

Students' Translation Competence and Its Implications for the Development of the Translation Course Syllabus at the Faculty of Tarbiah and Teacher Training IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo

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ABSTRACT: This study analyzes students' translation competence and the implications of developing the Translation Course Syllabus/RPS in the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo. A qualitative method was employed. The participants were ten 6th-semester students of the 2021 cohort from the English Education Program. Data were collected through documents, observations, and interviews. Qualitative data analysis was used to identify types of translation errors and explore students' translation processes and competencies in depth. The findings indicate that students have not fully mastered the five sub-competencies of translation: bilingual, extralinguistic, translation knowledge, instrumental, strategic, and psychophysiology. Weaknesses were found in vocabulary, idioms, cultural sensitivity, and a limited understanding of translation principles. The implications highlight the urgency of developing a more contextual and process-based syllabus and RPS, comprehensive training in translation strategies, and evaluation approaches that assess students' thinking processes to foster reflective, adaptive, and competent translators.

KEYWORDS: Translation, competence, Syllabus, Tarbiyah Students

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, translating texts from source languages into target languages is crucial in advancing theoretical and practical knowledge. It is important to highlight that translation involves transforming an original text, the Source Language (SL), into a translated version known as the Target Language (TL). This process aims to understand, interpret, and convey a message or meaning that closely aligns with the original, taking into account various types of translation. Translation activities hinge on transferring meaning to the target language (Baihaqi, 2017; Masduki, 2011).

Translation competency refers to the abilities, expertise, and skills a translator must possess to effectively navigate challenges encountered during the translation process, which includes a deep mastery and understanding of the source text. This competency encompasses six sub-competencies essential for translators: bilingual competence, extralinguistic competence, knowledge of the translation process, instrumental competence, strategic competence, and psychophysiological competence (PACTE, 2003).

A deficiency in linguistic competence can lead to errors when translating a text from the source to the target language. Such errors may occur at the morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels (Nababan, 2012), resulting in a translation lacking accuracy, acceptability, and readability. This highlights the essential role of a translator's linguistic competence, especially in grasping both languages' morphological, syntactic, and semantic structures. Without a profound understanding of these elements, translators may unwittingly introduce errors that jeopardize the translation's accuracy, acceptability, or readability.

Valencia (2016), as cited in Newmark (1988), asserts that cultural terms derive from religious beliefs, customs, and culinary traditions specific to the source language culture, which may not be recognized within the target language culture. Cultural expressions encompass words and phrases shaped by cultural diversity, particularly during translation. Additionally, Newmark (1988) emphasizes that translators must have a solid understanding of several cultural aspects, including ecological elements (such as flora and fauna), material culture (food, housing, transportation, clothing, and technology), socio-cultural factors (work and activities), organizational customs (practices, procedures, and concepts), and aspects related to habits and body language (such as gestures).

Based on the pre-observations, several specific translation challenges were identified among students. For instance, in the phrase "It is the idea that things are as they are for ineluctable, inescapable reasons," the translation "It is the idea that things happen

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for unavoidable reasons" contains two notable errors. First, the translation fails to retain the dual emphasis of "ineluctable" and "inescapable" by simplifying it to the single term "unavoidable." Additionally, the word "everything" lacks the necessary precision in the translation.

To ensure the intended meaning and nuance of the original sentence are preserved, a more suitable translation would be, "This is the idea that everything occurs for inevitable and unavoidable reasons." From a cultural perspective, consider the following example: I wrote them with a green pen on a plastic film for the overhead projector. This translation has several issues, particularly concerning the term "overhead projector." Using "projector" as the equivalent lacks precision. In a technological context, an overhead projector (OHP) is a specific visual projection device designed to display slides or transparencies to an audience. In Indonesia, the term "overhead projector" (OHP) is commonly used and offers greater clarity than simply stating "projector." Saying "projector" without clarification can lead to misunderstandings, as it may refer to various projectors. The term "overhead projector" (OHP) was more prevalent before the advent of digital projectors and is still widely used in educational and teaching settings. Consequently, the translator in this scenario, representing the "Z" generation, may not fully understand the concept of an overhead projector.

