

Perceived Meaning and Common Errors in Google Translate's Translation of Goodreads Reviews

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ABSTRACT

The study analyzes translation on meaning. It aims to examine the extent to which Google Translate can preserve meaning and find the most common errors created by Google Translate when translating English customer reviews into Bahasa Indonesia from fiction books on the Goodreads website. Further, when analyzing the data, the writer used Bowker (2023) theory of translation on meaning and a qualitative approach. The study shows that some data were error-free, and some revealed that translation errors were found, where Google Translate chose a slightly incorrect choice of vocabulary and a wrong choice of vocabulary, leading to an error in meaning. In addition, other errors were classified into two categories: vocabulary errors and translation technique errors. Moreover, the study reveals that the most common errors were failing to translate idiomatic expressions. The study concludes that the data showed more errors than error-free.

Keywords: machine translation, source language, target language, translation

INTRODUCTION

Translation plays a crucial role in facilitating cross-communication by enabling texts to be understood by readers beyond their native language. Moreover, the rapid development of technology has brought people's lives into a modern era where everything is growing easier. One example is the shift in translation. Google Translate is a machine translation tool that people can use. It is effortless to use, convenient, fast, and free. For instance, people simply need to click the "Translate" button after copying and pasting the text into the Google Translate website. In this study, the writer analyzed how far Google Translate can convey the meaning when translating English customer reviews to Bahasa Indonesia, and found the most common errors produced by Google Translate.

To analyze the data, the writer applied Bowker (2023) translation theory on meaning. According to Bowker (2023, p. 9) "Translation" in English is derived from the Latin Language, the word "trans" refers to "across," and "lation" from the Latin language verb means "to carry," and the word "translation" actually refers to "to carry across." In this case, translation involves carrying across the message from one language to another, or simply put, translation focuses on beginning with one message from one language, and with translation, the message ends up the same in the other language (Bowker, 2023, p. 10). Translation is an umbrella term to explain more broadly any activity that involves transferring a message from one language to another.

In translation, equivalence is deemed to be the central concept. It means that equivalence is commonly perceived as the connection between the original text and its translation (Bowker, 2023). Additionally, the *source* explains the diverse elements related to the translation's starting point, and the *target* refers to those connected with the finish point (Bowker, 2023, p. 11). The source and target are connected to each other. For example, when the translation direction is from English to Arabic, then English is the source language and the

source text is written for English speakers as well as the intended readers.

Meanwhile, Arabic will be the target text, and the intended readers of the target text will be Arabic speakers (Bowker, 2023). After the translation is done, the source and target texts are assumed to be equivalent (Bowker, 2023). Equivalence is usually not found at the word level because word-for-word translation is frequently impossible or impractical. Hence, equivalence is usually comprehended at the level of meaning (Bowker, 2023). Usually, source and target texts are accepted as equivalent if the meanings are the same, although they do not necessarily correspond precisely at the word level.

While this study focuses on Google Translate as a machine translation tool, and the theory applied by the writer to analyze the data was translation theory by Bowker (2023), which was developed for human translation context, it was still beneficial and relevant for examining the results from Google Translate. The theory applied served as a benchmark to determine the extent to which Google Translate can perceive the meaning after translating English customer reviews into Bahasa Indonesia. Because machine translation, such as Google Translate, was created and kept on developing so that the output can replicate the production of human translation, especially in carrying across the meaning from the source language to the target language. Also, by applying translation theory on meaning by Bowker (2023) that was developed for human translation context, it could also help in emphasizing the limitations of Google Translate as machine translation, such as whether Google Translate made an error or made a success in perceiving the meaning in its translation.

METHOD

The writer used a qualitative approach to carry out this study. The data analyzed were the Indonesian translation of customer reviews of the fiction translated by Google Translate. Furthermore, using purposive sampling by Ary et al. (2009), the writer approximated the amount of data, which was 30 customer reviews, and decided the criteria for each of the data, which were one paragraph for each data, and was taken from different random fiction books on the Goodreads website by herself. Additionally, the data was analyzed based on Bowker's (2023) translation of meaning theory. The writer also used a table of four columns to analyze the data.

