Persidangan Penterjemahan Antarabangsa ke-15 (PPA-15)
15th International Conference on Translation (ICT-15)
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Persatuan Penterjemah Malaysia
Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia
Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
Perbadanan Kota Buku

2015
Diterbitkan bersama oleh / Co-published by
Persatuan Penterjemah Malaysia / Malaysian Translators Association
Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka / Institute of Language and Literature
Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia / Malaysian Institute of Translation & Books
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Cetakan Pertama 2015 / First print 2015

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia / The National Library of Malaysia
Data Pengkatalogan-dalam-Penerbitan / Cataloging in Publication Program
Sinergi Komuniti Terjemahan: Akademia, Industri dan Amalan Profesional / Synergizing
the Translation Community: Academia, Industry and Professional Practice
Editor / Editors: Haslina Haroon, Hasuria Che Omar, Goh Sang Seong, Norizah Ardi


1. Translating and Interpreting. I. Haslina Haroon II. Hasuria Che Omar III. Goh Sang Seong IV. Norizah Ardi
418.02

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Muka Taip Tekst / Type Face: Times New Roman

Saiz Taip Tekst / Font Size: 11/14

Dicetak oleh / Printed by:

BS Print (M) Sdn. Bhd.
No.10, Jalan Indrahana 1,
Off Jalan Kuchai Lama,
58100 Kuala Lumpur.
MEANING EQUIVALENCE IN TRANSLATION OF PROverbs

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to find out meaning equivalence proposed by Larson (1984) in the translation of proverbs from Bahasa Indonesia into English by analysing kinds of shift (Cafford, 1965) applied and assessing accuracy (Nababan, 2012). The data analysed is 72 Toba Batak proverbs written in Bahasa Indonesia and their translations in English. The source of data is 'Batak Toba Karakter Keaftan Indonesia' book written by Mangala Pekpahan. The method used in this research is content analysis with qualitative descriptive model. The result of the research shows that from 72 proverbs analysed, structure shifts are applied on 23 proverbs (31.94%), unit shifts are applied on 9 proverbs (12.50%), and other translation procedures are applied on 40 proverbs (55.56%). The structure shifts can be seen on the
changing of the position of Noun Phrase (NP), Verbal Phrase (VP), Adjective Phrase (AP), Adverbial Phrase (AdvP), and Adjunct while the unit shifts can be seen on the changing of clause into sentence and sentence into clause. Furthermore, the shifts applied on the translation of proverbs to obtain meaning equivalence gives high level of accuracy at 93.75%.

**Keywords:** proverbs, translation, shifts, meaning equivalence, accuracy.

**INTRODUCTION**

Language as a means of communication contains message or meaning that can affect people through words, phrases, clauses and sentences to convey their thought, express their feeling, share the information, etc. According to Greenberg (1957:1), language is a system of signals conforming to the rules which constitute its grammar/a set of culturally transmitted behaviour patterns shared by a group of individuals. It means that language carries culture of a group of people as well as its culturally specific features when they communicate each other. As Newmark (1988:94) stated, “Culture is the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression”. It implies that the culture of a community can be reflected through language and both cannot be separated each other.

One of cultural reflections through language is a proverb. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English (1987:673), a proverb is a popular short saying, with words of advice or warning. It means that a proverb contains a message or meaning which can be values, norms, rules, principles, etc. A proverb is one of the local wisdoms which is very important not only for the Toba Batak community but also for other communities. Local wisdom here means remembering the past, understanding the present and preparing the future (Sibarani 2012:1). The past traditions are impossible to be represented exactly as present since they have transformed or even been “extinct”, however, their values and norms can be actualized now and in the future.

A proverb is required in a community as a guideline for people to behave in their life, especially to build the characters of young generations. However, the message or meaning on a proverb cannot be conveyed or understood directly. There must be good understanding and knowledge, especially when it is translated from one language to another. As House (1977:25) states, “The most important task for translation lies in the preservation of ‘meaning’ across two different languages.”
Larson (1984) emphasized the importance of meaning in translation by classifying two types of translation as form-based and meaning-based translation. Form-based translation attempts to follow the form of Source Language (SL) which is known as literal translation while meaning-based translation makes every effort to communicate the meaning of the SL text in the natural forms of the receptor language. Such translation is called idiomatic translation. Communicating the meaning here means a correspondence between the SL and TL or meaning equivalence. As Catford (1965:21) points out, "The central problem of translation-practice is that of finding TL equivalents. A central task of translation theory is that of defining the nature and conditions of translation equivalence."

It means that meaning equivalence becomes the main aim in translation or the nucleus of translation. Certainly, a translator always tries to produce a meaning-based translation or idiomatic translation with target text-oriented. However, finding meaning equivalence in translation is not an easy work since each language is exclusive, the rules and conventions are used only for its own community that is its native speaker (Machali, 2009:42). The concept in the source language cannot be understood easily by the native of other language. In this case, role of a translator is required to transfer the meaning from the source language to the target language. So, how can a translator achieve meaning equivalence in translation?

