



STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATING RECOUNT TEXT FROM INDONESIAN INTO ENGLISH AT GRADE XI IN SMA NEGERI 3 PEMATANGSIANTAR

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the difficulties experienced by Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar in translating recount texts from Indonesian into English. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the research focuses on one class consisting of 36 students during the 2024–2025 academic year. The students were asked to translate a recount text titled “Perjalanan ke Candi Borobudur” (A Trip to Borobudur Temple), which contains linguistic and cultural elements that pose challenges in translation. Data were collected through students’ written translations, classroom observations, and interviews. The analysis revealed four main categories of difficulties: grammatical errors, particularly in the use of the simple past tense; lexical errors due to literal translation; structural errors influenced by Indonesian syntax; and problems translating culture-specific expressions. These findings suggest that students often rely on direct translation strategies, leading to inaccurate and unnatural English output. The study highlights the importance of integrating grammar instruction, vocabulary development, and cultural awareness in translation teaching. Additionally, employing a genre-based approach can help students better understand the features and conventions of recount texts, thereby improving their translation accuracy. The results imply that targeted instructional strategies and consistent practice are essential for enhancing students’ translation competence and overall English proficiency. This study contributes to understanding the linguistic and cultural challenges in EFL translation contexts and offers practical recommendations for language educators.

Keywords: translation difficulties, recount text, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), verb tense errors, cultural translation

INTRODUCTION

Translation plays a crucial role in second language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In Indonesia, where English is taught as a compulsory subject in schools, translation activities are often integrated into the curriculum to enhance students’ understanding of vocabulary, grammar, and meaning (Munday, 2016). Translating texts from Indonesian into English allows students not only to improve their linguistic competence but also to bridge cultural and

contextual differences. However, translation is a complex skill that requires a deep understanding of both the source and target languages (Newmark, 1988), and many students still face challenges in producing accurate and meaningful translations.

Recount texts are a common genre used in the Indonesian high school curriculum, particularly in Grade XI, where students are expected to recount events, experiences, or stories in a structured way. The structure of recount texts typically includes orientation, a sequence of events,

and a reorientation or conclusion (Hyland, 2004). When translating such texts into English, students must deal with narrative structure, verb tense consistency (typically past tense), and chronological coherence. These linguistic features can become significant obstacles for learners who lack sufficient mastery of English grammar and vocabulary.

Many students in Indonesian senior high school's struggle to accurately translate recount texts due to interference from their first language (L1). Language interference, or negative transfer, occurs when students apply Indonesian sentence patterns and word usage directly into English, resulting in unnatural or incorrect constructions (Odlin, 1989). This phenomenon often leads to errors in word choice, verb tense, and sentence structure. Furthermore, the differences between Indonesian and English grammatical systems—particularly in the use of articles, auxiliary verbs, and verb conjugation—compound the difficulty for students in accurately rendering meaning.

The translation process also involves cognitive strategies such as comprehension, transfer, and reformulation, which can be mentally demanding for learners with limited language proficiency (Jakobson, 1959; Hatim & Munday, 2004). Students not only need to understand the source text but also reproduce it in grammatically correct and stylistically appropriate English. In the case of recount texts, this includes paying attention to past tense usage, time connectors, and the chronological ordering of events—all of which require a solid understanding of English grammar rules and cohesive devices (Nida, 1964).

Research has shown that students frequently commit various types of errors in translation, including lexical errors, syntactic errors, and errors in cohesion and coherence (Puspitasari, 2013). For example,

they may misuse past tense forms, omit subjects, or directly translate idiomatic expressions, resulting in awkward or inaccurate translations. These difficulties highlight the need to investigate specific problem areas in students' translation practices, especially when dealing with common text types such as recounts.

