

Synonymy: A Translation Procedure to Overcome Problems of SL and TL Cultural Differences

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Abstract

Translation is reproducing equivalent message from a source language (SL) text into a target language (TL) text. This concept implies translators' efforts to maintain message equivalence. On the other hand, the efforts may be hindered by cultural differences. In other words, cultural differences may cause problems in maintaining message equivalence in translation. A common problem found in translation is loss and gain of meaning. To overcome translation problems related to loss and gain of meaning as a result cultural differences, various translation procedures could be applied. Synonymy is one of many translation procedures commonly used. This procedure is applied when a translation is not the first literal translation of the SL text. This procedure is usually chosen when translators could not find the one-to-one substitute in the TL.

Keywords: *Synonymy, equivalence, loss and gain*

Introduction

In its broadest sense, translation is commonly defined as a reproduction of a written message in a source language (SL) into an equivalent message in a target language (TL). This definition, however, implies a complication in the process. When translating a written message into a TL, translators have to consider three aspects. They are equivalence, naturalness, and acceptability (Putranti, 2007: 106). Equivalence is observed through the accuracy of message transfer. The accuracy here means that the message transferred does not experience any shift of meaning. Naturalness is seen from the use of TL expressions as well as TL structure. Meanwhile, acceptability is based on whether or not the message transferred into a TL can be accepted by the TL reader's values and norms. In other words, translation is concerned with not only transferring message written in one language into another language accurately as well as naturally, but also transferring SL message

which can be accepted by TL readers with different cultural background.

Considering such complications, methods are required to overcome the problems. Translation methods, according to Newmark, refer to how an SL text is translated into a TL (Newmark, 1988: 81). In applying the methods, certain procedures must be followed to handle smaller units in a text such as sentences and phrases. In relation to that, this article intends to briefly discuss one translation procedure called synonymy. To focus and limit the scope of discussion, translation from Indonesian to English and vice versa is taken as examples.

Definition and Process of Translation

As said by Nida and Taber, translation is defined as "reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida and Taber, 1974: 12). What Nida and Taber mean concerning equivalence implies accuracy of message transfer in terms of form

and meaning that is expressed in natural TL language and considers TL reader's cultural background. The term 'closest natural equivalent' indicates that finding the 'exactly natural equivalent' of the SL in the TL is not always possible.

Nida and Taber's concept of equivalence is clarified by Bassnett. She says that "translation involves the transfer of 'meaning' contained in one set of language signs into another set of language signs through competent use of dictionary and grammar, the process involves a whole set of extra linguistic criteria also" (Bassnett, 1991: 13). This definition suggests that translation not only is a process of transferring texts from an SL into a TL linguistically, but it also involves extra linguistic knowledge in which TL reader's backgrounds are considered.

What is meant by extra linguistic knowledge is, then, clarified by Newmark (1981: 102) who says that equivalence is also related to the fact that "all words have different connotations of situation and/or user's origin (education, class, profession, dialect, etc.)". In short, users' backgrounds are important to consider when talking about equivalent translation. Since users' origin includes various aspects of life, it can be said that users' origin is related to the users' cultural background. This assumption is relevant to Newmark's definition of culture, in which culture is defined as "a way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to community that uses a particular language as its means of expressions" (Newmark, 1988: 94). The last statement above shows that the use of language cannot be separated from its cultural background.

Further, Nida and Taber state that a translation reaches the highest degree of equivalence when "the receptors of the message (TL readers) respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language" (Nida & Taber, 1974: 24). The concept of responding a translation in a substantially the same manner as the SL readers implies the translators' effort to find a "one-to-one equivalent" (Newmark, 1988: 114) of an SL item in the TL. In the process of translation,

such a task is not easy to perform because, according to Sapir (1929), as quoted by Katan, "language can only be interpreted within a culture" (Katan, 1999: 74). What Katan says implies that the discussion of SL and TL cultural differences in translation process has become inevitable. Unfortunately, Bassnett mentions that "sameness cannot exist between two languages" (1991: 30). Relating Katan's, Bassnett's, and Nida's statement about TL readers' response, it can be concluded that TL readers will never respond a translation in "a substantially the same manner" as the SL readers because of the SL and TL cultural background.