Certainly, a translator must be able to apply the appropriate procedures to get the meaning equivalence as one aspect to determine the accuracy of a translation. One of translation procedures which can be applied to get meaning equivalence in translation is transposition or shift. According to Catford (1965:73), transposition is a shift or changing; a procedure of translation that involves the grammatical form changing from the source’s language (SL) to the receptor’s language (TL). Catford (1978:73) states that by shift we mean the departure from formal correspondence in the process of going from the source language to the target language. Further, he states that basically, in shift of translation, or transposition he says, it is only the form that is changed. In addition, he argues the translation shift is done to get the natural equivalent of the source text message into the target text (1978:76).

Catford (1965) divides the shift in translation into two major types, level/rank shift and category shift. Level/rank shift refers to a source language item at one linguistic level that has a target language translation equivalent at a different level. In other words, it is simply a shift from grammar to lexis. Category shift refers to departures from formal correspondence in translation.
What is meant by formal correspondence is any grammatical category in the target language which can be said to occupy the same position in the system of the target language as the given source language category in the source language system. The category shift is divided again into structure shifts, class shifts, unit shift, and intra-system shifts. Structure shift is the changing of words sequence in a sentence. Class shift occurs when the equivalent translation of a source language item is a member of a different class from the original item. Unit shift is the changes of rank; that is, departures from formal correspondence in which the translation equivalent of a unit at one rank in the source language is a unit at a different rank in the target language. Intra-system shift refers to the shifts that occurs internally, within the system; that is for those cases where the source and the target language possess systems which approximately correspond formally as to their constitution, but when translation involves selection of a non-corresponding term in the target language system.

Shifts applied to get meaning equivalence in translation also affects the quality of translation. According to House (2015:6), equivalence is both a core concept in translation theory, and the conceptual basis of translation quality assessment. Nababan, et.al.(2012) argues that translation quality covers three aspects, they are accuracy, acceptability, and readability. The accuracy of a translation refers to whether the source text is equivalent with the target text or not (Nababan, 2012:44). Acceptability refers to whether a translation has been appropriate with the existing rules, norms, cultures or not. both at micro-level and macro-level (Nababan, 2012:44-45) and readability refers to whether the meaning of a translated text can be understood or not (Larson, 1984: 499). However, this research only focuses on the accuracy level of the translation of proverbs by applying accuracy rating instrument proposed by Nababan (2012). According to Nababan (2012:50), high level of accuracy can be seen from distortion of meaning occurs on translation of meaning of word, technical term, phrase, clause, sentence or text of source language. The absence of distortions of meaning indicates that a translated text has high level of accuracy. On the contrary, the presence of more distortions in a translated text shows that it has low level of accuracy.

Regarding to the explanations above, it is challenging to investigate and conduct a research closely related to shifts as one of translation procedures applied in translation of proverbs from Bahasa Indonesia into English in order to get meaning equivalence and the effect of shifts on the accuracy level on the translation of proverbs in Batak Toba Karakter Keairfan Indonesia book.
RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is content analysis with qualitative descriptive model. To carry out the research, the original book *Batak Toba Karakter Kearifan Indonesia* written by Mangala Pakpahan, a Batakinese writer, published in 2008 by PT. Erlangga, Jakarta, was selected as source of data. The main data of this research is 72 proverbs at sentence level. This data is used to find out the types of shift applied in the translation of proverbs from Bahasa Indonesia into English based on the theory of shifts proposed by Catford (1965). The additional data is taken from one rater who is qualified in translation and competent in both languages, Bahasa Indonesia (ST) and English (TT). She also knows the Toba Batak culture well. The additional data is used in order to reveal the effect of shifts on the accuracy level of the translation of proverbs in *Batak Toba Karakter Kearifan Indonesia* book by applying Nababan’s model (2012).

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Shifts appear to be one of the most important translation procedures in order to achieve meaning equivalence in translation, especially in the translation of proverbs. Syntactic analysis on Noun Phrase (NP), Verbal Phrase (VP), Adjective Phrase (AP), Adverbial Phrase (AdvP), etc. was applied to find types of shifts applied in the translation of proverbs. It is found that from the 72 proverbs analysed, structure shifts are applied on 23 proverbs (31.94%), unit shifts are applied on 9 proverbs (12.50%), and other translation procedures are applied on 40 proverbs (55.56%). The structure shifts can be seen on the changing of the position of Noun Phrase (NP), Verbal Phrase (VP), Adjective Phrase (AP), Adverbial Phrase (AdvP), and Adjunct while the unit shifts can be seen on the changing of clause into sentence and sentence into clause. Furthermore, the shifts applied on translation of proverbs to achieve meaning equivalence gives high level of accuracy that is 93.75% as shown in the following examples:

