhu, 2016). In addition to human translation, other studies have also been conducted to examine the accuracy of translation performed by translation machines (Baldwin & Tanaka, 2001; Aiken et al., 2009; Aiken & Baldwin, 2011). They found that, despite their small number of weaknesses, translation machines are helpful in achieving accuracy in translation.

The notion of accuracy discussed in the previous paragraph is basically related to the reproduction of a text which is equivalent in meaning with its ST. Finding meaning equivalence is considered as the real definition of translation, so studying equivalence problems in translation should always be regarded useful. Besides, equivalence is a central problem encountered by translators during the translation process (Catford, 1965; Panou, 2013). Moreover, Alfaori (2017) argues that producing non-equivalents in translation is inappropriate and distorts or blurs the meaning. The notion of equivalence has attracted many researchers to conduct studies on it. Most of studies were conducted to redefine the term equivalence in translation (e.g. Leonardi, 2000; Krein-Kuhle, 2003; Yinhuu, 2011). Yinhuu (2011) who studied features and necessity of equivalence in translation, for example, found that equivalence in translation cannot be interpreted as identity in terms of its scientific sense because there are no words that have exactly the same meaning in one language. This means that studying equivalence should be established on different levels and in different aspects. In addition to redefining the concept of equivalence, other studies also investigate the issue of equivalence and non-equivalence in translation (e.g.

ABSTRACT

Any translation practice is intended to produce a text which is equivalent in meaning with its source text. However, to arrive at such equivalence is not an easy task due to a number of differences between the source language and the target language. Therefore, finding the right equivalence is a problem often encountered by translators, especially student translators. Suggested by such problem, a study on equivalence problems and possible strategies to solve the problems is obviously necessary. This article aims at finding out the problems of equivalence encountered and the strategies to solve such problems applied by student translators in translating a historical recount text. This is a descriptive study taking 10 student translators as the participants who were asked to translate a historical recount text from English into bahasa Indonesia. The data were collected using Translog that recorded all the translation process done by the student translators. The results of the study were: (i) the student translators encountered five equivalence problems while translating a historical recount text from English into bahasa Indonesia; and (ii) to solve such problems, they applied six strategies (naturalization, borrowing, description, deletion, addition and generalization). The findings imply that the problems were motivated by the student translators’ lack of cultural understanding of the source language.
Kashgary, 2010; Moafi, 2015; Andreici, 2016). Other studies were conducted to investigate the equivalence in TT. Herlam-bang (2017) who analyzed the equivalence of the translated subtitle of Intel advertisements, for example, found that the TT was equivalent in meaning with its ST.

A number of studies have been conducted to find out strategies best applicable to solve such equivalence-related problems. Rezaei and Kuhi (2014) conducted a study on translation strategies used in translating two tourist guidebooks and found foreignization as the most common strategy. Furthermore, Obeidat (2015), who studied translation strategies in the English-Arabic e-brochures of baby care products, found transference, transliteration, literal translation and omission as the translation strategies frequently used. Other researchers focused their translation strategies-related studies on preaches or speeches (Alajlan, 2016), legal texts (Buma, 2016; Stepanova, 2017), scientific texts (Zheng, 2017; Ashuja’a et al., 2019), etc. However, the term “strategy” used in their studies needs to be revisited since the focus of their studies was on the product of translation. Meanwhile, the use of the term “strategy” refers to mechanism used by translators in solving translation problems during translation process (Hurtado, 2001). In other words, strategy is the terminology related exclusively to translation process.

Considering the gap left (paying less attention to the problem encountered by translators in achieving equivalence) and the slightly misconception of the term “strategy” in those previous studies, this study takes equivalence problems and translation strategies to such problems as the issue that needs to be investigated. In particular, this study aims at finding out equivalence problems encountered and translation strategies used by student translators in translating a recount text from English into bahasa Indonesia. The choice of specific text genre as the object of investigation is motivated by the research conducted by Krein-Kuhle (2003). Besides, the choice of student translators as the participants is mainly motivated by previous studies suggesting that student translators have their own unique translation characteristics different from professional translators (Sofyan & Rosa, 2015; Rosa et al., 2018).

