

Strategies Used by EFL Students in Translating English into Indonesian: A Review of Translation Practices and Challenges

Xaveltince Oagay

English Education Department of STKIP Kristen Wamena, Papua Pegunungan, Indonesia

Email: xaveltinceoagay@gmail.com (korespondensi)

ABSTRAK

Translation is an important part of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It helps students transfer meaning from English into Indonesian accurately. This study aimed to investigate the translation strategies used by EFL students when translating English texts into Indonesian. The study used a qualitative descriptive research design. The participants were nine EFL students who were taking the Translation I course at STKIP Kristen Wamena. The data were collected through a translation task and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. The findings showed that literal translation was the strategy most often used by the students. They chose this strategy because they believed it was the easiest way to keep the original meaning of the source text. However, the students also had difficulties translating idioms, culture-specific expressions, and complex grammatical structures. These findings show that literal translation alone cannot always produce natural and accurate translations. Therefore, this study concludes that although literal translation is useful for beginner translators, EFL students should learn and practice different translation strategies to improve the quality of their English–Indonesian translations.

Keyword: EFL students, English-Indonesian translation, translation strategies, literal translation, qualitative descriptive study

INTRODUCTION

Translation is an important skill for students who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It helps them understand and communicate information between English and Indonesian. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language. Because of this, students have limited opportunities to use English in their daily lives. Translation helps students understand English texts and express the same ideas naturally in Indonesian. Students often translate textbooks, journal articles, news reports, stories, and classroom materials. These activities improve reading comprehension and support academic learning. Through translation, students also learn new vocabulary, grammar, sentence structures, and cultural expressions.

Today, English is an international language used in education, science, business, technology, and communication. Many books, journals, and scientific publications are written in English. Therefore, Indonesian university students need to understand English texts and translate them accurately into Indonesian. However, translation is not just changing English words into Indonesian words. A good translation transfers the meaning of the original text without changing the writer's intention. Translators must understand the context, the purpose of the text, and the culture of both languages before translating.

According to Nida and Taber (1982), translation is the process of finding the closest natural equivalent of the source language message in the target language while considering meaning and style. This means that translators should focus on meaning rather than translating word by word. Newmark (1988) also states that a good translation should be accurate, natural,

and acceptable to readers. Therefore, translators often change sentence structures, vocabulary, and cultural expressions so that the translation is easy to understand.

Translators use different strategies to solve translation problems. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) divide translation strategies into two groups: direct translation and oblique translation. Direct translation includes borrowing, calque, and literal translation. Oblique translation includes transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. Molina and Albir (2002) explain that translation techniques are practical methods used to create equivalent meanings between the source and target languages. These techniques help translators deal with vocabulary, grammar, and cultural differences that cannot be solved by literal translation.

For Indonesian EFL students, translation is also an effective learning strategy. By translating English texts into Indonesian, students compare the grammar of both languages, understand differences in vocabulary, and learn English expressions. Translation also encourages students to think carefully before choosing the best Indonesian words. Instead of translating every word directly, students should understand the context, identify the purpose of the text, and produce a natural translation that gives the same meaning as the original.

Although translation is important, many Indonesian EFL students still face difficulties. One common problem is using literal translation too often. Students sometimes translate each word without considering the context. As a result, the Indonesian translation sounds awkward or incorrect. This problem often appears when translating idioms, phrasal verbs, collocations, metaphors, and cultural expressions. For example, the English idiom *break the ice* should not be translated literally as *memecahkan es*. Its correct meaning is *mencairkan suasana*. This example shows that translators must understand the meaning of an expression, not only the individual words.

Another problem is limited vocabulary. Students often find unfamiliar academic words and technical terms. Because of this, they depend on bilingual dictionaries or machine translation tools. Although machine translation has improved, it cannot always understand context, hidden meanings, or cultural references. As a result, the translations may be grammatically correct but still sound unnatural in Indonesian. Therefore, students need good language knowledge and translation skills to check and improve machine-generated translations.

Grammar differences between English and Indonesian also make translation difficult. English uses tenses, passive forms, complex noun phrases, and relative clauses that are different from Indonesian grammar. Therefore, students often need to reorganize sentence structures so that the translation follows Indonesian grammar while keeping the original meaning. Cultural differences also create challenges because some English expressions come from Western culture and may not be familiar to Indonesian readers. In these cases, students need to choose suitable strategies, such as equivalence, adaptation, or paraphrasing, to express the intended meaning clearly.