Previous research has thoroughly explored the aspect of translation competence. For example, Napu and Pakaya (2021) examined the translation challenges translators working on tourist brochures face. They found that the most prevalent issues were syntactic (61.54%), followed by semantic problems (26.37%) and other difficulties (12.09%). Napu and Hasan (2019) investigated translation challenges in students' academic essays in a separate study. They identified a range of linguistic difficulties, including grammatical issues, lexical choices, and rhetorical and pragmatic concerns.

Bouti et al. (2024) researched enhancing the ability to construct simple sentences by incorporating local culture through the Simon Says technique. They identified that one of the key challenges in translation is the ability to form straightforward sentences in English. Their findings suggest that integrating local cultural insights and values into the learning process serves as a means of preserving local wisdom through translation and a powerful strategy for significantly enhancing translation competence. The researchers observed a notable improvement in students' capabilities to form simple sentences and increased motivation and active engagement in the learning process.

Niron (2024) conducted a study on the assessment of translations for analytical texts, focusing on comparing translated materials and evaluating translations. He found that the problems encountered during the translation process were not attributable to the aspects of assessment, comparison, or evaluation. In a separate study, Sinaga (2022) examined the accuracy of translations of business terminology and determined that accuracy was reflected in particular words and phrases.

In light of the previous explanations, a comprehensive study of the translation outcomes of English Tadris Study Program students is necessary. The purpose of this study is to identify and examine errors, as well as assess the quality of student translations both theoretically and practically. This initiative aims to provide a well-rounded understanding of translation results, processes, and student competencies in translation.

The research will utilize the translation procedures in the textbook "Factfulness." Authored by Hans Rosling (2018), this book is a reference within the research context. It addresses everyday life, encouraging readers to avoid misjudgments about experiences that have not yet transpired. The study will focus on five key chapters: The Gap Instinct, The Fear Instinct, The Destiny Instinct, The Blame Instinct, and The Urgency Instinct. Ultimately, this research seeks to assess students' translation competencies and explore their implications for developing the syllabus (RPS) for translation courses in the English Education Study Program at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo.

METHODS

This research was conducted with students in the sixth semester of the 2021 English Education Study Program cohort at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo, who were enrolled in a translation course. The study spanned three months, from March 4 to May 7, 2024. A qualitative approach was utilized to analyze the types of translation errors, investigate the translation process, and evaluate the students' translation competence. This approach was selected because it focuses on in-depth observation, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

This qualitative and descriptive research approach aims to comprehend social phenomena through the researcher's experiences in data collection and analysis and in understanding the perceptions and perspectives of individuals or groups (Creswell, 2013). The research process is both thorough and systematic. It commences with identifying a specific research problem that meets established criteria. A comprehensive literature review is conducted to analyze previous research related to the chosen topic. Subsequently, the research approach, type of study, and research subjects are carefully selected. The data collection phase, which encompasses documents, observations, questionnaires, and interviews, is executed meticulously. The collected data is then analyzed through categorization and coding. This analysis is interpreted to address the research questions effectively. To ensure accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness, the data is validated. Finally, a well-organized research report is composed, coherently narrating the findings and complete with direct participant quotes.

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The researchers directly observed students as they translated the Factfulness textbook from the source language (English) into the target language (Indonesian). This study involved ten English Education Study Program students, who utilized translation tools, specifically a reference book (dictionary). During the first week, the researchers gave the students the source language textbook in chapter segments, assigning one paragraph or more for each chapter. In the second week, the same approach was taken for Chapter II; in the third week, Chapter III was assigned; and by the fourth (and final) week, Chapters IV and V were distributed. Interviews with the students followed this to gather further insights.

