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**Students' Difficulties in Translating Academic Essay: Beginning Translators' Perspectives**  
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**Abstract**

Translators play an important role in delivering the meaning written in the source language to the target language. This should be done without changing the intended purpose of the source text. It is generally accepted that translation students often produce an inadequate translation in the process of translation training at university. Students tend to translate word for word or often mistranslate a source text meaning into the target text. This study aims to investigate the factors that influence the quality of translation, particularly in translating academic essay. The data of this study were obtained by the qualitative method by interviewing beginning translator students. Four questions were designed and given to students in order to find out the point of view of the participants in terms of the difficulties they encounter when translating academic essay. The finding revealed that lack of translation knowledge is among the factors contributing to the quality of their translation.

**Keywords:** Translation difficulties, students, perceptions, academic essays.

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**INTRODUCTION**

There are two tendencies that students do before translating a text from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Firstly, students are generally translating a text from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) without having to read the whole text in the beginning, whereas the teacher has asked students to read the whole text until students comprehend the content of the source language text before they translate it into target-language text. Secondly, most students are translating text from source language (SL) to the target language (TL) word for word, not sense by sense. The word for word translation means the translators are only translating a text by interpreting the word literally without even understanding the context of the text. Meanwhile, sense by sense translation means that the translators are translating a text based on what the text actually means, so that the translators attempt to comprehend the text by reading to the whole text first until they really understand the written ideas from the source language text, and then they translate a text from source language to the target language. Hence, students of translation's tendency in translating a text word for word lead to the result of translation where their translated-work cannot be understood by others who read on its text, based on my experience when I asked other students to read the translated text of student of translation class who had those tendencies in translating a text. Unless themselves who translated that text.

In the curriculum of the English Department of Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, there is an academic writing subject called Writing for Academic Purposes. Writing for Academic Purposes aims to train students' critical thinking; hence, students are able to construct ideas supported by current studies evidence logically. In addition, none of the English Department students have ever conducted the quality of essay translation so far. Based on the previous preliminary observation that has been done by the researchers, most students prefer to conduct other components of writing, such as collocation and grammatical error on students' writing essay. Additionally, most students of English Department conduct the study of writing problems because they think that there are still many mistakes that students do in the writing class.

As with any other English skills, translation is one of the English skills which deal with problems either the problem coming from translators' competence, or from the text that will be translated. Further, most translation problems deal with lexical choice, syntactic, and the textual means [1]. Also, the

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*by* Rifal Hasan, sri Widyarti Ali, Novriyanto Napu\*

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### Abstract

Translators play an important role in delivering the meaning written in the source language to the target language. This should be done without changing the intended purpose of the source text. It is generally accepted that translation students often produce an inadequate translation in the process of translation training at university. Students tend to translate word for word or often mistranslate a source text meaning into the target text. This study aims to investigate the factors that influence the quality of translation, particularly in translating academic essay. The data of this study were obtained by the qualitative method by interviewing beginning translator students. Four questions were designed and given to students in order to find out the point of view of the participants in terms of the difficulties they encounter when translating academic essay. The finding revealed that lack of translation knowledge is among the factors contributing to the quality of their translation.

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### INTRODUCTION

There are two tendencies that students do before translating a text from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Firstly, students are generally translating a text from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) without having to read the whole text in the beginning, whereas the teacher has asked students to read the whole text until students comprehend the content of the source language text before they translate it into target language text. Secondly, most students are translating text from source language (SL) to the target language (TL) word for word, not sense by sense. The word for word translation means the translators are only translating a text by interpreting the word literally without even understanding the context of the text. Meanwhile, sense by sense translation means that the translators are translating a text based on what the text actually means, so that the translators attempt to comprehend the text by reading to the whole text first until they really understand the written idea from the source language text, and then they translate a text from source language to the target language. Hence, students of translation's tendency in translating a text word for word lead to the result of translation where their translated-work cannot be understood by others who read on its text, based on my experience when I asked other students to read the

translated text of student of translation class who had those tendencies in translating a text. Unless themselves who translated that text.