Many previous studies show that beginner EFL students often use literal translation because it is the easiest strategy. However, students with better English skills usually combine different strategies, such as borrowing, transposition, modulation, equivalence, adaptation, and paraphrasing. They choose different strategies depending on the type of text they translate. These findings show that translation skills improve as students develop better language ability and

cultural understanding. However, many studies mainly discuss translation errors and pay less attention to the strategies students use to solve translation problems.

Based on this discussion, this study investigates the translation strategies used by Indonesian EFL students when translating English texts into Indonesian. The study identifies the strategies that students use most often, examines the language and cultural challenges they face, and explains how different strategies help produce accurate, natural, and acceptable Indonesian translations. It is expected that the findings will provide useful information for English lecturers, translation teachers, and EFL students to improve translation teaching and learning in Indonesian universities.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the translation strategies used by EFL students when translating English texts into Indonesian. A qualitative approach was chosen because it helps the researcher describe the translation strategies used by the students and understand the challenges they faced during the translation process.

The participants were 9 EFL students who were taking the Translation I course at STKIP Kristen Wamena, Papua, Indonesia. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. They were chosen because they had learned translation formally and were expected to use different translation strategies when translating English texts into Indonesian. Their experience in the Translation I course made them suitable participants for this study.

The data were collected through a translation task and semi-structured interviews. In the translation task, each participant translated an English text into Indonesian. The translated texts were collected and analyzed to identify the translation strategies used by the students. After completing the translation task, the participants took part in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted to understand why they chose certain translation strategies, what difficulties they faced during translation, and what factors influenced their translation decisions. The interview data also helped explain and support the findings from the translation task.

The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. First, the researcher read the students' translations carefully and compared them with the original English text. Second, the researcher identified and classified the translation strategies based on the framework of Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), supported by Molina and Albir (2002). The strategies included literal translation, borrowing, transposition, modulation, equivalence, adaptation, and other techniques found in the students' translations. Third, the interview data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to explain why the students used particular strategies and how they solved translation problems. Finally, the researcher compared and interpreted the findings from the translation task and the interviews to identify common patterns in the students' translation strategies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that literal translation was the most common strategy used by the nine EFL students who were taking the Translation I course at STKIP Kristen Wamena when translating English texts into Indonesian. Based on the students' translations,

most participants kept the original words and sentence structure of the English text. They usually translated the text word by word or sentence by sentence with only a few grammar changes. This finding shows that beginner translators prefer literal translation because it is simple and easy to use.

The interview results support this finding. Most participants said they preferred literal translation because it helped them understand the source text and reduced the risk of changing the author's meaning. One participant said,

"I usually translate every word first because it is easier for me to understand the English sentence."

Another participant said,

"I follow the English sentence because I am afraid that changing too many words will make the meaning different."

These responses show that the students believed literal translation was the safest way to keep the original message, especially when they were not sure how to write natural Indonesian sentences.

The students' preference for literal translation is understandable because they were still learning translation. They were taking the Translation I course and had limited experience using other translation strategies. According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), literal translation is one type of direct translation. It can be used when the source language and the target language have similar grammar and vocabulary. In these situations, literal translation can keep the original meaning without many changes. Therefore, the students' use of literal translation reflects their early stage of learning translation rather than poor translation skills.

However, the findings also show that literal translation was not always enough to produce natural Indonesian translations. During the interviews, several participants said they had difficulties translating idioms, phrasal verbs, and culture-specific expressions. One participant said,

"When I found an idiom, I translated every word, but the sentence did not make sense in Indonesian."

Another participant said,

"Sometimes English sentences have different grammar, so after translating every word, I still have to rearrange the sentence."

These responses show that literal translation can keep the meaning of individual words, but it does not always express the intended meaning or cultural message. As a result, some translations were grammatically correct but sounded unnatural in Indonesian.

This finding supports Newmark (1988), who states that literal translation should not be used in every situation. It is suitable only when it produces a natural expression in the target language. If literal translation creates unclear or unnatural sentences, translators should use other methods to express the intended meaning. Nida and Taber (1982) also explain that translation should produce the closest natural equivalent of the original message in both meaning and style. This means that translators should focus on communicating the message clearly instead of translating every word.