Loss and Gain of Meaning as a Result of SL and TL Cultural Differences

One obvious problem related to cultural differences is when a linguistic item in an SL is not available in the TL, loses, or gains components of meaning in the TL, which Bassnett refers as loss and gain of meaning in the translation process (Bassnett, 1991: 30). In the case of English – Indonesian translation, one example can be discussed. The words '*kakak*' and '*adik*', in Indonesian, mean 'siblings'. In Indonesian culture, this kind of kinship does not distinguish sex category, but indicates seniority, in which '*kakak*' is older than '*adik*'. When these two words are translated into English, the closest translation would be 'brother' and 'sister'. The translation, in fact, loses the semantic property of seniority, but gains the property of different sex category, that is 'male' for 'brother' and 'female' for 'sister'. The example above shows that different cultures may focus on different things (Larson, 1984: 137). In Indonesian, family relation pays more attention to seniority, and tends to ignore gender identification. On the other hand, in English, words to describe family relation is focused more on the gender. Learning from the example, it can be assumed that loss and gain of meaning in translation is inevitable.

According to Munday, loss and gain of meaning should be considered a means of making decisions when "a 'sacrifice' has to be made by a translator" (2001: 27). Of course, what Munday means by 'sacrifice' here would

be decisions made by translators to select from the available expressions in the TL that contain the closest meaning to substitute the SL item. Referring to Nida and Taber's concept of 'the closest natural equivalent' and Bassnett's concept of loss and gain of meaning, it can be concluded that a one-to-one equivalent of an SL item in the TL is not always available, especially when the expressions translated are culture-bound. The absence of the one-to-one equivalent in the TL may lead to the necessity for translators to apply certain procedures to overcome such problems, which Munday refers as 'sacrifice' that translators have to make.

Translation Methods and Translation Procedures

According to Newmark, translation methods deal with how an SL text is translated into a TL. The scope is the whole texts (1988: 81). Translation methods range from word-for-word translation, which is generally out of context, because every word is translated individually without looking at how each word is related with the others in certain context, up to adaptation in which translators are allowed to reinterpret the SL text and adapt it into the TL language and culture. In the adaptation of a literary work, for example, what remains in the translated text is only the plot. The method that is commonly acceptable for TL readers and could still preserve the SL message is communicative translation (Newmark, 1988: 45 - 47).

The application of translation methods requires certain procedures. What Newmark means by procedures is how the words, the phrases, and sentences in an SL text are translated. The basic procedure is, of course, literal translation (Newmark, 1988: 68 - 69). Unfortunately, such procedures cannot always be applied considering that there are expressions which are culture-bound and must be handled within the context of cultural differences. Among many procedures mentioned by Newmark, synonymy is a translation procedure that is commonly used (Newmark, 1988: 84).

Synonymy as a Translation Procedure

Newmark uses "the word 'synonym' in the sense of a near TL equivalent to an SL word in a context, where a precise equivalent may or may not exist" (1988: 84). Further, Newmark also states that "a synonym is only appropriate where literal translation is not possible" (1988: 84). In Indonesian, for example, the word '*teman*' could generally be defined as someone who is related to someone else, but has no family relationship. When this word is translated literally into 'friend' in English, the meaning becomes more specific, that is, a person who is not related, whom someone knows and likes well (Hornby, 1980: 345). The component of meaning 'someone knows and likes well' may cause a non-equivalent translation when the Indonesian sentence says '*Dia adalah teman sekelasku yang paling kubenci*'. Literally, the English translation would be 'He is a friend in my class that I hate the most'. Here, a contradiction occurs between the meaning of 'friend' and the meaning of 'that I hate the most'. To avoid such a problem, the word 'mate' as a synonym of 'friend' can be used. So '*teman sekelasku*' in that context will be more appropriate when it is translated into 'my classmate' because the word 'classmate' only refers to 'a member of the same class' (Hornby, 1980: 151) without regarding the person's personal relationship with another. The case can also be applied to the word 'counterpart' as the translation of '*teman sejawat*', that is a person who holds a position or performs a function that corresponds to the position or the function of another person in another place. A more idiomatic Indonesian expression '*teman hidup*' closely means 'spouse' rather than 'a friend whom some share his/her life with'. In short, it can be said that translating by using synonymy can be achieved by observing the context of the text to find the closest equivalence.