The ability to translate effectively is also influenced by students' background knowledge, motivation, and exposure to English texts. Students with limited vocabulary and reading comprehension often find it hard to convey the meaning of Indonesian texts into English (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). In addition, the lack of consistent practice and insufficient feedback from teachers may hinder the development of translation skills. Teachers often focus more on grammar drills and reading comprehension, leaving little room for translation exercises that target specific genres like recount texts.

Despite the inclusion of translation tasks in English language learning in Indonesia, there is a lack of detailed research focusing on the specific difficulties students face when translating certain genres, particularly recount texts. Most previous studies have addressed general translation issues or focused on tertiary education levels, leaving a gap in understanding the challenges faced by senior high school students at the secondary level (Ardi, 2017). Given the importance of genre-based translation tasks in the curriculum, it is essential to explore the specific linguistic and cognitive difficulties that students encounter.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the difficulties faced by Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar in translating recount texts from Indonesian into English. By identifying common linguistic errors and examining the

underlying causes of these difficulties, this research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of students' translation competence and to offer insights that may inform teaching practices and curriculum development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Translation in EFL Learning

Translation has long been recognized as a pedagogical tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning context. While often overlooked in communicative language teaching, recent research highlights its potential to support vocabulary development, grammar mastery, and cross-linguistic awareness (Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011). In EFL classrooms, translation serves as a bridge between learners' native language and the target language, enabling students to connect their existing knowledge to new linguistic structures (Leonardi, 2010). Specifically, in Indonesia, translation exercises are frequently used to enhance students' comprehension and written production, especially at the senior high school level.

2. Challenges in Translation for EFL Students

Despite its benefits, translation presents several challenges for EFL learners. Students often struggle with syntactic differences, idiomatic expressions, collocations, and pragmatic nuances between the source and target languages (Baker, 2011). In the Indonesian context, students face additional obstacles due to the structural and grammatical contrasts between Bahasa Indonesia and English. For instance, the absence of verb conjugation in Indonesian often leads to errors in tense and aspect when translating into English (Yuwono, 2019). Moreover, learners may rely heavily on literal translation, which often results in awkward or incorrect output

that does not accurately reflect the intended meaning.

3. Genre-Based Approach to Translation

The genre-based approach to teaching English has gained prominence in the Indonesian education system, especially since the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013). This approach emphasizes students' ability to recognize and produce different types of texts, including recount, narrative, descriptive, and procedural texts (Emilia, 2011). Recount texts, in particular, are commonly taught in Grade XI and are used to help students develop narrative and chronological writing skills. When translating such texts, students must apply genre-specific knowledge, such as past tense usage and time-sequencing markers, which can pose significant challenges for learners with limited grammatical awareness (Feez & Joyce, 2002).

4. Features and Structure of Recount Texts

Recount texts are characterized by their function to retell past events in a logical order. Typically, these texts follow a generic structure that includes an orientation, a sequence of events, and a reorientation (Derewianka, 1990). The effective translation of recount texts requires students to not only transfer the meaning but also retain this structure in the target language. Moreover, the use of time conjunctions such as then, after that, finally, and the proper use of past tense verbs are crucial for maintaining coherence (Christie & Derewianka, 2008). Students' failure to apply these features correctly often results in disorganized or grammatically flawed translations.

5. Common Translation Errors

Several studies have categorized the types of errors commonly made by EFL learners during translation. These include lexical errors (incorrect word choice),

syntactic errors (incorrect sentence structure), morphological errors (verb tense, plural forms), and pragmatic errors (failure to convey implied meaning) (Kusmaul, 1995). In the context of Indonesian high school students, frequent mistakes include incorrect use of past tense verbs, omission of subjects, and direct translation of Indonesian idioms (Handayani, 2020). Understanding the nature of these errors is essential in identifying the specific areas where students need instructional support.