1. **ST**: *Biar menderita asal hanya dalam kehidupan*
   
   VP  
   AdvP

   **TT**: *We may suffer, but only in this life.*
   
   NP  VP  Adjunct  AdvP

   In (1) structure shift and unit shift are applied in order to get meaning equivalence in translation of the proverb. In the ST, the structure of sentence is VP + AdvP, but in the TT the structure changes into NP + VP + Adjunct
+ AdvP. From both structures, ST and TT, it can be seen that there is the addition of NP in TT to make the meaning clearer and directly changes its structure. In addition, in ST unit of sentence is a clause as independent clause as well as a sentence *Biar menderita asal hanya dalam kehidupan*, but in the TT the sentence consists of two clauses, they are “We may suffer” as independent sentence or main clause and “but only in this life” as a dependent clause or subordinate clause. In other word, there is a change from a simple sentence into a compound sentence. Although the structure and the unit of sentence change, the meaning of the proverb, both in the ST and the TT can be understood easily.

2. ST : *Pentuh pondok yang besar, pondok yang kecil pun herlimgah.*
   
   TT : *A large house has abundance, A small house too has abundance.*

In (2), the proverb in the ST is a sentence which consists of two clauses, but in the TT the proverb consists of two sentences in which each sentence in the TT can represent the meaning of each clause in the ST. Since the unit of the proverb changes, its structure also changes. In ST, the structure of first clause is AP+NP changes into first sentence in the TT with its structure NP+VP+NP and also the structure of second clause in TT which consists of NP+VP changes into second sentence in TT with its structure NP+VP+NP. The structure and unit shifts applied also can represent the message in the ST into the TT.

3. ST : *Jika telah berterus terang, risiko buruk akan hilang.*
   
   TT : *Honesty reduces risk. Frankness reduces risk.*

The shifts applied in (3) are almost similar with (2). In (3), the proverb in the ST is a sentence which consists of two clauses, but in the TT the proverb consists of two sentences in which each sentence in the TT also can convey the message of each clause in the ST. The unit shift applied on the translation of the proverb also affects the structure of the TT. In the ST, the structure of first clause is Adjunct+VP changes into first sentence in TT with its structure NP+VP+NP and also the structure of second clause in TT which consists of NP+VP changes into second sentence in TT with its structure NP+VP+NP. The shifts applied in translation of that proverb even makes the meaning in the TT clearer and simpler.
Meaning Equivalence in Translation of Proverbs

4. ST: Jika nasihat telah diberikan, jangan menyesal kemudian.
   Adjunct NP VP (passive) VP
   TT: Do not regret after advice has been received.
       VP Adjunct NP VP (passive)

In (4), the proverb in the ST is in one sentence which consists of two clauses; Jika nasihat telah diberikan as dependent clause or subordinate clause and jangan menyesal kemudian as independent clause or main clause. Structure shift is applied when it is translated into the TT. In the ST, the main clause jangan menyesal kemudian is written after the subordinate clause Jika nasihat telah diberikan. It changes when it is translated into the TT “Do not regret after advice has been received”, which is written before the subordinate clause and indicated by the changing of adjunct jika (if) in the ST into “after”. Although the structure changes, the meaning of the proverb, both in ST and TT is equivalent.

The shifts applied on the translation of proverbs can also result in non-equivalence, as in the following example:

5. ST: Air mengalir sesukanya, pematang sawah menjadi runtuh.
   NP VP NP VP
   TT: Meandering streams will not sustain a rice padi
       NP VP NP

In (5) the proverb in ST is a sentence which consists of two clauses; Air mengalir sesukanya and pematang sawah menjadi runtuh. These two clauses then are joined when they are translated into TT to become one sentence. It changes the structure of the proverbs, both in ST and TT. However, the shift applied makes the meaning of the proverbs in target text unclear especially the use of the word “a rice padi”, “Padi” is not an English word and “rice” is an uncountable noun and thus the article “a” cannot be added before it. It is better to change it with a more appropriate word and put an adjective before the noun phrase to make the translated proverb clearer.

CONCLUSION

A proverb is one of the local wisdoms which is very important not only in the Toba Batak community but also other communities in the world. It carries meanings which can strengthen the identity and character of people, especially the young generation. However, it is being forgotten and neglected. Therefore, it is very important to reintroduce them and make them alive again. One of
the ways to do this is through translation. Translating proverbs is not easy because proverbs carry and convey cultural values. Finding the equivalence is the most problematic stage of translation. Therefore, a translator must be able to apply appropriate translation procedures in order to achieve meaning equivalence. Shifts appear to be one of the most appropriate procedures in translating cultural text. In this study, it was shown that the shifts applied in the translation of proverbs in order to achieve meaning equivalence gives high level of accuracy in terms of translation quality.

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