In the curriculum of the English Department of Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, there is an academic writing subject called Writing for Academic Purposes. Writing for Academic Purposes aims to train students' critical thinking; hence, students are able to construct ideas supported by current studies evidence logically. In addition, none of the English Department students have ever conducted the quality of essay translation so far. Based on the previous preliminary observation that has been done by the researchers, most students prefer to conduct other components of writing, such as collocation and grammatical error on students' writing essay. Additionally, most students of English Department conduct the study of writing problems because they think that there are still many mistakes that students do in the writing class.

As with any other English skills, translation is one of the English skills which deal with problems either the problem coming from translators' competence, or from the text that will be translated. Further, most translation problems deal with lexical choice, syntactic, and the textual means [1]. Also, the

lexical choice is the word choices that translators considering when they will translate a text from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). While syntactic is the problem which dealing with the grammatical structure of the source language text and target language text. Then, textual means is the intention or the purpose of the source language text.

Based on the researcher's preliminary observation, not all students understand English as well. Hence they are looking for the translation of the English article where have been translated into their mother language, for instance, English article which has been translated into Indonesia. Moreover, not all translators are capable of translating academic transcripts because they might be dealing with several issues in translating it [2]. Firstly, translators' competence might be not suitable in translating academic transcript where their previous knowledge is not suitable to the discourse that is being talked in the essay. For instance, translators, whose educational background from English studies is asked to translate a text about electrical engineering where most of the terms are not familiar with the translators. As a result, several words or terminologies in the translated text might confuse the reader in the target text, especially when the readers from the target text are those who are studying electrical science.

Secondly, other problems that might be faced by translators are the use of words in translating the academic transcript because translators supposed to use the proper words which are acknowledged in the academic world [2]. For instance, the words in the academic word list which are commonly used in academic terms. Other problems also are dealing with the grammatical rules where the grammatical rules of the source language are different to the target language as well, for instance in Indonesia SL: *saya sudah makan* in TL English will be: I have eaten. Additionally, have in this case as the simple perfect tense which indicates that the action has been done by someone. In the Indonesian language, there are no such specific rules in describing the action as English has.

This seeks to address the following questions "What are the causal factors of translation problems found in students' academic essays translation?"

## PROCEDURES OF STUDY

This study was carried out by using a qualitative method. Interview is a sort of activity which has particular purposes which are done by interviewer and interviewee [3]. Additionally, the sort of interview that will be used in this research is a structured interview. A structured interview is the kind of interview where the questions are planned and created for particular purposes [4]. The advantages of using this approach are all respondents will have opportunity to answer the same questions where this technique will make the responses of participants more accurately,

because the reason of applying this approach is to investigate the perspectives of participants towards the issue or phenomenon are being discussed in the study. Accordingly, the same questions are asked to see participants' different views on the same issue.

Equally important, this study used the open-ended interview because the researcher needed deep responses from the respondents in order to comprehend the translation problems phenomenon from their different perspectives deeply. Open-ended interview is better to be applied in research due to the need of finding wide general and deep information about the phenomenon are being discussed, and also this approach is better to be conducted face to face for more accurate and trusted information could be obtained [4].

Furthermore, this technique conducted after students' translation results were collected. Because of this, they could respond to the questions based on what they had experienced during translating academic essays from source language Indonesia into target language English. Therefore, by following the procedures, it was easier for the researchers to elaborate on both techniques of collecting data, documentation, and interview. In addition, there were four questions that had been asked to students, which focused on eliciting the point of view of the participants.

### Here were the following questions

- What do you think about translation? Is it difficult or easy? Please explain
- Are there any words or sentences that you do not understand in the text?
- What obstacles did you find when you were translating comparison/contrast and argumentative texts?
- Do you understand both contexts of the text given?

The questions above were intended to find out more information and supporting data about the approach, method, and some indicators of translation problems. Question number 1 was purposed to get to know the general opinion from the participants about the translation. Question number 2 was related to the indicator of translation problem which intended to investigate students of translation class' tendencies in translating a text when they got several words and sentences that they were not really familiar with or they did not understand as what it was written. Question number 3 was intended to figure out students' obstacles when they were translating academic essay texts. Afterward, question number 4 purposed to investigate whether the participants understood the intended meaning of the source language text (comparison and contrast and argumentative essay given).