6. Cognitive and Linguistic Factors

Translation difficulties are also influenced by both cognitive processing and linguistic competence. According to PACTE (2005), translation competence consists of sub-competences such as bilingual, extralinguistic, instrumental, and strategic competences. Many senior high school students, however, lack these competencies, particularly strategic and instrumental ones, which are essential for making informed decisions during the translation process. Additionally, limited exposure to authentic English input—both written and spoken—can restrict students' ability to understand context and nuance, leading to surface-level or literal translations (Göpferich, 2009).

7. Instructional Approaches to Improve Translation Skills

Effective instructional strategies are needed to support students in overcoming translation difficulties. Research suggests that integrating contrastive analysis, translation tasks with peer feedback, and explicit teaching of genre conventions can significantly enhance translation performance (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1991). Teachers should provide guided practice that focuses on form, function, and meaning, especially when dealing with genre-specific texts such as recounts. Moreover, encouraging students to reflect on their own translation process can foster metalinguistic

awareness and critical thinking, leading to more accurate and meaningful translations.

METHODOLOGY

1) Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, which is suitable for understanding and analyzing phenomena in natural settings. The purpose of using this approach was to explore and describe in detail the difficulties that students encountered when translating recount text from Indonesian into English. According to Creswell (2012), research design refers to the specific procedures involved in the research process, including the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. In qualitative research, the emphasis is placed on understanding the meaning and complexity of human behavior, particularly from the perspective of the participants. In this context, the researcher sought to identify the types of translation difficulties and the reasons behind those challenges as experienced by the students.

2) Research Setting and Subjects

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar, a public senior high school in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The subjects of this study were Grade XI students during the 2024–2025 academic year. Out of the twelve Grade XI classes available, the researcher selected one class consisting of 36 students as the sample for this study. The class was chosen using purposive sampling, with the consideration that the students had previously been taught recount texts and had sufficient English background to perform translation tasks. The researcher interacted directly with the students to collect and analyze their translations of the assigned text.

3) Object of the Research

The object of this research was the students' written translation work, specifically their translations of a recount text from Indonesian into English. The text chosen for this task was titled "Perjalanan ke Candi Borobudur" (A Trip to Borobudur Temple), which tells a personal and cultural story about a journey to one of Indonesia's most iconic historical sites. The selection of this text was intentional, as it represents a typical recount text used in the high school English curriculum and presents both linguistic and cultural challenges in translation. The students were expected to apply the features of recount text, including proper use of the simple past tense, chronological ordering, and cohesive devices.

4) Data Collection Techniques

To collect the data, the researcher asked the students to translate the assigned recount text individually from Indonesian into English during a classroom activity. This translation task served as the primary data source. The students submitted their handwritten or typed translations, which were then collected by the researcher for analysis. In addition to the written translations, the researcher also observed the translation process and took field notes to gain deeper insights into the students' behaviors, strategies, and challenges during the task. Furthermore, short interviews were conducted with selected students to clarify certain translation choices and to understand their thought processes and difficulties more thoroughly.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis approach. First, the students' translations were carefully read and examined to identify translation errors and patterns of difficulty. The errors were then classified into several categories, such

as grammatical errors, lexical errors, structural errors, and cultural misunderstanding. Special attention was given to errors related to the use of tenses, especially the simple past, which is a critical element in recount texts. The researcher also compared the translations to standard English versions to assess accuracy and fluency. Finally, the findings were interpreted and discussed to identify the underlying causes of students' difficulties and how these might relate to their language proficiency or knowledge of the recount genre.

RESULTS

After analyzing the translation texts produced by the 36 Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar, the researcher identified a range of difficulties encountered during the translation of the recount text "*Perjalanan ke Candi Borobudur*" into English. These difficulties were classified into four main categories: grammatical errors, lexical errors, structural errors, and cultural-linguistic translation issues. One of the most prevalent challenges observed was in the use of correct verb tenses, especially the simple past tense, which is essential for recount texts. Many students incorrectly used present tense verbs, such as "*I go to Borobudur*" instead of "*I went to Borobudur*", indicating a lack of understanding or attention to the time setting of the text. In some cases, students mixed present and past tenses within the same sentence or paragraph, disrupting the chronological flow of the narrative.

