

LITERALNESS IN TRANSLATING TEXTS FROM ENGLISH INTO INDONESIAN

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Abstract

This article seeks to describe literalness in translating English texts into Indonesian. The foci of literalness observed in this study are of word order and of word choice. Data are translations of twelve respondents asked to translate a given English text, which is approximately 500 words in length, into Indonesian. The respondents are senior students of English Department Students of Andalas University. Therefore, there are twelve comparable texts collected. During the translation process, the respondents were given a plenty of time and were also allowed to use any kinds of translation aids such as dictionary, encyclopedia, etc, but disallowed to use machine translation without human editor. The analysis, by making comparison between the English source text (ST) and the twelve translated texts (TT), shows that the respondents tend to apply literal methods or strategies in their translations especially in terms of word order or syntactical constructions, to be more general. These tendencies in general do not necessarily produce inadequate translations, but to some degree, may produce less natural target texts. In addition, the respondents make some considerable literalness somehow leading to inaccuracy in choosing the equivalence for several words/phrases of the source text. The inaccuracy they make occasionally end them up with producing poor translations. The output obtained from this research is worth noting in the effort to improve translation quality when it is used either as an alternative method of foreign language teaching or language testing.

Key words: *translation, literalness, word order, lexical*

A. INTRODUCTION

Language is not only about form. A configuration of sound (of spoken language) which is not comprehended by the hearer conveys not more than a series of meaningless and irregular sound. The same is true for the written language. For sound and writing to be meaningful should follow the rules of language, so-called grammar, in question. The grammar itself has meaning. Needless to say, meaning bridges the symbols of language and reality. With this in mind, language at least can be said as the combination of form and meaning. Both are two sides of the same coin.

Basically, language is learned by understanding its forms and meaning they carry, implicitly or explicitly. To understand a language, one can make the best use of the language that s/he is learning or another language that s/he has mastered. In relation to this, translational activity is one of the ways to figure out and in turn comprehend the meaning of language. In a broader sense, translation indeed has become an indispensable element of human kind life particularly of their communication needs.

If translation involves a language pair, usually called source language (SL) and target language (TL), then the SL can act as the form and the TL as the way to understand the SL

meaning. In fact, translation undertakings enable the learners of language to understand both the SL and TL at the same time. Of course, when dealing with translation, it does not always occur interlingually, but also intralingually (Jakobson in Munday, 2001:5). It is due to the linguistic fact that one meaning can possibly be expressed in many different ways within the same language, let alone with different languages.

Many Indonesians are benefitted when learning a foreign language, English in particular, as they are bilinguals; they already speak a local language or at least Indonesian before they start to learn English. Such situation acclimatizes them to get in touch with translation activity either consciously or unconsciously. If the conscious translation occurs on purpose by the learners and is knowledge-based activity, the unconscious one takes place spontaneously. The latter is in line with what Tifford (in Mogahed, 20121) says that learners of a foreign language do refer to their mother tongue to aid the process of acquisition of L2 or, in other words, they "translate silently". In my opinion, both contribute to the success of learning language.

However, conscious translation had been used as a language teaching method before it was finally stated ineffective. The method is called Grammar-Translation method. Despite being unpopular nowadays, the method cannot be judged to be incompletely futile. In contrast, it still can be employed as one alternative together with other methods.

This article deals with the case of literalness in translation undertaking. Larson (1984) implies a translation is said to be literal if the grammatical constructions (syntax) and literal sense of lexical items of the source language (SL) are preserved (TL), rather than their natural forms in the target language. The domain of syntax focused on here is pertinent with word order. In brief, the foci in this article deal with literalness in terms of construction order and choice of words.

Linguistically, the two forms of literalness can be used as spots to observe the occurrence of literalness. If literal choice of words is directly related to meaning, the literal of syntax has more to do with the structural or grammatical construction. In this study, literal meaning is defined as the dictionary meaning, meaning in isolation, or context-free. It is the meaning that one very likely comes across in the first place when looking up the meaning of a word in a bilingual dictionary. Meanwhile, the syntactic literalness is concentrated on the word order of sentences. However, the extent of the word order here is not confined to 'word order' within phrases, but also 'clause order' within complex sentences.