In analyzing the interview data, the researcher used a content analysis method examine the phenomenon that is being discussed in the researcher'

study. The first step was listening to the recording of the participants' audio recording 4 out their tendencies in translating an academic essay from source language Indonesia into target language English carefully for the accurate analysis. In deriving the codes, the researcher was carefully highlighting some words and sentences in the audio recording that showed students of translation class' tendencies in translating an academic essay from source language Indonesia into target language English. The next step was making notes about participants' impressions, thoughts, and initial analysis. Next, codes were sorted into categories based on how different codes were related and linked. After that, the researcher drew the conclusion based on the opinion of the participants about translations, and participants' opinion and comments about translation had been elaborated with their translate documents for the more accurate analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The initial findings of the translation problems in the academic essays revealed that students produced a sheer amount of linguistic problems ranging from grammatical problems, word-choices, rhetorical, and pragmatic problems. The data from the interview found that students have several difficulties when dealing with translation work of academic texts. These difficulties hindered them in producing an adequate translation. The causal factors which would be mentioned below had been categorized based on the five translation students' responses.

### *Limited knowledge of translation*

It was not wondering if most of the translation students as the participants of this research study dealt with translation problems which had been mentioned previously, because most of them did not really understand about the science of translation, such as translation approach, method and translation techniques in translating some specific texts which mostly dealing with language of specific fields. It could be concluded by some responses referred to the participants' limited knowledge of translation science.

- "It is difficult because, in translation, there is so many knowledge that you need to comprehend."
- "Translation sometimes it is easy, but sometimes it is also difficult."
- "I think translation is difficult."
- "I think translation is difficult."

Based on the opinions that had been stated by the whole participants above, it can be inferred that the translation activity is one of the challenging activities because not everyone can easily do it. In addition, referring to the word "difficult" used by the whole participants in describing translation activity indicated that the participants did not really understand 1) v to precisely translate the academic essays from source language Indonesia into target language English, because they acknowledged that as translator, they need

to comprehend translation science like what approach and technique should be used in translating such a technical language found in the source language text, hence the words and certain phrases in the source language text can be understood when it comes to the target language English. Further, the problems like choosing incorrect word choice in translating the Indonesian source language text to the target language English was indicated by the word "knowledge" as response where the participants of this study admitted that they needed to learn more about translation. This is because translation insight is 3) needed when someone wants to properly translate a text from the source language to the target language.

However, the limited knowledge of translation science could be seen by how the whole participants of this research study in translating the rhetorical words and sentences found both in the argumentative and comparison and contrast essay. In addition, the participants of this study translated the rhetorical words and sentences found in the Indonesian source language into target language English literally. Hence the failure of understanding the contextual meaning of the source text caused the translators 6) chose the irrelevant words in describing the ideas from source language Indonesia to the target language English. As a result, the target readers also would not understand what the translators did due to the failure in transferring ideas properly into the target language. Additionally, limited translation knowledge will cause translation problems such as the failure of translating the technical language or certain language used in the source language text.

The translators need to have such a proper insight about translating the academic essay [5]. In translating the academic transcript, the translators need the knowledge about specific terminologies, academic jargons, and technical language which are commonly used in translating the text from source language to the target language.

To sum up, the limited knowledge of translation science became 1) one of the causal factors for the translation students as the participants of this research study in translating both argumentative and comparison and contrast from source language Indonesia into target language English. In addition, to avoid the translation problems, such as the problems in translating rhetorical words and sentences found in the argumentative and comparison and contrast, the participants needs to learn how to 1) translated the specific words such as rhetorical language from source language to the target language, hence the real purposes or messages are written in the source language can be conveyed into target language.

### *The failure of understanding the contextual meaning in the source text*

It could not be denied that the aim of the translation activity is conveying or transferring ideas from the source language into target language. However, the whole of the participants in this study mostly did not transfer the ideas written in the Indonesian source language into target language English because they failed in understanding the contextual meaning in the source language text so that they chose the words or phrases that did not represent the real message of the source language text. The ideas mentioned can be seen by some of their responses below

- “There are some sentences that will be ambiguity if I translate it into target language” (Quoted by Participant 1)
- “It is about language style, homestyle language. For instance, the word in Indonesia I find like “*Kementrian Pariwisata Indonesia*” but I cannot find the equivalence translation in English the word I do not understand” (Quoted by Participant 3)
- “Perhaps new phrases that I did not know like perhaps just the context of the text itself” (Quoted by Participant 4)

Referring the whole responses stated, it is important for all translators to fully understand the all the words and phrases written in the source language text so that they are able to transfer the real messages or ideas written in the source language Indonesian into target language English. However, there were several words and phrases like the rhetorical expression in the source language text was not translated properly, so that the real messages written in the source language text was not conveyed.

