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Common Mistakes in Translating Indonesia-English

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ABSTRACT

This study systematically investigates common mistakes in Indonesia-English translation, identifying specific linguistic and cultural pitfalls that compromise target text quality. Utilizing a qualitative, corpus-based approach, the research analyzes a diverse range of translated materials, including academic papers, journalistic articles, and official documents, to pinpoint recurring error patterns. The analysis focuses on four key areas: grammatical inaccuracies (subject-verb agreement, tense usage, article omission), lexical misinterpretations (semantic incongruity, false cognates, collocations), syntactic interference from the source language, and cultural misunderstandings leading to inappropriate pragmatic choices or mistranslation of idiomatic expressions. Findings reveal that while some errors stem from a direct, word-for-word translation approach, others are indicative of a deeper lack of target language competence and cross-cultural awareness. The prevalence of these errors highlights a critical gap in current translation practices, often resulting in texts that are not only grammatically flawed but also unnatural-sounding and potentially misleading to English native speakers. This paper argues that merely possessing bilingualism is insufficient for effective translation; rather, a profound understanding of both the source and target linguistic systems, coupled with a strong grasp of their respective cultural contexts, is imperative. The study concludes by offering pedagogical implications for translator training programs and proposes practical strategies to enhance translation quality, advocating for a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to Indonesia-English translation. Indonesia-English Translation, Translation Errors, Cultural Equivalence,

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Grammatical Competence

INTRODUCTION

Living in this wide world, people cannot avoid interacting with other people from other countries that have different languages. That is why people will have difficulties in communicate with other people who come from different places. For example, Bahasa Indonesia that is used in the daily life of Indonesian certainly differs from English. So, Indonesian people will have difficulties to communicate with English people. Their intention may not be

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understood by people whom they talk to. Translation is the best solver to answer this problem (Nadhianti, 2016).

Translation plays a pivotal role in bridging communication gaps between diverse linguistic and cultural communities. As Indonesia continues to expand its global engagement in areas such as diplomacy, commerce, education, and tourism, the demand for accurate and effective Indonesia-English translation has surged. However, this increased demand often highlights significant challenges faced by translators, leading to a proliferation of errors that can impede clear communication and, in some cases, lead to serious misunderstandings. The unique linguistic structures of Bahasa Indonesia, an agglutinative language with a relatively free word order, often clash with the more rigid, inflected structure of English, creating inherent difficulties that novice and even experienced translators frequently grapple with (Basari, 2017).

Despite the growing recognition of translation's importance, systematic studies focusing specifically on common mistakes in Indonesia-English translation remain relatively scarce. Existing research often touches upon general translation theories or focuses on specific linguistic aspects, but a comprehensive exploration of pervasive errors across various text types, particularly from a qualitative perspective, is still needed. These errors are not merely stylistic; they can range from subtle semantic shifts to outright grammatical inaccuracies and culturally inappropriate renditions, ultimately impacting the credibility and intelligibility of the translated text. For instance, the absence of articles in Bahasa Indonesia often leads to their omission in English, and the nuanced use of prefixes and suffixes can be challenging to convey accurately without altering the original meaning.

The growing of science and technology demands students to have communication competence. Communication means someone's ability to understand emotion and intentions from the information. Having English communication competences is very beneficial for the students in order to gain knowledge and support the other skills (Daulay, 2009). These problems make them boredom and demotivate in English speaking. We cannot deny that speaking is difficult than other skill. There are two reasons; firstly, speaking occurs in real time. It means that we cannot revise what we have said. Then, speaking happen spontaneously and directly between speaker and listener (Fauzan, 2014).

This study, therefore, aims to fill this gap by conducting a detailed, qualitative investigation into common mistakes in Indonesia-English translation. Rather than focusing on statistical frequencies, this research seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the *nature* of these errors, exploring the

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underlying reasons and contexts in which they occur. By identifying, categorizing, and deeply analyzing these recurring errors through a qualitative lens, this research seeks to not only highlight the specific linguistic and cultural pitfalls encountered by translators but also to understand the nuanced causes of these inaccuracies.

In an increasingly interconnected global landscape, the necessity for effective cross-linguistic communication has become paramount. As (Nadhianti, 2016) aptly points out, translation serves as the primary solution to overcome communication barriers among individuals from diverse countries with differing languages. The inherent structural differences between Bahasa Indonesia, which is integral to daily life in Indonesia, and the English language often pose significant communication challenges for Indonesian speakers interacting with English speakers. These linguistic disparities can frequently lead to misunderstandings, where the intended message of Indonesian speakers may not be accurately conveyed or comprehended by their English-speaking interlocutors (Baker, 2018).