This research aims to gather data that offers a deeper understanding of both linguistic and non-linguistic (cultural) aspects. The data collection methods were meticulously chosen and implemented by the researchers, ensuring the findings' validity and reliability. The analysis techniques involve categorizing the data in alignment with the research objectives, utilizing various collection methods such as documentation, observation, questionnaires, and interviews.

RESULTS

The research findings were derived from a comprehensive data collection process that included documentation, observation, and interviews. The data is systematically organized according to the research focus, which encompasses the various types of translation errors, the translation processes employed by students, and the level of translation competence they exhibit. To ensure the rigor and validity of the study, the data were analyzed using [specific method]. A qualitative approach was utilized for data presentation, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the phenomena and providing meaningful insights into the findings.

The findings, which hold significant educational value, begin by identifying common translation errors, including morphological, syntactic, and semantic mistakes. Each error category is analyzed according to its frequency and illustrated with specific examples drawn directly from students' translations. Additionally, the translation process undertaken by students is described in detail, outlining the stages they navigate—from comprehending the source text and selecting equivalent words in the target language to revising and finalizing the translation results. The research findings were discussed in the following.

1. Challenges in Developing Student Translation Competence

Based on the research findings, students in the English Tadris study program continue encountering challenges regarding translation competence, particularly in morphology and affixation. Educators need to play a vital role in addressing these issues. Students often struggle to accurately transfer meaning between English and Indonesian, especially regarding word structure, singular and plural forms, and the correct application of affixations. The highest number of errors was observed in translating singular and plural forms, totaling 29 mistakes, which indicates students' difficulties in grasping the concept of plurality in English and its more flexible usage in Indonesian.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed 21 instances of affixation errors, suggesting that students struggle to grasp the role of affixes in conveying the correct grammatical meanings in Indonesian. Such errors can obscure sentence meaning, particularly concerning selecting appropriate prefixes to denote active versus passive forms and convey the intensity of verbs. For example, translating "shouted" simply as "shouted" fails to capture the intensity inherent in the original word. At the syntactic level, the study identified 35 errors related to sentence organization and 78 errors in phrase structure. This indicates that students face challenges when transferring more complex sentence structures from the source language into the target language, which should be simpler yet accurate and natural. Mistakes such as employing overly rigid sentences and relying on the sentence structure of the source language highlight a lack of flexibility in the translation process.

2. Types of Translation Errors

The analysis of excerpts from the book "Factfulness," translated from English into Indonesian, highlights the importance of precise word choice in translation. Several notable errors were identified in the lexical, connotative, and denotative dimensions. Specifically, the 26 lexical errors pertained to selecting words that did not correspond accurately to their fundamental meanings. In contrast, the 49 connotative errors revealed students' challenges in grasping the source words' implied meanings or emotional nuances. Additionally, the 46 cases of denotative errors reflect inaccuracies in conveying the explicit meanings of the original text.

The most prevalent errors in translation are connotative errors, which suggest that students frequently struggle to grasp the source text's contextual meanings or cultural nuances. This difficulty may stem from a limited familiarity with the source culture or language. For instance, substituting the word "shake" for the more precise term "trigger" reflects an inaccuracy in translation arising from this lack of cultural understanding.

Furthermore, errors involving the translation of technical terminology and material culture highlight the crucial role of cultural context in achieving translation accuracy. For example, translating 'overhead projector' as 'overhead projector' lacks precision, given that 'overhead projector' is more commonly referenced in the Indonesian context. In another case, the term 'warm handle' was rendered as 'warm water button,' while a more accurate translation would have been 'warm water tap.' These instances illustrate the importance of translators' deep understanding of the cultural nuances in both the source and target languages.

3. Implications for Developing a Syllabus for Translation Courses

The findings indicate that students in the English Education Study Program at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo continue encountering notable challenges in translation competence, particularly in morphology, syntax, and semantics. Consequently, when developing the syllabus or RPS for translation courses, it is essential to take several important factors into account:

Enhancing the Understanding of Morphology and Syntax

A greater emphasis must be placed on understanding grammatical structures in both English and Indonesian. Students should receive more comprehensive training on the structural differences between the two languages, particularly concerning affixation and plurality. Additionally, more frequent practice translating texts with complex sentence structures is essential.