Another important finding is that limited vocabulary influenced the students' choice of translation strategy. Many participants said they often translated unfamiliar words directly after checking bilingual dictionaries or machine translation tools. One participant said,

"If I do not know the meaning of a word, I usually look it up in the dictionary and translate it directly."

This finding shows that students with limited vocabulary tend to focus on the meaning of individual words instead of the overall meaning of the text. As a result, they rely heavily on literal translation.

This finding is similar to previous studies. Liao (2006) found that EFL learners often use literal translation because it is easier and requires less effort. Kharismawan and colleagues also found that Indonesian EFL students often use literal translation when translating academic texts because they want to keep the original meaning of the words. These studies suggest that literal translation is common among students who are still developing their translation skills.

The findings also show that students were concerned about keeping the original meaning. Most participants believed that changing sentence structures or using different words might change the author's message. Therefore, they preferred to follow the structure of the English text. However, translation experts explain that a good translation should transfer the meaning, not simply copy the original structure. Baker (2018) states that translators often face situations where direct word-for-word translation is impossible because of language and cultural differences. In these cases, translators should choose expressions that give the same meaning in the target language.

The findings also show that grammar differences between English and Indonesian affected the students' translations. English uses tenses, passive sentences, relative clauses, and complex noun phrases that are different from Indonesian grammar. Several participants said these differences made translation difficult. Because of this, they often started with literal translation before changing the sentence into natural Indonesian. Larson (1998) explains that translators should first understand the meaning of the source text and then rewrite it using the grammar of the target language. Without this step, the translation may sound unnatural.

Another reason students depended on literal translation was their limited knowledge of other translation strategies. Although they were taking the Translation I course, most participants said they rarely used strategies such as transposition, modulation, equivalence, or adaptation. They believed literal translation was the easiest strategy to use in classroom assignments. However, Molina and Albir (2002) explain that professional translators usually combine different strategies depending on the vocabulary, grammar, context, and culture of the text. This shows that good translation requires not only language knowledge but also the ability to choose the best strategy for different situations.

Overall, the findings show that literal translation was the main strategy used by the participating EFL students because it was familiar, easy to use, and considered the safest way to keep the original meaning. However, the interviews also showed that students faced difficulties when literal translation could not express the meaning naturally in Indonesian. These findings support previous studies showing that beginner translators usually start with literal translation before learning to use more flexible strategies. Therefore, the Translation I course should not

only introduce different translation strategies but also give students more opportunities to practice using them. Activities such as comparing translations, working in groups, giving peer feedback, and revising translations can help students improve their translation skills. These activities can help students produce translations that are accurate, natural, and easy for readers to understand.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the translation strategies used by EFL students when translating English texts into Indonesian. The findings show that literal translation was the most frequently used strategy among the students. Most participants preferred this strategy because it was easy to use and helped them keep the original meaning of the English text. They also believed that translating word by word reduced the risk of changing the author's message.

However, the study also found that literal translation was not always effective. Many students had difficulties translating idioms, phrasal verbs, and culture-specific expressions. They also faced problems with limited vocabulary and the grammatical differences between English and Indonesian. These challenges sometimes made their translations sound unnatural in Indonesian.

The findings suggest that the students were still developing their translation skills. Although literal translation was useful in many situations, students needed to learn how to use other translation strategies, such as transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation, when literal translation could not produce a natural translation.

In conclusion, translation teaching should not only focus on literal translation but also provide students with more practice using different translation strategies. By improving both their language knowledge and translation skills, EFL students can produce translations that are accurate, natural, and easy for Indonesian readers to understand.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to the participants for their valuable contribution and cooperation in this study.

REFERENCES

- Baker, M. (2018). *In other words: A coursebook on translation* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Larson, M. L. (1998). *Meaning-based translation: A guide to cross-language equivalence* (2nd ed.). University Press of America.
- Liao, P. (2006). EFL learners' beliefs about and strategy use of translation in English learning. *RELC Journal*, 37(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688206067428>
- Molina, L., & Albir, A. H. (2002). Translation techniques revisited: A dynamic and functionalist approach. *Meta*, 47(4), 498–512. <https://doi.org/10.7202/008033ar>
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation*. Prentice Hall.

Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1982). *The theory and practice of translation*. Brill.

Vinay, J.-P., & Darbelnet, J. (1995). *Comparative stylistics of French and English: A methodology for translation* (J. C. Sager & M.-J. Hamel, Trans.). John Benjamins. (Original work published 1958)