Research Questions
This research was conducted to answer the two research questions:
1. What are the equivalence problems encountered by student translators in translating a recount text from English into bahasa Indonesia?
2. What are the translation strategies used by student translators to solve the equivalence problems in translating a recount text from English into bahasa Indonesia?

Equivalent-related Problems
In every translation process, a translator certainly faces problems that all boil down to choosing the right equivalent in the TT. Amina (2010) argues that translating verbal phrases is a problem often found in the translation process from English into Arabic. Furthermore, she believes that the problem is not only caused by the translator’s lack of understanding of the meaning of English verbal phrases, but also by the difficulty of reproducing these verbal phrases into Arabic.

The next problem relates to the translation of neologisms (Moghadas & Sharififar, 2014; Kolev, 2016; Fumani & Abdollahpour, 2017). As newly formed words, neologisms present certain difficulties for translators to find their right equivalent in the TL because their meaning is often not found in general dictionaries (both printed and electronic dictionaries), so translators must use other sources that are relevant to the related neologisms to gain an understanding of their meaning, or use certain proper strategies.

Furthermore, Aljubayri (2016) summarizes four difficulties or problems often encountered in the translation process: (i) cultural problems, (ii) semantic content problems, (iii) problems of translating expressions containing idioms, and (iv) grammatical problems. He concluded that the problems are mainly because translation involves two different languages which certainly have different cultures and grammatical rules. Cultural problems in translation have also been expressed by de Mendoza (2008), who believes that translating emotion-related vocabulary is heavily influenced by the TL culture, and by Brazill (2016), who argues that cultural and historical terms often present difficulties to translators in determining their right equivalents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Equivalence-related Problems
The results of data analysis found several equivalence-related problems in the translation of student translators. The first
The SL interference in (2) is found in the use of conjunction “bagaimanapun juga” (as the equivalent of “however”) that interrupts the sentence in the TT. In the TL, such contrast conjunction is used only in the beginning of a sentence or a clause, and it is never used to interrupt the elements of a sentence or a clause. Therefore, it is easily identified that the use of contrast conjunction “bagaimanapun juga” that interrupts the TT sentence in (2) is influenced by the SL structure.

The second equivalence problem found in the translation of the student translators is SL culture. Language is so cultural, and culture influences its structure. Consequently, translators’ insufficient knowledge of the SL structure affects the equivalence chosen in their translation. One of the main SL structure problems encountered by the student translators is a phrase structure, particularly in defining the modifier(s) in a phrase. Study the translation of the phrase in (3).

The ST in (3) is a noun phrase (NP) composed of “local” (adjective) as the modifier and the remaining is the core. The translation problem arises in identifying which elements are modified by the modifier “local” because the core is composed of another NP “Quechua speaking resident”. In the SL structure, the core of NP composed of several nouns is the noun appearing in the final position; therefore, the core should be “resident”. However, the TT indicates that the word “local” modifies “Quechua”, one of the local languages in Peru. The student translator’s insufficient knowledge of the modifier and the core of the phrase makes the TT in (3) fail to represent the meaning contained in the ST; in other words, the TT is not the right equivalent of the ST. Such failure certainly results in inaccurate translation.

In addition, the equivalence problem related to SL culture is found in translating the phrase as in (4).

The translation problem shown in (4) occurs in translating the ST word “spelled”. This problem is caused by the different culture of the TL and SL. The TL is a phonic language, while the SL is not (see Khalilzadeh, 2014); therefore, spelling is not well recognized in the TL culture. The use of ST word “disebut” as the equivalent of the ST word “spelled”
is not precise since “disebut” is related to “pronunciation”, while the ST original meaning is related to “orthography”.

The third equivalence problem found in the translation of the student translators is the improper use of borrowing technique. Although borrowing is one of the translation techniques mentioned in a number of studies (e.g. Newmark, 1988; Baker, 1992; Molina & Hurtado, 2002; D’Hulst, 2010; Raesa Rm & Rosa, 2020), it should be used when there is no established equivalence available in the TL. Study the example of incorrect borrowing in (5).