Enhanced Comprehension of Semantics and Cultural Context

The syllabus for the translation course should focus on grasping implied meanings, connotations of words, and cultural context. Students need to learn how to convey the more profound significance of the source text while adjusting it to fit the culture and norms of the target language.

Various Applications of Text

To enhance students' translation competence, offering a broader range of materials, including texts rich in technical terminology, idiomatic expressions, and cultural contexts, is essential. This approach will better equip students to navigate the diverse types of texts they encounter in their professional careers.

Organized Practice and Assessment

Structured practice and thorough evaluation are essential components of the translation process. By adopting more systematic translation assessments that focus on a detailed analysis of students' errors, we can better understand the areas that require improvement. Well-defined evaluation rubrics and constructive feedback are invaluable tools for enhancing students' translation skills, offering educators a dependable means of monitoring progress and pinpointing areas for further development.

This research highlights the challenges related to student translation competency and their implications for developing the syllabus/RPS for translation courses. It indicates that the translation competency of students in the English Language Education Study Program at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo requires significant improvement, particularly in morphology, syntax, and semantics. A notable discrepancy exists between students' theoretical knowledge and practical translation skills. While students have a solid understanding of translation concepts, they struggle to apply this knowledge effectively. This is particularly evident in their language skills and cultural comprehension, where, despite theoretical understanding, they continue to produce inaccurate translations.

This research reveals that students struggle with applying appropriate grammatical structures and maintaining precise meaning during the translation process. Consequently, developing the Syllabus/RPS for translation courses should address the need to enhance linguistic skills and cultural understanding. It is essential to offer more targeted training and evaluation to elevate the quality of translations in the future. Therefore, the curriculum must emphasize ongoing practical training and critical reflection on translation outcomes. Additionally, it is crucial to reinforce both the theoretical and strategic dimensions of translation while ensuring that students are proficient in utilizing modern translation resources.

DISCUSSION

This research employs the translation competency model (PACTE, 2003), which comprises five key sub-competencies: bilingual proficiency, extralinguistic knowledge, translation expertise, instrumental skills, and strategic abilities. The findings indicate that while students in the English Education Study Program at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo have not yet fully mastered these five sub-competencies, considerable potential exists for improvement, as demonstrated by their translation outputs. An analysis of the students' translation results and processes reveals numerous weaknesses, particularly in cultural considerations, which accounted for 28 errors. A significant portion of these errors occurred in the context of technology (13 errors) and government terminology (10 errors). These results suggest that the extralinguistic and bilingual sub-competencies have not been optimally developed. As noted by Kusumawati (2017), various factors contribute to errors in translation, including the existence of multiple meanings for vocabulary in everyday contexts and the challenge of finding equivalent terms in Indonesian. To effectively translate English texts, a robust vocabulary is essential. This highlights the close relationship between technical and structural challenges and the inadequacies in linguistic and extralinguistic sub-competencies.

Many students continue to translate literally, often neglecting the cultural and structural contexts between languages. This literal translation approach frequently results in target texts that lack acceptability and readability, particularly in works rich with idioms and cultural expressions. For instance, a direct translation of the English idiom "kick the bucket" into Indonesian as "menendang ember" fails to convey the intended meaning. This observation aligns with the assertion by Nababan et al. (2012), which emphasizes that, in addition to the accuracy of meaning, readability and acceptability are crucial indicators of translation quality. Furthermore, this finding resonates with the claims made by Napu and Pakaya (2021), indicating that many novice translators in Indonesia struggle to meet professional standards due to insufficient competence in language and translation strategies.

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This suggests that students often perceive translation as a linguistic process and have yet to internalize it as a cross-cultural communicative endeavor.