Table 1. The table used to analyze the data

No	Source Language (SL)	Target Language (TL)	Analysis

In addition, the writer followed multiple steps to collect the data. First, the writer searched for English customer reviews in the fiction books list on the Goodreads website. Second, the writer selected a customer review with only one paragraph from 30 different random fiction books. Each of the customer reviews was screen-captured and placed in the Source Language column of Table 1. Then, the writer rewrote the customer reviews and placed it into Google Translate and screen captured the translation, which later put into the Target Language of the same table.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the three key findings: error-free meaning analysis, translation errors, and the most frequent errors found.

Error-Free Meaning Analysis

According to Bowker (2023), translation includes carrying a message from one language to another. Similarly, it concentrates on beginning with one idea within one language, and using translation, the idea gets translated into the same idea in another language. Further, after the analysis, the writer found some data that shows error-free. The following table is an example of a good Google Translate translation.

Table 4.1

Table Analysis of Error Free Meaning Analysis Data (Data 5)

Source Language (SL)	Target Language (TL)
"...the characters here are vibrant and complex, as are the relationships among them..."	"...karakter di sini bersemangat dan kompleks, seperti juga hubungan di antara mereka..."

In this translation, Google Translate chose the vocabulary when translating the word "vibrant" from the SL. Further, the word "vibrant" has many different meanings according to the context. If the context was to describe colours, then in Collins Dictionary (n.d.-b), "vibrant colours are very bright and clear," which does not align with the context of the source text. Nevertheless, if the word was used to describe one personality, then Collins Dictionary (n.d.-b) stated, "someone or something that is vibrant is full of life, energy, and enthusiasm." Furthermore, if the translated word were translated back to English, it would be "enthusiastic." And, based on Collins English Dictionary (n.d.-a), supposing someone is enthusiastic about something, it is seen how much they like it or enjoy it from the way they act or speak, which aligns with the definition of vibrant personality taken from the Collins English Dictionary.

Errors of Translation

Errors in Google Translate translation happen when Google Translate chooses a slightly incorrect vocabulary and a wrong choice of vocabulary. More specifically, a slightly incorrect choice of translation refers to the translated word being correct but not the most suitable word to represent the meaning. This shows that although the word chosen might be comprehended, it still does not capture all the underlying meaning. This occurs because, according to Bowker (2023), every language has many words that are similar or have the same meaning to one another. The following table shows the analysis of a slightly incorrect choice of vocabulary.

Table 4.2

Table Analysis of Slightly Incorrect Choice of Vocabulary (Data 11)

Source Language (SL)	Target Language (TL)
"...I don't really feel it cheapened anything and..."	"...Saya tidak merasa itu merendahkan apa pun dan..."

The word from the source language "cheapened" actually carried the meaning that the revealing of the particular character's identity from the book was actually very obvious, and the data writer felt that it did not disrupt the plot. However, Google Translate translated it into

“merendahkan,” is too faithful, and makes the whole sentence incomprehensible. Consequently, the writer suggests the better translation would be “mengurangi.”

In addition, another translation error that happens in Google Translate is when Google Translate chooses the wrong vocabulary to translate from the source text, which can create a misleading meaning in the target text. According to Bowker (2023), there is no one true perfect translation, and in actuality, translation is somewhat subjective, yet choosing the wrong vocabulary can lead to meaning error, which later leads to the target audience misunderstanding the text. Furthermore, throughout the data analysis, the writer also found some data where Google Translate chose the wrong vocabulary that made up a whole different meaning in the target text. The following table shows one of the examples from the data analysis.

Table 4.3

Table Analysis of Error In Wrong Choice of Vocabulary (Data 19)

Source Language (SL)	Target Language (TL)
“...I kind of saw the twist of who was Pip's benefactor coming but at the same time...”	“...saya agak melihat perubahan tentang siapa yang menjadi dermawan Pip datang tetapi pada saat yang sama...”

The phrase taken from the source text, “who was Pip’s benefactor coming,” speaks about the exposing of the true identity of Pip’s benefactor. However, Google Translate translated it into “siapa yang menjadi dermawan Pip datang,” which was bewildering and also deviated from the true meaning. Other than being confusing, the translated phrase is also grammatically incorrect in Bahasa Indonesia because the word “datang,” at the end of the phrase, in Bahasa Indonesia is counted as a verb that is dependent and needs a subject to make it clear. Further, the translated phrase actually means that Pip’s benefactor would come in physically instead of revealing the plot twist of who Pip’s benefactor's identity is. Hence, it would be better if it were translated as “siapa sebenarnya donatur Pip.” Although the writer suggests changing the original “dermawan” into “donatur,” the two words have the same meaning, which is benefactor, yet the word “donatur” is more common than “dermawan”. To add more, the phrase that the writer suggests is more grammatically correct in Bahasa Indonesia, and delivers the meaning clearly, which does not have to confuse the target audience.