Syntactic Literalness

Before moving on, comparing particularly the Syntax between English and Indonesian is necessary. However, their comparison will not be given in a thorough way, but merely focus on their word order. Syntax in general covers the discussion of sentences, clauses, and phrases within which topics such as word order, cross-referencing, case marking are included. In this section, I will focus my attention on comparing the word order of Indonesian and English.

English and Indonesian have relatively similar constituent or word order. Both belong to fixed word order category. It means that the constituents in a clause, the phrases, cannot move freely unless the meaning is altered or to give special effects of an 'emphatic or poetic kind' (Crystal, 1987). Therefore, English and Indonesian differ from Latin which has a free word order. For example, a subject or NP can appear essentially anywhere in a sentence, but always marked by a nominative case ending (Kaplan, 1989). The syntactic role of an element in Latin sentence is then recognized by the use of nominative case ending, not by its word order or

position of the elements in relation to the other elements in the sentence. To conclude, order matters in English and Indonesian.

The basic word order of Indonesian sentence is SVO (Subject + Verb + Object) or, to be more plain, S + P (Subject + Predicate). Stack (2005) reports that ‘the basic order of constituents in an Indonesian clause is subject-predicate-object for a transitive verb’. Chung (2006) supports the notion by saying that ‘the neutral word order of word clauses is unquestionably SVO’. However, Chung also argues that Indonesian also has a ‘non-neutral word order of word clauses’ which is called ‘verb initial’. In verb initial pattern, the subject comes after the predicate. Therefore, the sequence is VSO instead of SVO. This argument is related to the fact that Indonesian is part of Austronesian languages in which the word order of the elements in a clause is normally verb initial.

On the other hand, the basic word order (SVO) is also found in English; therefore, it is similar to Indonesian. This is not to ignore that there are many linguistic differences between Indonesian and English such as their morphological and phonological subtlety. In terms of word order of a noun phrase, for example, English differs from Indonesian especially in the case of the position of modifiers.

A thorough study of Indonesian grammar was conducted by James Neil Sneddon in his book entitled *Indonesian: A Comprehensive Grammar*. In relation to word order in clauses in Indonesian, he says:

‘The normal and standard order of constituents in a clause is subject + predicate. In a transitive verbal clause the normal word order is subject + predicate + object. If there are two objects the normal word order is subject + verb + primary object + secondary object. In a passive clause the normal word order is subject + verb + agent. If there is a secondary object this freely precedes or follows the agent. In passive type two the order is subject + agent + verb’. (Sneddon, 1996)

Although there is a possibility that SVO order of Indonesian exists as a result of European languages’ impact on it such as Dutch and English, yet it might be safe to say that contemporary Indonesian has SVO order. In fact, many studies devoted to the topic ‘word order’ basically agree that SVO is the basic word order of Indonesian.

Regarding the fact that Indonesian and English show similarity in case of word order, it is tempting to say that a sentence in Indonesian can be translated into English in the same word order. I mean the presence of the subject, verb, and object elements can exactly occur in the same sequence. Compare the sentence (A) below and its literal rendering in (B):

(A)	<i>They</i>	<i>send</i>	<i>him</i>	<i>money</i>	<i>every month</i>
(B)	<i>Mereka</i>	<i>MeN-kirim-i</i>	<i>Dia</i>	<i>uang</i>	<i>setiap bulan</i>

They functions as the subject, *send* the verb, *him* the object, *money* the second object, and *every year* as the adverbial (adjunct). The same syntactic analysis applies to the Indonesian version. In other words, it is possible to translate the sentence into Indonesian by keeping the sequence of the elements as they are in English.

What I want to highlight is that it is very likely to translate an Indonesian clause into English literally in terms of word order. It means the translators have two options in this case; being literal in that the translators follow the word order of the ST or being free in which the translators defy the word order of the ST. If the former can possibly happen unconsciously, the latter cannot. It means the translators should use their theoretical knowledge in translation, their

preference or personal taste. Teaching translation is expected to alert the students to realize the available options they can make.

Lexical Literalness

The term ‘literal’ can mean various sense. Larson (1984) for example subdivides literal translations into interlinear and modified literal translation. If the first is aimed at reproducing the linguistic features of the source language text, the second allows the translators to modify the order and grammar to gain acceptable sentence structure in the target language. However, as Larson continues, ‘lexical items are translated literally’.