Synonymy in translation may also mean using either a more general or a more specific expression in the translation (Owji, 2013). Owji's statement is in line with Larson's statement on different focuses in different cultures. Larson elaborates that a culture may focus on agriculture, which can be seen in the richness of vocabulary related to that, while

another culture may focus more on technology, which is reflected in the availability of words related to technology, with more subtle meaning distinction (Larson, 1984: 138). The word 'rice', for example, can be translated into Indonesian as '*gabah*', '*beras*', or '*nasi*'. In this example, it can be said that 'rice' is a more general expression which refers to different stages in rice production. However, in Indonesian, various expressions are used to describe each stage of rice product. Referring to Larson, this shows that rice is an important focus in Indonesian culture. '*Gabah*' is 'harvested rice' which is dried already, but still 'unhusked', '*beras*' is 'rice' which is already 'husked' and ready to cook, while '*nasi*' refers to 'rice' which is 'cooked'. To avoid generalization in translation, as well as to approach the closest equivalent in translation, translators would not simply translate those different terms into just 'rice'. Instead, they commonly add some words to make the meaning of the word 'rice' more specific. Thus, '*gabah*' would probably be translated into 'unhusked rice', '*beras*' into 'uncooked rice', and '*nasi*' into 'cooked rice'.

Besides translating into a more general or specific TL expression, the translation procedure that involves synonymy can also be observed in the translation of the word 'bathroom' into '*kamar mandi*'. Basically, 'bathroom' and '*kamar mandi*' share basic components of meaning related to their function, which is 'a place to clean one's body with water'. However, when observed more closely, a bathroom provides a tub filled with water in which someone can put himself/herself completely in the water (Hornby, 1980: 66). On the other hand, '*kamar mandi*' is not equipped with a tub where someone can put himself/herself in it because, in Indonesian, '*mandi*' is an activity of cleaning the body with water by splashing it on the body (KBBI, 2011: 871) that implies the presence of water container from which someone would take water to splash one his/her body with a tool like a water dipper. Thus, from this example it can be seen that the translation applies partial synonymy (Quine, 1951 in Shiyab, 2007) in which '*kamar mandi*' and 'bathroom' share the necessary components of meaning, which is a

place to wash the body, in order to maintain the closeness of message transferred from the SL to the TL.

Another example is the word 'dinner' and its common Indonesian translation, '*makan malam*'. 'Dinner' is usually defined as the main meal of the day eaten at midday or in the evening (Hornby, 1980: 242). This definition implies two things. First, dinner is not always eaten in the evening. Second, the other meals eaten in the same day (breakfast and lunch) are not main meals. When such a concept is compared to the Indonesian concept of '*makan malam*'. It can be immediately seen that '*makan malam*' is not the literal translation of 'dinner'. In Indonesian, '*makan malam*' is a phrase consisting a noun head '*makan*', which means 'putting food into the mouth to chew, and then swallow' (KBBI, 2011: 860), modified by the word '*malam*', which means 'evening'. The second word in the phrase indicates the time of having meal. It means that '*makan malam*' is never eaten at the other times in the same day. When the meal is eaten in the morning, it is called '*makan pagi*'. When eaten in the afternoon, it is called '*makan siang*'. The phrase '*makan malam*' implies the meaning that Indonesian people do not categorize the meal they eat based on whether or not it is main or light. Indonesian people are accustomed to having three main meals eaten three times a day (in the morning, afternoon, and evening). From this explanation, it can be concluded that 'dinner' is not the literal translation of '*makan malam*' because the semantic property of main meal is not shared. So, it can be said that this is another example of the application of partial synonymy.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, some conclusions can be drawn. First, not all SL items can be literally translated into a TL. When literal translation cannot be employed, certain methods must be applied. The method applied, then, requires certain procedures. Among many translation procedures available, synonymy is an immediate choice.

Synonymy is commonly employed by observing the semantic properties shared by

the SL and TL items. Since synonymy is used when no literal translation can be found, the type of synonymy which is well recognized in this procedure is partial synonymy in which the translation is focused on the basic meaning shared by both the SL and TL items. To decide what TL synonym is appropriate to transfer an SL message, the context of the message must be observed.

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