In terms of lexical choice, several students demonstrated difficulty in selecting appropriate English vocabulary. This often resulted in literal translations of Indonesian words or phrases that were not contextually suitable in English. For example, some students translated the Indonesian phrase "*kami sangat senang dan menikmati*

perjalanan” as “*we very happy and enjoy the trip*”, which is grammatically incorrect and lacks appropriate auxiliary verbs (“*were very happy and enjoyed the trip*” would be more accurate). Structural errors were also common, particularly in sentence construction and word order. Many students used Indonesian syntactic patterns in their English translations, resulting in awkward or incorrect sentence structures such as “*To Borobudur Temple we go by bus*” instead of the correct “*We went to Borobudur Temple by bus.*” Additionally, some students omitted essential sentence elements, such as subjects or articles, making the translations unclear or grammatically incomplete.

Lastly, cultural and linguistic expressions posed significant difficulties. Words or concepts that are deeply embedded in Indonesian culture, such as “*oleh-oleh*” or “*doa bersama*”, were either left untranslated or translated inaccurately, as students could not find appropriate English equivalents. This highlights a lack of exposure to cross-cultural vocabulary and idiomatic language.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal several important insights into the difficulties faced by students in translating recount texts from Indonesian into English. The consistent misuse of verb tenses, particularly the simple past tense, indicates a fundamental grammatical gap. Since recount texts rely on accurate representation of past events, the inability to maintain consistent past tense usage undermines the communicative purpose of the text. This aligns with earlier observations in translation pedagogy that emphasize the importance of verb tense mastery in narrative translation tasks. The presence of literal translation errors suggests that many students depend heavily on word-for-word translation

strategies, possibly due to limited vocabulary and low confidence in rephrasing or paraphrasing. This reliance results in sentences that are grammatically flawed or culturally inappropriate in the target language. It also reflects a need for greater instruction on translation techniques, including equivalence and context-based vocabulary selection.

Structural errors appear to be influenced by first language interference, where Indonesian sentence patterns are unconsciously applied to English. This supports previous research findings that show the significant impact of L1 structures on L2 production, particularly in translation contexts. Such interference highlights the importance of contrastive grammar instruction, which helps students become more aware of the syntactic differences between the two languages. The difficulty in translating culture-specific terms indicates a lack of cultural literacy and suggests the need for incorporating more culturally contextual materials into language instruction. When students are unaware of how to express local cultural elements in English, they either omit the terms or provide incorrect approximations. This can lead to a loss of meaning and hinders the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication.

Overall, the results indicate that students' difficulties are not limited to one area but span multiple aspects of linguistic and cultural competence. The findings suggest that English translation instruction should not only focus on grammar and vocabulary but also provide students with strategies for understanding text genre, maintaining cohesion, and dealing with cultural equivalence. Moreover, consistent feedback and translation exercises across various text types could help students develop greater fluency and accuracy.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar face several significant difficulties when translating recount texts from Indonesian into English. The main challenges identified include incorrect use of the simple past tense, literal translation of vocabulary, structural errors influenced by Indonesian syntax, and problems translating culture-specific expressions. These difficulties highlight gaps in both grammatical knowledge and cultural competence, which affect the accuracy and fluency of students' translations.

The findings suggest that effective translation teaching in the EFL classroom should integrate focused grammar instruction, especially on verb tenses, alongside vocabulary development and cultural awareness. Additionally, adopting genre-based teaching approaches that emphasize the features of recount texts can help students better understand the expectations and conventions of this text type. Providing students with guided practice and feedback on translation tasks can further enhance their skills and confidence.

Overall, improving students' translation competence requires a comprehensive approach that addresses linguistic, cognitive, and cultural factors. By doing so, educators can better support students in overcoming the challenges of translating recount texts and ultimately improve their overall English language proficiency.

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