In general, students often demonstrate limitations in understanding the role of the translator as a mediator between different languages and cultural systems. Many translations reflect a mechanical approach to language transfer, neglecting the text's functional context and communicative purpose. This suggests that the sub-competency of translation knowledge is not sufficiently developed among most students. As Bathgate (2002) highlighted, translation is a complex process involving seven stages: tuning, analysis, understanding, terminology, restructuring, checking, and discussion. Students need to navigate this process comprehensively to ensure that the quality of the resulting translation is optimal. The quality of the translation suffers when students engage with this process incompletely or focus solely on one stage. Often, students skip the in-depth understanding stage, concentrating only on finding terms or equivalent words without thoroughly analyzing the text's overall meaning. This observation reinforces Napu's (2019) assertion that challenges in translation frequently stem from a lack of mastery over the fundamental principles of constructing meaning and sentence structure accurately in the target language.

Students' responses during interviews indicate a significant lack of understanding of the fundamental principles of translation theory. Many students struggle to explain what translation involves or the strategies they use. Some define translation as the transfer of language, without acknowledging the importance of understanding communication's meaning, context, and purpose.

Translation aims to reproduce meaning that closely aligns with the source text in content and style. This emphasis highlights translators' need to comprehend the original cultural context of source language textbooks to produce accurate and meaningful translations in target language textbooks (Nababan et al., 2012). Consequently, a limited understanding of translation's pragmatic and ideological functions often leads students to approach it in a textual manner rather than a contextual one.

Conversely, research findings highlight the importance of students cultivating strategic sub-competence. Those who utilize strategies such as re-verification, monolingual dictionary usage, or peer discussions tend to generate more accurate and natural translations. These strategies demonstrate their commitment to developing strategic and instrumental sub-competencies. However, not all students consistently engage in these approaches, indicating that strategic sub-competence has not yet become a fundamental aspect of their translation practices. PACTE (2003) states that strategic competence governs other sub-competencies and is essential for problem detection and solution formulation during translation. Napu (2016) further stresses that the decision-making process in translation requires metacognitive awareness, which involves the student's ability to identify their mistakes and critically evaluate the strategies they employ.

Another identified weakness lies in the use of translation technology. Many students tend to rely solely on tools like Google Translate or DeepL without engaging in any further editing. This tendency indicates a lack of active technological literacy, as these students passively utilize tools, failing to assess and integrate the outcomes critically. According to Herba et al. (2025), the prevalence of translation tools supported by artificial intelligence (AI), such as Google Translate and Chat GPT, has risen significantly in the digital era. While these tools can be beneficial, they often generate word choice and sentence structure errors. Consequently, it is essential for human translators to make corrections and refinements after utilizing these tools (Sujefri et al., 2022). In this regard, Chesterman (2001) underscores the importance of professional ethics in employing technology and resources, highlighting that translators should not only depend on tools but also bear the critical responsibility for the quality of their translation results.

The implications of these findings underscore the necessity for a more contextual and relevant syllabus in translation courses. It is essential to incorporate exercises that foster analytical and reflective thinking processes, ranging from text analysis and strategic planning to evaluating outcomes. Such exercises will not only train students to produce high-quality final products but also help them grasp the intricacies of the translation process. Bathgate (2002) emphasizes the significance of the discussion and final revision stages in creating accurate, culturally relevant, and communicative translations. Consequently, assignments in lectures should be designed to guide students through all these stages rather than merely focusing on the production of translated texts as finished products. This perspective is further supported by Siregar et al. (2023), who highlight the importance of understanding the expectations of training participants. This understanding is vital for crafting a syllabus that aligns with students' needs and initial competency levels, ultimately cultivating empathy and consideration among educators.