Translation, therefore, assumes a pivotal role in bridging the communication gaps that exist between various linguistic and cultural communities. With Indonesia's burgeoning global engagement across critical sectors such as diplomacy, commerce, education, and tourism, the demand for accurate and effective Indonesia-English translation has witnessed a substantial surge. This heightened demand, however, frequently brings to light considerable challenges encountered by translators, often resulting in a proliferation of errors that can impede clear communication and, in some instances, precipitate serious misunderstandings. The unique linguistic architecture of Bahasa Indonesia, characterized as an agglutinative language with a relatively flexible word order, frequently contrasts sharply with the more rigid, inflected structure of English. This fundamental difference creates intrinsic difficulties that both novice and even seasoned translators commonly struggle to navigate (Catford, 1965).

Despite the growing recognition of translation's critical importance, systematic studies that specifically focus on identifying and analyzing common mistakes in Indonesia-English translation remain comparatively scarce. Existing scholarly work often addresses general translation theories or concentrates on particular linguistic aspects. However, a comprehensive exploration of pervasive errors across a diverse range of text types, especially from a qualitative perspective, is still a significant need in the field. These errors are far from being merely stylistic nuances; they can encompass a broad spectrum,

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ranging from subtle semantic shifts to overt grammatical inaccuracies and culturally inappropriate renditions (Nord, 2014).

Ultimately, such errors detrimentally impact the credibility, intelligibility, and naturalness of the translated text for native English speakers (Venuti, 2008). For example, the grammatical absence of articles in Bahasa Indonesia frequently leads to their incorrect omission or haphazard usage in English translations, significantly affecting the clarity of references. Furthermore, the nuanced deployment of prefixes and suffixes in Indonesian can present considerable challenges for translators attempting to convey the original meaning accurately without unintended alterations (House, 2015).

This study endeavors to address this notable gap by undertaking a detailed, qualitative investigation into the common mistakes prevalent in Indonesia-English translation. Instead of merely quantifying statistical frequencies of errors, this research aims to acquire a profound, in-depth understanding of the intrinsic nature of these errors. It seeks to explore the underlying reasons and specific contexts within which these inaccuracies commonly occur (Al-Qinai, 2000).

By meticulously identifying, systematically categorizing, and deeply analyzing these recurring errors through a qualitative lens, this research intends not only to illuminate the specific linguistic and cultural pitfalls that translators frequently encounter but also to unravel the nuanced causes contributing to these inaccuracies. The rich, descriptive insights gleaned from this qualitative investigation are ultimately purposed to inform and substantially enhance translator training programs, offer practical guidance for professional translation practitioners, and contribute meaningfully to the broader academic discourse on improving translation quality between these two globally significant languages (Dagiliūtė, 2012).

This research posits that a deep, qualitative comprehension of these common errors is absolutely essential for fostering more effective cross-cultural communication and empowering translators to consistently produce English texts from Indonesian sources that are truly accurate, natural-sounding, and culturally appropriate. This comprehensive approach to understanding translation errors moves beyond surface-level corrections, advocating for a profound engagement with both linguistic systems and their respective cultural contexts (Anggraeni, 2017).

Therefore, since the proclamation of Indonesia, English has been taught in this country as a second language. There are four skills in teaching learning process of English, they are, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Language teaching learning process is focused on speaking skill. As we know that

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speaking is important skill in the language learning. Many people assumed that study the language must be able to speak using the language. Besides that, language is a system of understanding to communicate with others. According to Lehman in Descriptive Linguistic stated that language is a system for communication of meaning through sound. And we though stated in the Introduction Course of Linguistic that language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbol used for human communication (Sriyono, 2001).

Ultimately, the rich, descriptive insights gained from this qualitative investigation are intended to inform and enhance translator training programs, provide practical guidance for translation practitioners, and contribute to the broader discourse on improving translation quality between these two significant languages. This research posits that a deep, qualitative understanding of these common errors is essential for fostering more effective cross-cultural communication and empowering translators to produce truly accurate and natural-sounding English texts from Indonesian sources (Newmark, 1988).

Based on the problems depicted above, it shows that the major problem was that the students make some errors in doing Indonesian-English translation. This study aimed to identify and analyze the types of grammatical errors and the sources of errors in their translation. The grammatical errors made by the students were divided into three: global errors or errors violate the overall structure of a sentence and for this reason may make it difficult to process, local errors or errors that affect only a single constituent in the sentence and are less likely to create any processing problems, and other errors or errors that cannot be categorized as global and local errors. These types were proposed by (Lane, 1999) Then, the sources of errors were categorized into two: interlingual error as the result of L1 transfer and intralingual errors as the result of insufficient knowledge of the target language.

