

STUDENTS' COMMON ERRORS IN TRANSLATION

Issy Yuliasri
issy.yuliasri@gmail.com
Universitas Negeri Semarang

Abstract

Translating is a complicated task as it involves two different languages with two different systems. To produce a good translation product a translator should have good translation competence. Translation competence consists of several sub-competencies, among which is the linguistic mastery of the two languages. The more a translator is linguistically qualified, the better the translation is expected. So, it is assumed that in the case of students of a foreign language, some linguistic errors would normally be found in their translation from the mother tongue as the source language to the foreign language as the target language, which may affect the quality of their translation. This paper presents the common linguistic errors EFL students make in translating from their mother tongue to a foreign language, in this case from Indonesian to English. The data were taken from the Indonesian-English Translation course at the English Department of Universitas Negeri Semarang. The data show that none of the students' translation works are linguistically error free. The paper will describe the common linguistic errors the students make, which can serve as feedback for better teaching of Translation.

Keywords - *Translation competence, common linguistic errors, Indonesian-English translation*

Introduction

Translating is not an easy task; it requires a complex set of competence. As PACTE suggests, a translator should have translation competence (TC) to successfully accomplish his/her translating task. TC is referred to as "the underlying knowledge system needed to translate" which consists of 5 sub-competencies and psycho-physiological components (PACTE 2003). Among the sub-competencies is the bilingual sub-competence which is made up of pragmatic, socio-linguistic, textual and lexical-grammatical knowledge in each language. This means that a translator must have good mastery the two languages involved. Thus, in translating from English to Indonesian and vice versa a translator must master both English and Indonesian.

In the case of translating from Indonesian to English, which is a foreign language in Indonesia, students of English as a foreign language usually find difficulties because they have to produce English writing which requires good mastery of English, including

grammar. Based on past experience in teaching translation in an EFL context, it is generally assumed that Indonesian-English translation is more difficult than English-Indonesian translation. Which such an assumption this research was therefore conducted to find out students common errors in translating from Indonesian to English, focusing on linguistic errors.

Some underlying theories of translation are considered. As has been widely known, the linguistic approaches of translation see translation as "the replacement of textbook material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language (TL)" (Catford in Nord 2001: 7) and that it "consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the sourced-language message (Nida and Taber in Nord 2001: 7). Such approaches suggest that equivalence is a key in translating activity.

Gaining equivalence in translation, however, is not an easy task because it involves two languages each of which "articulates or

organizes the world differently” (Culler in Baker, 1992: 10). There are cases of lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic non-equivalent (Baker, 1992) that cause problems in translation. Baker (1992: 87-118) identifies that problems of lexical non-equivalence occur at word level and above word level, while grammatical problems include number, gender, person, tense and aspect, and voice. In dealing with these problems, strategies are used by translators to achieve good quality translation. In the case of student translator, however, such strategies are not usually explored not only due to their lack of experience in translating but also due to their insufficient mastery of the (foreign) language.

Toury as cited in Hatim and Munday (2004: 7) proposes that there are two general “laws” of translation: (1) the law of growing standardization – that target texts (TTs) generally display less linguistic variations than source texts (STs), and (2) the law of interference – that common ST lexical and syntactic patterns tend to be copied, creating unusual patterns in the TT. The “laws” suggest that translated language has specific characteristic that are different from non-translated language. Such characteristics are known as universals of translation.

Research Methodology

This small-scale research used descriptive approach, using content analysis technique. The research was done using the Indonesian-English Translation Course at the English Department of Unnes (State University of Semarang). Twenty-six fifth semester students participated in the research. They were asked to translate an Indonesian text about early childhood education. Student’s translated texts were then compared with the original text to analyze the linguistic errors lexically and grammatically. The errors were then categorized into several lexical and grammatical items. Below is the text used in the research:

Pendidikan anak usia dini (PAUD) adalah jenjang pendidikan sebelum jenjang pendidikan dasar yang merupakan suatu upaya pembinaan yang ditujukan bagi anak sejak lahir sampai dengan usia enam tahun yang dilakukan melalui pemberian rangsangan pendidikan untuk membantu pertumbuhan dan perkembangan jasmani dan rohani agar anak memiliki kesiapan dalam memasuki pendidikan lebih lanjut, yang diselenggarakan pada jalur formal, nonformal, dan informal.