(5) ST: It is perched above the Urubamba River valley in a narrow saddle between two sharp peaks

TT: Machu Picchu terletak di atas lembah Sungai Urubamba di sadel yang sempit antara dua puncak yang tajam

Back Translation: Machu Picchu is located above the Urubamba River valley in a narrow saddle between two sharp peaks

The incorrect use of a borrowing technique in the translation in (5) is indicated by the underlined words. The borrowing was done by naturalizing the ST word “saddle” into “sadel”, the acceptable SL spelling. Even though the word “sadel” is used in the TL, its meaning does not represent the meaning of “saddle” in the ST. According to the Monolingual Indonesian Dictionary, “sadel” means a seat on horse or on a bicycle, while the meaning of “saddle” in the ST is a space. So, the use of “sadel” in the context of translation in (5) indicates the use of incorrect equivalence.

The other equivalence problem related to the incorrect use of borrowing technique found in the translation of the student translators is shown in (6).

(6) ST: … which were sponsored by Yale University and the National Geographic Society

TT: … yang disponsor oleh Universitas Yale dan National Geographic Society

Back Translation: … which were sponsored by Yale University and the National Geographic Society

The problem of equivalence occurs when the student translator decided to borrow the ST phrase “National Geographic Society” in the TT. As the initial letters of each of the words are capitalized, the student translator simply regards it as the proper name, which is usually unchangeable in translation. However, it is not a proper name as it is the name of organization which is usually translated into certain target languages. In the context of bahasa Indonesia as the TL, the right and widely used equivalent for such organization is “masyarakat geografi nasional”.

The fourth equivalence problem in the translation of the student translators is related to meaning omission as in (7).

(7) ST: … however, that interpretation is no longer widely accepted.

TT: … namun, interpretasi itu tidak diterima secara luas.

Back Translation: … however, that interpretation is not widely accepted.

Meaning omission in the translation in (7) shows that the TT is not equivalent in meaning with the ST. The student translator decides to delete the meaning carried out by the ST word “longer” in the TT, and such omission certainly leads to changes in the original meaning contained in the ST. The TT in (7) saying that “the interpretation is not widely accepted” means that the interpretation has never been widely accepted. Meanwhile, the ST originally means that the interpretation used to be accepted, but it is not accepted anymore nowadays. Omission is only allowed when the original meaning is comprehensively conveyed in the TT.

The omission-related equivalence problem found in the translation of the student translators can also be seen in (8).

(8) ST: One of the few major pre-Columbian ruins found nearly intact, Machu Picchu was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1983.


Back Translation: As the pre-Columbian ruins were found almost intact, Machu Picchu was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1983.

The ST in (8) means that Machu Picchu is one of the few major pre-Columbian ruins found nearly intact; however, the TT means that Machu Picchu is the only major pre-Columbian ruin, showing that the meaning contained in the ST is partially omitted in the TT. Such omission influences the TL readers’ understanding of the pre-Columbian ruins found nearly intact.

The fifth equivalence problem is lack of TL competence. A good translator must have good competence in both the SL and the TL. As the student translators are Indonesian students, the TL competence in this context refers to the language competence in bahasa Indonesia. In translation, competence as the person’s knowledge of his/her language (Chomsky, 1965) influences the use of the linguistic code of a language (Newby, 2011) in the TT. In other words, the translators’ competence of the TL is reflected in their TT. The translation in (9) presents the student translator’s lack of TL competence.

(9) ST: The dwellings at Machu Picchu were probably built and occupied from the mid-15th to the early or mid-16th century.

TT: Rumah di Machu Picchu mungkin dibangun dan ditempati dari pertengahan abad 15
Strategies in Solving Equivalence-related Problems

In order to solve the equivalence-related problems elaborated above, the student translators applied various strategies which are summarized in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Strategies in solving equivalence-related problems

Figure 1 shows that six translation strategies – naturalization, description, generalization, borrowing, deletion and addition were used by the student translators in solving the equivalence-related problems. In addition, the results presented in Figure 1 also indicate that the six strategies used by the student translators in solving the equivalence finding-related problems are helpful for differently specific equivalence problems. For example, one of the equivalence problems solved by naturalization strategy is improper use of borrowing technique as shown in (10).