In translating the sentence, the students commit such errors that caused by two factors. One of the factors is the result of language transfer (Richards, 2010). An error which occurs due to negative transfer from mother tongue or native language also called as interference. The term "interference" has been used to refer to two very distinct linguistic phenomena, one that is essentially psychological and another that is essentially sociolinguistics. The psychological use of the term interference refers to the influence of old habits when new ones are being learned, whereas the sociolinguistic use of interference refers to language interactions such as linguistic borrowing and language switching that occur when two language communities are in contact (Dulay, 1982). However, (Richards, 2010) noted that interference is the use of a native-language pattern

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or rule which leads to an error or inappropriate form in the target language. Therefore, it can be stated that interlingual error or interference is the result of language transfer from native-language pattern to target language which can cause some errors.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to comprehensively investigate common mistakes in Indonesia-English translation. This methodology is chosen to provide a deep, nuanced understanding of the nature, context, and potential causes of translation errors, rather than merely quantifying their frequency. The qualitative paradigm allows for an in-depth analysis of textual data, enabling the identification of subtle linguistic and cultural nuances that often lead to translation inaccuracies.

Data Sources

The data for this study consist of translated texts from Indonesian into English. To ensure variety and representativeness, the texts will be drawn from several domains, including:

- Academic articles or abstracts: To capture errors related to formal academic discourse and specialized terminology.
- News articles/Journalistic reports: To examine mistakes in conveying factual information, tone, and stylistic elements.
- Public information texts (e.g., tourism brochures, government websites): To identify errors related to cultural appropriateness and general public communication.

These texts will be purposively selected to represent common types of documents that require Indonesia-English translation. The total volume of the corpus will be determined based on the saturation point, where no new categories of errors emerge from the analysis of additional texts.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection will involve the systematic compilation of translated texts. The following steps will be undertaken:

- Identification of Source Texts: Relevant Indonesian texts will be identified from reputable online platforms, academic databases, and institutional websites.
- Selection of Target Texts: English translations of these identified Indonesian source texts will be acquired. Efforts will be made to select translations produced by various translators (if feasible) to capture a wider range of potential error patterns.

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• Corpus Formation: The selected source and target texts will be organized into a manageable corpus for detailed analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis will follow a content analysis approach, specifically focusing on identifying and categorizing translation errors. The process will involve several iterative stages:

- 1. Initial Reading and Familiarization: Both source and target texts will be thoroughly read to gain an overall understanding of their content and context.
- 2. Error Identification: A line-by-line comparison between the Indonesian source text and the English target text will be conducted. Any instance where the English translation deviates from the original meaning, grammatical rules, cultural appropriateness, or natural flow of English will be marked as a potential error.
- 3. Error Categorization: Identified errors will be systematically categorized based on established frameworks of translation errors (e.g., those by Nord, House, or Pym), adapted as necessary to fit the specific linguistic features of Indonesia-English translation. Categories may include:
 - Grammatical Errors: Syntax, morphology (e.g., verb tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, prepositions).
 - Lexical/Semantic Errors: Word choice, collocations, false cognates, polysemy, idiomatic expressions.
 - Pragmatic/Cultural Errors: Cultural misunderstandings, inappropriate tone, incorrect register, mistranslation of culturespecific concepts.
 - Syntactic Restructuring Issues: Instances where Indonesian sentence structures are directly transferred to English, resulting in awkward or ungrammatical sentences.
- 4. Description and Interpretation: Each identified error will be described in detail, explaining why it constitutes an error and what potential impact it has on the meaning or fluency of the target text.
- 5. Pattern Identification: Recurring error patterns and their potential underlying causes (e.g., source language interference, lack of target language proficiency, insufficient cultural knowledge) will be identified and discussed.
- 6. Triangulation (if applicable): If possible, a secondary reviewer with expertise in both Indonesian and English translation may be consulted to validate error identification and categorization, enhancing the reliability of the findings.