Pendidikan anak usia dini merupakan salah satu penyelenggaraan pendidikan yang menitikberatkan pada peletakan dasar kearah pertumbuhan dan 5 perkembangan, yaitu: perkembangan moral dan agama, perkembangan fisik (koordinasi motorik halus dan kasar), kecerdasan/kognitif (daya pikir, daya cipta), sosio emosional (ssikap dan emosi) bahasa dan komunikasi, sesuai dengan keunikan dan tahap-tahap perkembangan sesuai kelompok usia yang dilalui oleh anak usia dini seperti yang tercantum dalam Permendiknas no 58 tahun 2009.

Ada dua tujuan diselenggarakannya pendidikan anak usia dini yaitu:

- 1. Tujuan utama: untuk membentuk anak Indonesia ang berkualitas, yaitu anak yang tumbuh dan berkembang sesuai dengan tingkat perkembangannya sehingga memiliki kesiapan yang optimal di dalam memasuki pendidikan dasar serta mengarungi kehidupan di masa dewasa.*
- 2. Tujuan penyerta: untuk membantu menyiapkan anak mencapai kesiapan belajar (akademik) di sekolah, sehingga dapat mengurangi usia putus sekolah dan mampu bersaing secara sehat di jenjang pendidikan berikutnya.*

Rentang anak usia dini menurut Pasal 28 UU Sisdiknas NO.20/2003 ayat 1 adalah 0-6 tahun. sementara menurut kajian rumpun

keilmuan PAUD dan penyelenggaraannya di beberapa negara, PAUD dilaksanakan sejak usia 0-8 tahun (masa emas).

(Source:

https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pendidikan_anak_usia_dini)

Findings and Discussion

The research findings reveal that students had problems with vocabulary as well as grammar. None of the students' translated texts were error-free. The common errors they made in their translated texts include: diction, including technical terms, noun phrase, word class, gerund after preposition, number (singular/plural), collocation, parallelism, subject-verb agreement, wh-clause, double predicate (run-on), voice (active/passive), and fragment (no predicate).

Examples of the errors are given below:

1) Technical Terms

There are some technical terms used in the text. One of them, which is the key term in the text, is *Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini* (Early Childhood Education). Only around 38% of the students translated the term correctly. Others used the following terms instead: primary education, pre-school, pre-school education, pre-primary education, and education for early age child. Although the used terms are comprehensible, such terms are not the commonly used term.

Another technical term that was commonly mistranslated is *koordinasi motorik halus dan kasar* (fine and gross motor coordination). Only 34% of the students translated the phrase correctly. Mistranslations are: soft motoric and rough coordination, coordination of delicate and coarse motor, the coordination between smooth motoric and rough motoric, soft and coarse motor coordination, sensitive and rough motoric coordination, fine and hard motor coordination, soft and hard skill, coordination and smooth and hard

motoric, coordination of smooth motoric and rude motoric, soft skill and hard skill coordination, synchronizing soft and coarse skills, subtle and rough motor coordination and coordination of delicate and crude motor.

Another specific term used in the text is *Permendiknas* (National Education Ministerial Regulation). Most students 73% used borrowing technique, using the word as it is (*Permendiknas*). Others used the term ministerial regulation (19%), and the rest used Ministerial Regulation, which is a misspelled term. The choice of borrowing technique in this context, without any additional note or description, will affect the readability of the translation if the text is to be read by non-Indonesian readers.

2) Noun Phrase

Compared to English, Indonesian has different construction of noun phrase. While English has Modifier-Head or Head-of-Modifier construction, Indonesian has the Head-Modifier pattern. It is not surprising that among the common errors students made was the noun phrase. For example, the phrase *pertumbuhan dan perkembangan jasmani dan rohani* (physical and spiritual growth and development) were correctly translated into 'physical and spiritual growth and development' by only 2 students (7.6%). Other translations are: the growth and development of (the) physical and spiritual (38.4%), the growth and expansion of physical and spiritual (7.6%), physical and spiritual growth and development (7.6%), growth and development physical and spiritual (7.6%), growing and developing the children's physical and spiritual aspect (7.6%), the growing and the development of physical and spiritual, the development of physical and spiritual, grow and developing physical and spiritual, growth

and physical and spiritual development, growth and develop their physical and spiritual, the physical and spiritual development and growth.