A word can have one meaning or more. When translating, a translator may deal with several choices which are likely to be the correspondences of a single word of the source text. Literal lexical meaning means the meaning which is dictionary-based, in isolation, or context-free; it is the meaning put in the first place before the others in a dictionary. Added to this, word-class can also indicate lexical literalness in that if the word class of a word in the ST is similar to that in the TT.

Methodology

Data are the products of translation of an English authentic text consisting of more or less 500 words in length. The text was copied and pasted from the web *www.economist.com* of November 13, 2009 edition. In general, the text contains information of management as its subject matter.

Twelve senior students of English Department at Andalas University, so-called respondents hereafter, were then asked to translate the (same) text. The respondents were in their third year and had taken two courses of Theory and Practice of Translation consisting of four credits. The respondents were also given sufficient time to translate the text. After completing the translation task, they were asked to submit it by email or softcopy for ease of data mining. As they were twelve respondents, a total of twelve comparable texts (of the same source text) were gathered.

The SL and TL texts are then extracted per sentence, which constitute simple, compound and complex sentences. Each sentence of SL and its twelve comparable counterparts are faced in order (ordering translation)

B. DISCUSSION

Literalness of Word Order

It has to be made clear the sense of word order in this article is not confined to ‘word’ order. I mean it is not simply the order of words building a phrase such as a noun or prepositional phrase. In fact, examples to be shown below are larger than unit of phrases. Below several data consisting of a simple and a complex sentence will be analysed to show the case of word order literalness of the respondents. The source language (SL) and target language (TL) are displayed in ordering translation.

To begin with, it is obvious that the respondents succeed to avoid literalness when translating a noun phrase *these young people* as figured out below:

SL *What’s more, in today’s knowledge-based businesses, these young people are far more aware of their working environment, of “what’s going on around here”, than were their grandparents, who were hired for their brawn rather than their brain*

TL	1. ... orang- orang muda
	2. ... generasi muda
	3. ... orang-orang muda ini
	4. ... generasi muda
	5. ... anak-anak muda
	6. ... anak muda
	7. ... pekerja yang masih muda
	8. ... generasi muda
	9. ... kaum muda
	10. ... orang-orang muda
	11. ... orang-orang muda
	12. ... orang- orang muda

Regardless of various equivalences chosen, the respondents translate the noun phrase appropriately. If the head ‘people’ comes last in English, its equivalent must be put at initial position in Indonesia. The position of head and modifier within noun phrases works in opposite way in both languages and it is frequently emphasized in English grammar class. This explains why respondents can avoid the literal (similar word order) rendering. If not, they would have probably come with incorrect translation.

The case of literalness is shown in the higher unit of language than a phrase. In general, respondents can be concluded to have translating all of the sentences of the ST in a literal way in terms of word order. This occurs when they translate short or longer sentences. Below, due to limited space, are displayed one simple sentence and one longer sentence in order to show the syntactic literalness:

SL	<i>We need to cultivate the talent</i>
TL	1. <i>Kita harus mengasah bakat yang ada</i>
	2. <i>Kita harus mengembangkan bakat</i>
	3. <i>Kita perlu mengembangkan bakat yang ada</i>
	4. <i>Kita perlu mengolah bakat itu</i>
	5. <i>Kita perlu untuk mengembangkan bakat</i>
	6. <i>Kita butuh memelihara bakat</i>
	7. <i>Kita harus meningkatkan keterampilan</i>
	8. <i>Kita perlu mengupayakan bakat</i>
	9. <i>Kita perlu mengolah bakat</i>
	10. <i>Perlunya mengembangkan bakat</i>
	11. <i>Kita harus melatih bakat</i>
	12. <i>Kita butuh untuk mengolah bakat</i>

Simple syntactic analysis of the SL will attain the order SVO in which *we* is the subject, *need* is the verb, and *to cultivate the talent* is the object. This analysis is true if *need* is treated as the verb of the sentence rather than an auxiliary. The similar order is in general retained in the Indonesian translations except respondent 10 where the subject is ellipted by the respondent and make his/her translation less personal at the same time.