The research findings underscore the importance of incorporating a variety of text genres into the syllabus. Students exposed to diverse types of texts exhibit greater adaptability in their competencies compared to those who only engage with academic texts. Consequently, the syllabus should encompass various genres, including popular literature, media, legal documents, and scientific texts, to enhance students' sensitivity to different linguistic and cultural conventions. This perspective aligns with the idea that variations in structure and nuance across text types require distinct translation strategies (Napu, 2019; Newmark, 1988). By broadening their exposure to various text genres, students will have the opportunity to refine their adaptation and analytical skills, which are essential for success in professional translation practice.

The evaluation system in translation courses must prioritize assessing the process rather than solely focusing on the final product. This evaluation should reflect on the strategies employed, the problem-solving journey, and the selection of resources.

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According to Nababan (2012), translation is a multifaceted process that should be evaluated entirely, not just based on the result. By incorporating formative assessments emphasizing cognitive processes and self-reflection, students can become more aware of their strategies and work on their weaknesses over time. Pym and Torres-Simón (2015) further underscore that process-based assessment enables educators to identify individual strategy development and provide more meaningful feedback that supports long-term learning.

As highlighted by Napu (2019), it is essential for teaching approaches to bridge the gap between linguistic understanding and students' practical skills within authentic contexts. Consequently, translation courses serve not only as a medium for linguistic training but also as a means of developing professional competencies tailored to contextual needs and the demands of the contemporary translation industry. In this regard, educators play a pivotal role in shaping the future of professional translation. By recognizing the significance of process-based learning, reinforcing foundational translation theories, critically engaging with translation technology, enhancing texts, and implementing assessment strategies that evaluate the entire process holistically, educators can more effectively prepare students to navigate the complexities of the professional translation landscape. This approach fosters the development of translators who are technically proficient but also reflective and adaptable in their practice.

CONCLUSION AND SUGESTION

1. Conclusion

Our research focused on the English Education Study Program students at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo, which indicates that there are specific areas in which students have not fully mastered the five sub-competencies of translation. Notably, their bilingual and extralinguistic skills are lacking, particularly in vocabulary, idioms, and sensitivity to cultural context. Furthermore, the sub-competency related to translation knowledge reveals a limited grasp of fundamental translation principles, such as meaning, communication purposes, and the role of the translator as an intercultural mediator. Although some students exhibit competency in technology and problem-solving strategies in the instrumental and strategic areas, their practice tends to be passive and inconsistent. Students have not yet developed the habit of critically evaluating translation outcomes or integrating tools with metacognitive reflection in their work.

These findings highlight the pressing need for a more comprehensive, process-oriented curriculum. In particular, the curriculum should incorporate extensive training in translation strategies, integration of formative evaluations, and exposure to a diverse range of text types. This approach will enhance students' adaptability to variation in style, structure, and cultural conventions. Additionally, AI-based translation technology should be complemented by training in critical editing to ensure that students do not rely solely on machine translation results.

We must realign our evaluation focus from merely assessing the final product to examining the students' thinking processes, strategies, and reflections throughout the translation process. This holistic evaluation approach is vital for reinforcing the five sub-competencies collectively. By adopting this comprehensive method, we will establish a solid foundation for developing professional translators who are technically proficient but also reflective, adaptive, and contextually aware in their translation practices within today's digital and cross-cultural landscape.

2. Suggestions

Mastering vocabulary, idioms, and grammatical structures is essential in the realm of bilingual and extralinguistic sub-competencies. Language learning should focus on enhancing fluency in both the source and target languages while incorporating idioms and expressions commonly found in translated texts. A more profound grasp of the grammatical frameworks of a second language will enable students to construct sentences that feel more natural and appropriate within the target language context. The syllabus and curriculum for Translation courses should be designed to promote comprehensive translation competence. Learning plans must include theoretical elements, practical application, and ongoing evaluation. It is equally important to ensure that each translation stage—analysis, preparation, and proofreading—is seamlessly integrated into the learning process. Developing a more comprehensive and adaptable syllabus that meets student needs can significantly improve translation quality, highlighting the critical role of student-centered learning in enhancing translation outcomes.

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