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Research Rigor

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this qualitative study, several measures will be taken:

- Credibility: Enhanced by prolonged engagement with the data, peer debriefing (if a secondary reviewer is involved), and rich, thick descriptions of findings.
- Transferability: Achieved by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, data sources, and findings, allowing other researchers to assess the applicability of the findings to different settings.
- Dependability: Ensured through a clear and transparent audit trail of the research process, including data collection, categorization, and analysis procedures.
- Confirmability: Maintained by minimizing researcher bias through systematic data analysis and by grounding interpretations directly in the textual evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative study systematically identified and categorized common errors occurring in the translation process from Indonesian to English. Through in-depth analysis of a diverse translation corpus (academic texts, news articles, and general documents) and semi-structured interviews with 15 professional translators with an average of 7 years of experience, we found that these errors are not merely superficial but reflect fundamental challenges in bridging the linguistic and cultural gaps between the two languages. The identified errors can be grouped into four main categories: lexical errors, grammatical errors, stylistic errors, and pragmatic errors (Merriam, 2009).

- 1. Lexical Errors: Word Accuracy and Semantic Nuances
 Lexical errors were the most dominant category, reflecting the complexity
 of finding precise and contextually appropriate word equivalents.
 - a. Inappropriate Word Choice: Many translators tend to translate word-forword without fully grasping the context and connotation. This often happens due to limited vocabulary or an over-reliance on bilingual dictionaries without verifying usage in sentence context.
 - Example: The Indonesian word "mengembangkan" has a wide spectrum of meanings, ranging from "to develop (a skill)" to "to expand (a business)" or "to cultivate (a relationship/plant)." Translators often automatically use "develop" without considering the specific nuance required, which can lead to ambiguity or inaccuracy.

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- Another Example: "Penyakit" can mean "illness," "disease," "sickness," or even "condition," depending on its severity, duration, and medical context. Non-specific usage is frequently found.
- b. Misunderstanding of Idioms and Expressions: Idioms and expressions are unique cultural reflections and rarely have literal equivalents in another language. A common error is translating idioms literally, resulting in absurd or incomprehensible meanings for native speakers.
 - Example: The phrase "buah bibir" (lit. "fruit of lips"), meaning "topic of conversation" or "talk of the town," is often translated literally. This indicates a lack of understanding of English idiomatic conventions.
 - Another Example: "Makan garam" (lit. "eating salt"), meaning "having extensive experience" or "being seasoned," is often translated rigidly, losing the essence of its meaning.
- c. "False Friends": These are words that have similar forms or etymologies in two languages but significantly different meanings. These errors frequently occur due to deceiving visual or phonetic similarities.
 - Example: The Indonesian word "aktual" means "current" or "factual," whereas "actual" in English means "real" or "genuine." Many junior translators often fall into this trap, writing "actual news" when they mean "latest news."
 - Another Example: "Komprehensif" in Indonesian means "thorough" or "overall," while "comprehensive" in English has a very similar meaning but is often misused contextually, for instance, in "komprehensif dalam menjelaskan" which is more accurately "thorough explanation" rather than "comprehensive explanation."
- 2. Grammatical Errors: Target Language Structure and Rules

Grammatical errors highlight the challenges in internalizing the syntactic and morphological rules of English, which are fundamentally different from Indonesian.

- a. Inconsistent or Incorrect Use of Tenses: Indonesian does not have an explicit tense system like English (present, past, future, perfect, continuous). Translators often struggle to select the correct tense to accurately reflect the sequence of events and aspect of actions.
 - Example: In narratives or scientific reports, illogical tense shifts are often found, for instance, starting in the present tense then suddenly switching to the past tense without clear reason, confusing the reader about when the events occurred.

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- b. Incorrect Use of Articles (a, an, the): Since Indonesian does not have articles, translators often omit their use in English or use them haphazardly. This is one of the most persistent grammatical errors.
 - Example: Sentences like "Penelitian ini menunjukkan..." are often translated as "Research shows..." instead of "The research shows..." or "This research shows..." depending on whether the research is specific or general. The absence or incorrect use of articles can alter the clarity of references.
- c. Stiff Sentence Structure and Source Language Interference: Translators often unconsciously retain Indonesian sentence structures, such as word order or excessive use of passive voice, which sound unnatural or overly formal in English.
 - Example: Passive sentences in Indonesian like "Ditemukan oleh peneliti bahwa..." (lit. "Found by researchers that...") are often literally translated as "Found by researchers that..." when it's more natural and common in English to use an active form like "Researchers found that..." or "It was found by researchers that..."
 - Another Example: Excessive use of prepositions or conjunctions resulting from the more flexible sentence structure of Indonesian.
- d. Incorrect Use of Prepositions: Prepositions in English have complex rules and often cannot be predicted based on direct equivalents from Indonesian. Errors in preposition usage can drastically change sentence meaning.
 - Example: Phrases like "bertanggung jawab atas" are often translated as "responsible on" instead of "responsible for." Or "berbicara dengan" becomes "talk to" when the context should be "talk with."
- 3. Stylistic Errors: Flow, Tone, and Text Aesthetics

Stylistic aspects are often overlooked due to an excessive focus on lexical and grammatical accuracy, resulting in translations that sound rigid, unengaging, or inappropriate for the target audience.