Despite being literal in such a way, it is not to say the respondents’ translations are incorrect. In fact, Newmark (1988) once says that ‘literal word for word translation’ is not only the best, but the only valid method of translation as long as the equivalent effect can be preserved. However, the point attempted to emphasize here is the respondents should be aware of

the availability of other methods to translate the ST above. Transposition and modulation can be used as alternative techniques in translating the ST. While transposition can change the grammatical construction of ST by voice operation, for instance, and the TT becomes *Bakat harus dibudidayakan*, modulation gives the translator opportunity to modify the meaning of, for example, the non-finite verb *cultivate*.

However, it is obvious that the shorter the sentence of the ST, the less variations of the TT that a translator can possibly make as shown in the data above. However, it should not prevent the respondents from translating in different ways.

The next datum counts as a longer sentence. As it is a longer sentence, one can expect the sentence can be rendered in several ways. However, the datum below proves the respondents of committing literal translation instead as they tend to keep the order of ST in the TT:

SL *Spurred on by a book called "The War for Talent", written by three McKinsey consultants in the late 1990s, the word became common in management speak*

- TL
1. *Dipicu oleh sebuah buku berjudul "The War for Talent" atau "Peperangan untuk Bakat" karya tiga orang konsultan McKinsey pada akhir abad ke-19. Selanjutnya, kata tersebutpun menjadi biasa dalam perbincangan ilmu manajemen.*
 2. *Berangkat dari sebuah buku yang berjudul "Perang Bakat", yang ditulis oleh tiga konsultan Mckinsey diakhir tahun 1990-an, kata tersebut menjadi umum dalam dunia manajemen.*
 3. *Mendadak oleh buku yang berjudul "Perang untuk Bakat" yang ditulis oleh tiga orang konsultan McKinsey di penghujung tahun 1990, kata tersebut menjadi istilah umum di dalam percakapan tentang kepemimpinan.*
 4. *Termotivasi oleh sebuah buku yang berjudul " The War for Talent" yang ditulis oleh 3 konsultan Mckinsey pada akhir 1990an, kata tersebut menjadi lazim dibicarakan dalam pembicaraan manajemen.*
 5. *Terpacu oleh sebuah buku yang berjudul "Perang untuk Bakat", ditulis oleh tiga orang konsultan McKinsey pada akhir 1990-an, kata tersebut menjadi lumrah dalam pembicaraan manajemen.*
 6. *Terpacu dari sebuah buku yang berjudul "The War For Talent", yang ditulis oleh tiga konsultan McKinsey pada akhir tahun 1990, kata tersebut menjadi terkenal dalam manajemen berbicara.*
 7. *Hal ini dipacu oleh diterbitkannya sebuah buku yang berjudul "The war for talent" yang dibuat oleh Mckinsey bersaudara yang menjadi konsultan pada akhir 1990an. Kata "keterampilan" ini kemudian menjadi sesuatu hal yang sering dibicarakan dalam diskusi manajemen perusahaan*
 8. *Disebutkan dalam sebuah buku yang berjudul 'The War for Talent' yang ditulis oleh tiga penasihat Mckinsey di akhir tahun 1990an, kata tersebut menjadi hal yang biasa dalam bidang manajemen.*
 9. *Terpicu dari buku "The War for Talent", karanga konsultan McKinsey bersaudara pada akhir 1990an, kata itu menjadi trend di kalangan management.*
 10. *Disebutkan dalam sebuah buku yang berjudul 'The War for Talent' yang*

ditulis oleh tiga penasihat Mckinsey di akhir tahun 1990an, jargon tersebut menjadi konsumsi umum dalam bidang manajemen.

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11. *Didorong terbitnya sebuah buku yang ditulis tiga orang konsultan McKinsey pada akhir tahun 1990an dengan judul “The War for Talent”, kata tersebut menjadi hal yang lumrah dalam ruang lingkup manajemen.*
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12. *Yang ditulis pada sebuah buku “The War for Talent” yang ditulis oleh tiga konsultan McKinsey pada awal 1990-an, kata itu menjadi biasa yang diucapkan direksi.*
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The sentence of the ST belongs to the complex sentence type composed of an independent clause and three subordinate clauses. However, the three subordinate clauses are already reduced into past participle phrases; one of them belongs to non-restrictive relative clause (no. 3 below). As it is a long sentence, one can expect the ST can be translated in various orders or ways. The order of construction of the ST is shown below:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>1 Spurred on by a book,</i> | \Rightarrow <i>1st past participle phrase</i> |
| <i>2 called “The War for Talent”</i> | \Rightarrow <i>2nd past participle phrase</i> |
| <i>3 written by three McKinsey consultants in the late 1990s,</i> | \Rightarrow <i>3rd past participle phrase</i> |
| <i>4 the word became common in management speak</i> | \Rightarrow <i>Independent clause</i> |