Thus, throughout the data analysis, the writer found many errors and classified the errors into two categories: vocabulary errors and errors in translation technique.

Vocabulary Errors

During the data analysis, several types of vocabulary errors were included: compound words, wrong prepositions, acronyms, idiomatic expressions, and figurative phrases.

Furthermore, one of the examples shown is one of the errors included in vocabulary errors, which is an error in a compound word. In addition, a compound word refers to a word or word group formed from a combination of two or more words that function together as an individual unit to convert a specific idea (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The writer found that Google Translate failed to translate a compound word throughout the data analysis. Below is an example of how Google Translate makes a mistake when translating a compound word.

Table 4.4

Table Analysis of Error in Compound Word (Data 2)

Source Language (SL)	Target Language (TL)
4.5 stars! I went into this thinking it was going to be your typical enemies to lovers romantasy but its [sic] not at all! This was such a pleasantly different read. It is SO beautifully written. And I loved how Roman & Iris's relationship was so vulnerable & emotional. This was overall a very raw & beautiful read about love, letters, & war. My only wish is that we got to delve more into the gods/mythology and the politics of the war but based on how the book ended, I'm thinking we might get more of that in book 2!	4,5 bintang! Saya membaca buku ini dengan berpikir bahwa ini akan menjadi kisah cinta biasa antara musuh dan kekasih tetapi ternyata tidak! Buku ini sangat berbeda. Buku ini ditulis dengan SANGAT indah. Dan saya suka bagaimana hubungan Roman & Iris begitu rapuh & emosional. Secara keseluruhan, buku ini sangat mentah & indah tentang cinta, surat, & perang. Satu-satunya harapan saya adalah kita bisa lebih mendalami para dewa/mitologi dan politik perang, tetapi berdasarkan bagaimana buku ini berakhir, saya pikir kita mungkin akan mendapatkan lebih banyak hal itu di buku 2!

“Romantasy” is counted as a compound word because it is a combination of the words “romance” and “fantasy.” Both words are included as a genre of the book that the original data writer was reading. Hence, Google Translate translated it into “kisah cinta,” which did not represent the whole meaning because the element “fantasy” was not included or translated. Thus, the writer suggests translating “romantasy” into “kisah romansa fantasi,” or making up a new compound word in Bahasa Indonesia, where it is still easy for the target audience to guess which is “romantasi,” which is the combination of two Bahasa Indonesia words, “romansa” and “fantasi.” Also, it is because, in Bahasa Indonesia, there is no equivalent compound word for “romantasy.” Furthermore, in the target language, the word “so” was perfectly translated into “sangat” by Google Translate; however, the capitalization in the translation came with all capital letters “SANGAT.” It happened because the capitalization from the source language “so,” was also in all capital letters. It was observed that Google Translate likely retained the original capitalization, and the uppercase in the source language was intended to emphasize that the book was extremely well-written.

Errors in Translation Technique

During the data analysis, several types of errors in translation technique were included: repetitive patterns, omissions, untranslatability, and inadequate context.

Furthermore, one of the examples shown is an error in repetitive pattern translation, which is included in errors in translation technique. Additionally, the words, phrases, and structures from the source language (SL) were repetitively translated into the target language (TL). Although a repetitive translation can sometimes be correct, it often confuses the target audience and must be re-read at least once. The latter table presents an example of a repetitive pattern translation.

Table 4.9

Table Analysis of Error in Repetitive Patterns (Data 12)

Source Language (SL)	Target Language (TL)
“...between the 2 books is the buildup/ telling of the story... ”	“...antara kedua buku tersebut adalah alur/ penceritaan cerita... ”

The error occurred when Google Translate translated “telling of the story” from the SL into “penceritaan cerita.” Although it was correct in Bahasa Indonesia, it was still puzzling and not an easy read, making it difficult for the target audience to grasp the meaning in a single reading. This happened because the phrase was formulated repeatedly, starting from the Bahasa Indonesia word “cerita.” Because of this, the target audience had to spend more time reading the translation repeatedly to understand the phrase “penceritaan cerita.” By this, the writer suggests a better solution. It is to use “penulisan cerita.” Even though the words were translated back to English, it would be “the story written,” the phrase is still an easy read. The meaning can be understood in one read.