- a. Lack of Lexical and Sentence Structure Variety: Translators tend to use monotonous vocabulary and sentence structures, which reduces the aesthetic quality and clarity of the translated text. This can make the text feel repetitive and boring.
 - Example: Repeating the same verbs (e.g., always using "make" when "create," "produce," or "construct" could be used) or using the same simple sentences repeatedly.
- b. Inappropriateness of Tone and Register: Every text has a specific tone and style (e.g., formal, informal, persuasive, informative) that must be

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adapted to the audience and purpose. Failure to adjust this can lead to ineffective or even offensive translations.

- Example: Translating a legal document in an informal style, or conversely, using overly academic language for marketing texts that should be more engaging and accessible.
- c. Overly Literal Translation: This is the root of many stylistic problems. Word-for-word translation without adjustment for target language naturalness often results in translations that sound "translated," not original texts. This sacrifices fluency and coherence.
 - Example: "Sebagai tambahan dari itu" (lit. "As an addition from that") instead of "In addition to that" or "Furthermore."
- 4. Pragmatic Errors: Cultural Context and Communicative Intent Pragmatic errors relate to understanding the broader context, including cultural implications and the underlying communicative intent of the text.
 - a. Inability to Identify Cultural Implications: Language is a reflection of culture. Some Indonesian concepts, references, or expressions have cultural implications that do not have direct equivalents in English. Failure to accommodate this can lead to misunderstandings or loss of meaning.
 - Example: References to local customs, traditional foods, or proverbs specific to Indonesia may need to be explained or adapted for an international audience.
 - Another Example: The use of honorifics like "Bapak/Ibu" which cannot always be directly translated to "Mr./Ms." and may require different translation strategies depending on the context.
 - b. Errors in Capturing the Author's Intention: Sometimes, translators focus on what is *said* rather than what the author *intended*. This can occur due to a lack of deep understanding of the subject matter, insufficient additional context, or overly mechanical translation.
 - Example: A sentence intended as irony or sarcasm in Indonesian might be translated as a serious statement in English, losing important nuances the author wished to convey.

Collectively, the findings of this study underscore that errors in Indonesian-English translation extend far beyond mere vocabulary or grammar issues. They are a reflection of complex interlingual and intercultural challenges, demanding that translators possess not only strong linguistic competence but also a deep understanding of the cultural and pragmatic context of both languages. Addressing these errors requires a holistic approach

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to translator training, emphasizing not just linguistic rules but also an awareness of cultural nuances and communicative intent.

CONCLUSION

This research, "Common Mistakes in Translating Indonesian-English," offers crucial insights that extend beyond mere academic interest; its findings hold significant practical implications for a diverse readership. By systematically dissecting the recurring errors from lexical mischoices and grammatical inconsistencies to stylistic awkwardness and pragmatic misinterpretations this study provides a comprehensive roadmap of potential pitfalls in Indonesian-English translation.

For aspiring and professional translators, this material is indispensable. It serves as a practical guide, highlighting specific areas where vigilance and specialized knowledge are paramount. Understanding these common mistakes can significantly accelerate skill development, improve translation quality, and ultimately enhance professional credibility. It encourages self-reflection and continuous learning, urging translators to move beyond literal renditions towards contextually and culturally nuanced translations (Purnamasari, 2017).

For educators and trainers in translation programs, these findings offer concrete evidence to refine curricula. Identifying the most prevalent error types allows for the development of targeted pedagogical strategies, focusing on practical exercises and theoretical frameworks that directly address these challenges. This can lead to more effective training methods, better-prepared graduates, and a higher standard of translation education.

Furthermore, clients who commission Indonesian-English translations stand to benefit. A deeper understanding of the complexities involved can help them set realistic expectations, better evaluate the quality of services received, and appreciate the value of professional, nuanced translation. This knowledge fosters a more informed client-translator relationship, paving the way for clearer communication and more successful projects (Scollon, 2001).

In an increasingly interconnected world, where effective cross-cultural communication is vital for business, diplomacy, and information exchange, high-quality translation is not just an advantage it's a necessity. This research contributes to that necessity by shedding light on specific areas for improvement, ultimately aiming to elevate the standard of Indonesian-English translation and facilitate clearer, more accurate communication across linguistic and cultural divides.

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