Based on the context, the phrase *the word* refers to ‘talent’ in the previous sentence, which functions as the subject of the main clause. Observing the ST and TTs, a general conclusion can be made: if the constituent of ST is numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively, the respondents stick to the same sequence. It means they produce the same order of the TT which is exactly as the order of the ST.

Since the ST is a long sentence, as said above, the respondents indeed have a big chance of making some structural changes. The ST can be reordered in which the main clause comes first as:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>4 Kata itu menjadi biasa dalam pembicaraan manajemen,</i> | \Rightarrow <i>Independent clause</i> |
| <i>1 setelah diperkenalkan dalam sebuah buku</i> | \Rightarrow <i>1st subordinate clause</i> |
| <i>2 yang berjudul ‘The War for Talent’,</i> | \Rightarrow <i>2nd subordinate clause</i> |
| <i>3 yang ditulis oleh tiga konsultan McKinsey di akhir tahun 1990-an</i> | \Rightarrow <i>3rd subordinate clause</i> |

alternatively, the ST can possibly cut into more than one sentence as:

Kata itu menjadi biasa dalam pembicaraan manajemen setelah diperkenalkan dalam sebuah buku berjudul ‘The War for Talent’. Buku tersebut ditulis oleh tiga konsultan McKinsey di akhir tahun 1990-an.

Hassall (2011) says the usage of participle, present or past, in Indonesian is noticeably influenced by the English grammar. The ST above is initiated by a past participle and the respondents literally keep its position at sentence-initial. Hassall further explains that such a construction was not common in Indonesian until recently. Indonesian used to begin such construction with the explicit subject. Therefore, the ST can possibly be translated into :

Kata yang diperkenalkan dalam buku yang berjudul ‘The War for Talent’, yang ditulis oleh tiga konsultan McKinsey di akhir tahun 1990-an menjadi umum dalam pembicaraan manajemen.

Literalness of Lexical Choice

It is often said that a translator is a decision maker. This statement owes to the fact that a translator must choose, decide, and take one among several possibilities. For example, a translator may find two or more correspondences of the TT for a single word of the ST. This is the point where they can exercise their freedom in making decision of choosing any word they prefer as long as it is appropriate with the context.

In spite of being trivial in number, some respondents translate some lexical items in a literal way. This gives rise to awkward translation although not necessary wrong. Below are presented some words or phrase translated literally by the respondents. The English sentences in which the words occur are quoted in full. The words or phrases under consideration are underlined and faced with their literal translation. However, it should be made clear that not all respondents, but only a few, translated the words or phrases in literal way.

ST	TT
<i>Behind the word lies the idea that more and more corporate value is going to be created by knowledge and by so-called "knowledge workers."</i>	<i>Di belakang</i>
<i>That might take <u>some time</u>, but in a world where people sought jobs for life (and the pensions that went with them) time was in the company's favour.</i>	<i>... beberapa waktu</i>
<i>So now they look for talent that is <u>ready-made</u>.</i>	<i>... siap dibuat.</i>
<i>What's <u>more</u>, in today's knowledge-based businesses, these young people are far more aware of their working environment, of "what's going on around here", than were their grandparents, who were hired for their brawn rather than their brain.</i>	<i>Apa yang lebih</i>

C. CONCLUSION

The similarities of word order, in general, between English and Indonesian have advantage on the part of translators in that they may find it easier when translating involving the language pair. It is easier because the translators do not have to make grammatical operation in terms of construction order in question. On the other hand, the similarity can possibly hinder the translator from realizing the availability of other possible translations of the ST. Teaching translation can help the English learners become conscious of those possibilities.

This study describes how the syntactic and lexical literalness take place in the language pair. It is shown that the majority of respondents tend to translate literally in terms of (word, phrase, and clause) order. It means they keep the order of the St sentences in the TT. It is also found that some respondents, although small in number, translate some words or phrases literally which somehow end them up with awkward translations.

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