(10) ST : However, Machu Picchu’s existence was not widely known in the West until it was “discovered” in 1911 by the Yale University professor Hiram Bingham.

Back Translation : Namun, eksistensi Machu Picchu tidak diketahui secara luas di barat sehingga ini telah ditemukan pada 1911 oleh profesor Hiram Bingham dari Universitas Yale.

The improper use of borrowing technique occurs in the use of the word “eksistensi” as the equivalent of the ST word “existence”. Although the word “eksistensi” has been used extensively in many Indonesian texts, its use in the context of translation in Data 10 is incorrect because bahasa Indonesia has an established equivalent for the word that fits the context of the translation above. Such equivalence problem is solved by using a naturalization strategy, i.e. by looking for the common equivalent appropriately used in such con-
The naturalization strategy performed by one of the student translators can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2 is the linear view of translation process in Translog. It can be seen that the word “eksistensi” is the diction used in the student translator’s first draft. The log records that the first diction is substituted with another word “keberadaan”, which is the established equivalent of the ST word “existence”.

The other example is the use of addition strategy in translating the ST in (11).

(11) ST : One of the few major pre-Columbian ruins found nearly intact, Machu Picchu was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1983.

TT (1st Draft) : Situs ini merupakan satu dari penemuan utama reruntuhan pra-Colombia yang ditemukan dalam keadaan utuh, Machu Picchu ditetapkan sebagai warisan dunia UNESCO pada tahun 1983.

TT (Final Draft) : Karena situs ini merupakan salah satu dari penemuan utama reruntuhan pra-Colombia yang ditemukan dalam keadaan utuh, Machu Picchu ditetapkan sebagai warisan dunia UNESCO pada tahun 1983.

Back Translation : As one of the few major pre-Columbian ruins found nearly intact, Machu Picchu was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1983.

There are two instances of SL interference in the TT in (11) which are both solved by using addition strategy. At the first draft, the TT did not have any conjunction following the ST style; however at the final draft, the student translator decided to add conjunction “karena” due to the cause-effect meaning conveyed in the ST. The second addition strategy is applied by adding the word “salah” indicated by the red arrow.

As shown in Figure 3, in the first draft, the TT phrase in (11) “One of the few major pre-Columbian ruins found” was translated literally following the ST structure and style “satu dari penemuan utama reruntuhan pra-Colombia”. Considering the phrase style is not common in the TL, the student translator decided to add the word “salah” indicated by the red arrow.

The results of the study concerning the equivalence problems and the choice of strategies to solve them support the important role of culture in translation as Akbari (2013) argues that a good translator should be familiar with the culture, customs, and social settings of the source and target language speakers. Language is the product of human’s thoughts, and so is culture; therefore, the structure and the style of language are influenced by culture. This confirms Hatim and Mason’s (1990) statement that socio-cultural context in translating a text is probably a more important variable than its genre.

In addition, the results of this study imply that translation helps in cross-cultural understanding; in other words, translation serves as the bridge to cross-cultural communication. The historical recount text translated by student translators in this study helps them understand the local culture of several indigenous people in Peru, where Machu Picchu is located. Translation makes it possible for every nation’s local culture to be known by people around the world.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it is concluded that SL interference, SL culture, improper use of borrowing technique, meaning omission and insufficient TL competence are the equivalence-related problems encountered by student translators in translating a historical recount text from English into bahasa Indonesia. SL interference is obviously seen in the student translators’ TT that tends to follow the SL style and structure; SL culture is caused by the student translators’ insufficient knowledge of the SL structure and the different characteristics of the SL and TL; improper use of borrowing technique is caused by the issue of non-equivalent terms; meaning omission is mainly due to improper generalization; and insufficient TL competence is mainly caused by the student translators’ TL proficiency and inability to utilize online resources. To solve those equivalence-related problems, six strategies are used: naturalization, borrowing, description, deletion, addition and generalization. As certain strategies work better for certain equivalence problem, translators should be able to choose the right strategy for the right equivalence problem.
Furthermore, the results of the study give contribution to the role of translation as the bridge to facilitate cross-cultural communication. Translation allows people to communicate their local culture to other people from different culture. Therefore, studies on translation communicating local cultures are truly recommended.

REFERENCES