The claim was indicated by the term “ambiguity” where sometimes the participant was confused in translating the words or phrases that she never heard previously. In addition, the term “homestyle language” and “phrases” as responses indicated that the participant had the difficulties in terms of translating several particular words or phrases in the source language text, hence it was not wondering if some ideas written in the source language were not conveyed into target language because the participant did not really understand the contextual meaning written in the source language text such as rhetorical expression.

In addition, it is crucial for the translator to understand the intended meaning of the source text so that the translator will easily transfer the ideas from the source language to the target language by choosing the appropriate words and phrases to deliver the ideas [6]. However, the participants of this study did not fully understand the intended meaning of the Indonesian

source-language text so that some several words and phrases were not transferred to the target text.

### *Lack of vocabulary*

One of the most crucial factors which caused the translation problems such as, word-choice problems, rhetorical problems, and pragmatic problems was the limited amount of vocabularies that translation students had in translating both argumentative and comparison and contrast essay. The ideas admitted can be detected by these responses below

- “There are many vocabularies that I do not know” (Quoted by participant 2)
- “But I cannot find the equivalence of some English words that I do not understand” (Quoted by participant 3)
- “To be honest, I did not get the meaning of some words” (Quoted by participant 5)

By the responses above, knowing and understanding how the vocabularies are used in the certain context is very crucial. In addition, considering the sentences “ I don’t know”, “I do not understand”, and “ i did not get the meaning” as the participants responses towards the terms “vocabularies”, “equivalence”, and “meaning” indicated all the participants of this study having the limited amount of vocabularies, so that they did not fully successfully transfer the ideas written in the source language Indonesia into target language English. However, it is essential for the translators to have thousand amount of vocabularies in their mind, and not only having a lot of vocabularies in their mind, but also the translators need to understand each vocabulary [6]. The the understanding of vocabulary would be helpful for the translators in terms of translating a text from source language to the target language, so that the translators can avoid the word-choices and pragmatic.

Also, the term “equivalence” specifically indicated that sometimes the participants of this study did not know precisely the appropriate word choices in translating the specific words or phrases written in the source language text into the target language.

### *Grammar usage*

The differences between the grammatical structure of the Indonesian language and English language affected the translation students as the participants of this study in translating both argumentative and comparison and contrast essay in terms of adjusting the grammatical structure of the Indonesian source language text into target language English, so that translation process would not change the real messages written in the source language text. Also, the inability of using proper English grammar in translating the texts from the Indonesian source language into target language English affected the meaning written in the Indonesian source language. The

facts written above can be concluded by referring to these participants' responses below

- "The obstacles are just like lacking vocabularies and the grammar comprehension" (Quoted by participant 2)
- "Sometimes I hesitate of choosing which grammatical form should be used" (Quoted by participant 3)
- "I am also not good at grammar because until now I still learning grammar" (Quoted by participant 5)

It is undeniable that the grammatical structure of the Indonesian language was totally different from the English language, so that it was reasonable if several participants of this study dealt with the grammatical issue in translating both argumentative and comparison and contrast essay which caused to the pragmatic problems, for instance, some participants of this study translated the past event into present tense, whereas the sentences needed to be constructed into past tense to make the sentences more understandable. Also, by the failure of narrating the past ideas into present form caused the target readers in misunderstanding the ideas written in the source language text.

## CONCLUSION

This study is aimed to investigate the students the causal factors of the translation issues as mentioned above. Participants as the translators did not have enough insight in terms of translating academic essay, so that they sometimes did not understand what method and approach should be used in translating.

As a result, due to the translation students' lack of knowledge of the translation science, it caused them difficult to choose the appropriate words or phrases in the process of translating academic essays. These difficulties have affected the students in constructing sentences with proper English grammar in the target text. Also, they found it was difficult to fully understand the context given written in the source language text. Hence they sometimes failed in transferring the ideas from the source language into a target language that caused the intended meaning of the source text was not conveyed in the target text.

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# Students' Difficulties in Translating Academic Essay: Beginning Translators' Perspectives

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