Most Frequent Errors

Despite many other errors found in the Google Translate translation, the errors in idiomatic expressions happened most frequently. This is because translating them is challenging, as it sometimes includes cultural references that require further clarification so that the target audience can understand the meaning. Additionally, Bowker (2023) notes that not all words have a direct, literal meaning. However, Google Translate was too focused on translating each word instead of trying to understand the meaning that lies beneath. Further, the following table shows the errors in idiomatic expressions.

Table 4.13

Table Analysis of Most Frequent Errors (Data 1, 3, 9, 10, 15, 21, 23, 24, 26)

Data Number	Source Language (SL)	Target Language (TL)
1	“The best slow burn I've read in possibly years.”	“ Cerita lambat terbaik yang pernah saya baca selama bertahun-tahun.”
3	“...but then it gets bogged down in the cyber description...”	“...tetapi kemudian buku ini terjebak dalam deskripsi dunia maya...”
9	“...scientific elements of this book definitely made my eyes cross and my brain hurt , but An Zhe...”	“...elemen yang lebih ilmiah dalam buku ini benar-benar membuat mata saya juling dan otak saya sakit , tetapi An Zhe...”
10	“...family troubles. The story is quite grounded. ”	“...masalah keluarga mereka. Ceritanya cukup membumi. ”
15	“...became much more ham-fisted , to the point...”	“...buku ini menjadi jauh lebih kaku , sampai-sampai...”
21	“...i was locked in waiting...”	“...karena saya terkunci menunggu...”
23	“... I felt the plot twist ...”	“...meskipun saya merasa alur cerita ...”
24	“...seemed more like a slice of life style format...”	“...lebih seperti format gaya hidup sepotong ...”
26	“ There was so much heart in this	“ Ada begitu banyak hati dalam

	story.”	cerita ini.”
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CONCLUSION

This study is about analyzing the translation on meaning. More specifically, the study focuses on analyzing the extent to which Google Translate can perceive meaning when translating English customer reviews from Goodreads fiction books into Bahasa Indonesia. Also, the study focuses on finding the most frequent errors produced by Google Translate while translating. In this study, the writer uses Bowker (2023) translation on meaning theory to analyze the data.

Furthermore, the writer used a qualitative approach to carry out the research. The data collected were English customer reviews from different random fiction books on the Goodreads website. There were 30 customer reviews, each consisting of one paragraph. However, the data analyzed were the Bahasa Indonesian version after Google Translate translated it.

The findings revealed that some data were error-free, meaning that Google Translate could carry one message from the source text to the target text without any meaning being lost. However, some errors in the Google Translate translation were inevitable. The writer found that Google Translate happened to make mistakes in choosing the slightly incorrect choice of vocabulary, which means that Google Translate chose an unsuitable word to translate the word from the source text to the target text. Not only was there a slightly incorrect choice of vocabulary, but the writer also discovered that Google Translate mistakenly chose the wrong vocabulary to translate the word, so that it deviated from the actual meaning. Moreover, the writer also found that Google Translate made errors in translation that were classified as vocabulary and translation techniques. The finding of errors in vocabulary included compound words, wrong prepositions, acronyms, idiomatic expressions, and figurative phrases. While the errors that are classified into errors in translation technique include repetitive patterns, omissions, untranslatability, and inadequate context. In addition, the findings also revealed that the most frequent type of error made by Google Translate when translating English customer reviews from fiction books on the Goodreads website into Bahasa Indonesia was that Google Translate failed many times in translating idiomatic expressions.

From the findings, the writer concludes that during the in-depth analysis of the data, the writer found more data that showed errors rather than error-free. This leads to the fact that, although Google Translate is very easy to use, instant, and widely available in various languages, Google Translate as a machine translation is still lacking. Since it is still difficult to understand the meaning of words, phrases, or sentences from the source text, some data were found error-free, which shows that although it is still lacking, Google Translate can still help overcome the language barrier for people to converse daily. However, users must be fully aware that Google Translate comes with its own shortcomings, and personal discretion is advised.

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Fatrisya: Perceived Meaning and Common Errors in
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