The Indonesian phrase *pertumbuhan dan perkembangan jasmani dan rohani* consists of *pertumbuhan dan perkembangan* (growth and development) as the head and *jasmani dan rohani* (physical and spiritual) as the modifier. From all the translations it can be seen that students were aware of the fact that *jasmani dan rohani* (physical and spiritual) modify both *pertumbuhan dan perkembangan* (growth and development). However, when expressing in English most students took the Head-of-Modifier English pattern but with incorrect word class of the modifiers such as in ‘the growth and development of (the) physical and spiritual’, ‘the growth and expansion of physical and spiritual’, ‘the growing and the development of physical and spiritual’. This is because in Indonesian the words *jasmani* (physical or physical being) and *rohani* (spiritual or spiritual being) can serve as noun and adjective without any change of forms, and students used the direct translation of these words in adjective forms ‘physical’ and ‘spiritual’, which should not be put in the Head-of-Modifier pattern.

Some students also made wrong choice of word (diction), for example when translating the word *perkembangan* (development) they chose the word ‘expansion’; they also chose ‘growing’ instead of ‘growth’ for the word *pertumbuhan* (growth).

It is interesting to see that some students transposed the phrase, which shows their exploration of varied translation technique, although with occurring problem of number (plurality) and parallelism. The transposed phrases are:

growing and developing the children’s physical and spiritual aspect (the word ‘aspect’ should be in plural form), grow and developing physical and spiritual (parallelism problem with the words ‘grow’ and ‘developing’).

Interference of the source language form occurs in the phrase ‘growth and development physical and spiritual’ which uses the Indonesian Head-Modifier pattern with ‘growth and development’ being the head and ‘physical and spiritual’ being the modifier. This transferred Indonesian structure of noun phrase causes unreadable and meaningless English phrase.

3) Other Grammatical Errors

Other grammatical errors students commonly made include word class, gerund after preposition, collocation, subject-verb agreement, wh-clause, double predicate (run-on), voice (active/passive), and fragment (no predicate).

An example of error in word class is given in the phrase ‘to help the children *preparation*’ instead of ‘to help the children *prepare*’.

Students also frequently failed to use gerund after preposition such as in ‘through give the education’, ‘the power of create...’, ‘in achieve learning’, etc.

Collocation also seems to be a problem, such as in ‘same with’, which is the direct transfer or word for word translation of ‘*sama dengan*’, instead of the natural ‘same as’.

Subject-verb agreement is among the common errors, such as in ‘the delivery of education which focus on ...’, ‘one kind of education implementation which emphasize...’, ‘primary education which constitute...’, ‘education that

emphasize...’, ‘education system that give...’, etc.

Students also frequently used incorrect wh-word in their wh-clause, such as in ‘the children which grow and develop’, ‘children which are newborn until six years old’, etc.

Run-ons with double predicates also occur, such as in ‘early childhood education is addressed for children starts from the newly born to six years old’. On the other hand, students also made fragments or incomplete ‘sentences’ without predicate such as in ‘expansion stages that appropriate with the group age as included in the ministerial regulation’.

Lastly, error in voice (active-passive form) is also commonly shared such as in ‘further education which held in formal sector’, ‘primary education which held before elementary education’, ‘in some countries early childhood education implemented since 0-8 years old’, etc.

Conclusion

Common linguistic errors in students’ Indonesian-English translations have been found and discussed, which include diction, including technical terms, noun phrase, word class, gerund after preposition, number (singular/plural), collocation, parallelism, subject-verb agreement, wh-clause, double predicate (run-on), voice (active/passive), and fragment (no predicate). It is therefore recommended that such linguistic items are highlighted in the teaching of grammar as the

pre-requisite of the translation course and strengthened in the translation practice itself.

Biodata of Author:

Issy Yuliasri has been a lecturer at Universitas Negeri Semarang (Unnes) since 1990. Her research interests cover Translation and ELT. She has contributed in the writing of “Alice in a World of Wonderlands: the Translations of Lewis Carroll’s Masterpiece” published by Oak Knoll Press in cooperation with The Lewis Carroll Society of North America, New Castle (2015).

References

- Albir, A.H. 2005. “Investigating Translation Competence: Conceptual and Methodological Issues” in *Meta: journal des traducteurs/ Meta: Translators' Journal* Volume 50, number 2, April 2005, p. 609-619. <https://www.erudit.org/revue/meta/2005/v50/n2/011004ar.html>
- Baker, M. 1992. *In other Words: A course book in Translation*. London and New York: Routledge Publisher
- Hatim, B and Jeremy Munday. 2006. *Translation: An Advanced Resource Book*. London and New York: Routledge Publisher
- Nord, C. 2001. *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist approaches explained*. Manchester UK and Northampton MA: St. Jerome Publishing
- Pendidikan anak usia dini https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pendidikan_anak_usia_dini