

Constructing Meaning Through Context: An Analysis of Students' Strategies, and Challenges in Translating Idiomatic Expression

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Abstract: This study examines the difficulties faced by students in translating idiomatic expressions from English to Indonesian, highlighting the importance of effective strategies in the translation process of idiomatic expressions. Using a qualitative approach, the research involved in-depth interviews with students to gather insights into their translation strategies and the challenges they face. The research participants were ten students from the English education department of UIN ArRaniry Banda Aceh. The research findings show that although students use various strategies such as contextual translation, they often experience difficulties in literal translation and cultural nuances. The implications of this study suggest the need for enhanced teaching methods that address these challenges, ultimately aiming to improve students' translation skills and understanding of idiomatic expressions.

Keywords: *student's strategies, challenges; translating, idiomatic expressions*

INTRODUCTION

Idiomatic Expressions can be challenging for EFL learners to understand due to their non-literal meaning. Idioms are phrases or a group of word having meanings different from literal or individual words. EFL learners who engage in translation tasks, they often come across some difficulties in translating idioms, as they require not only linguistic knowledge but cultural and contextual awareness as well. Foreign language (EFL) settings, translating idiomatic expressions is not easy and can be a significant hurdle, especially when students rely on literal or word for word translation.

However, to successfully navigate the complexities of communication, students must master several key language skills as part of their English language learning process. This comprehensive approach enables them to grasp the nuances and meanings inherent in the language, thereby enhancing their ability to convey and understand information effectively. The process of transferring thoughts or meanings from one language to another is defined as translation Arono (2019). Translation is essential because it helps people share their messages accurately. A translator's task is not only to change language but to convey meanings from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) as well. This practice is crucial for both speaking and writing. When you speak with others, translation helps ensure that what you say is understandable correctly. It allows the listener to grasp the speaker's intended message, making conversations smoother and more effective. Similarly, when you write, translating texts helps you share complex ideas in a way that others can understand, regardless of their native language.

Translation also plays a key role in preventing misunderstandings. It is provided to connect people from different countries who speak different languages. However, by practicing translation, these language barriers can be

broken down. This leads to clearer communication and helps people connect better with one another. Translation is an important skill that helps individuals communicate across different languages. It allows us to share information and ideas while reducing the chances of miscommunication, creating a more connected world where everyone can understand each other better.

Translation is not just about transferring words from one language to another. When learning a new language, you need to understand how that language works and what words mean in that context. This helps you share the same message clearly. It's also important to study the rules and ideas behind translation because every language has its own systems and ways of organizing sentences. Finding the right meaning between two languages can be tricky. Translators often face challenges like differences in culture, how texts are organized, and the process of translating from English to Indonesian. These issues can make translation more complicated than it seems at first. Whenever students use English to communicate, they are actually translating ideas from their own language into English.

However, the words and phrases in English do not always match exactly with those in their native language. This can make it hard for them to learn English because the context, the way words are used, and the type of text can be different. Another challenge is that the cultural references and expressions in their native language might not be found in English, which can make it harder to understand and use English correctly. Besides, English has many words or idioms that cannot be translated literally and cannot be predicted (Bassnet, 2002).

Even if students know English very well, they can still make mistakes when translating. This often happens because they translate word by word, bringing their Indonesian thoughts directly to English. Not understanding grammar rules and not knowing enough vocabulary can also lead to errors. Another big problem is understanding idiomatic expressions, which are groups of words that do not mean what each individual word means. Because of this, students cannot just translate these expressions word for word; they need to understand the overall meaning first, as idiomatic expressions have unpredictable translations.

Consequently, the problem of this study is to identify the challenges faced by translators when translating English idioms and to identify effective strategies to mitigate these challenges. By understanding the complexity of idiomatic expressions and the specific difficulties they pose in translation, we can develop guidelines and recommendations to improve accurate teaching methods in translating idiomatic expressions, especially for EFL students at UIN Ar-Raniry.

Riskaaulina (2021) conducted a study to analyze student's ability in translation idiomatic expression in narrative text that involved twenty students of fourth semester of English Department Students Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji. The research was reported that not all students were able to translate the idioms correctly. Of the twenty students selected to translate the idioms in the narrative text presented, they translated the idioms word for word, not the meaning. They were able to identify only three idioms presented in the text.

Previous research addresses the general problems students encounter in translating idiomatic expressions. It does not focus on how these problems specifically affect students who are learning to translate. Unlike the previous research, the present study focused on the strategies students use and the challenges they face when translating idiomatic expressions. This study analyzes

ten English education department students in UIN Ar-Raniry through semi-structured interviews. It presents a clear understanding of how students can better handle the specific challenges in translating idioms. By doing so, the present research can be of use to improve teaching methods and provide better support for students as they learn to translate idiomatic expressions effectively.

The present study focused on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students who aimed to understand various aspects of their learning experience, particularly in translation classes. Yoko Iwai (2011) defined that EFL refers to those who learn English in non-English speaking countries. (E.g. Indonesian people who learn English in their country are EFL learners). It refers to the study of English by individuals who are learning the language in a country where English is not the primary or official language. This context typically involves students who have limited exposure to English outside of their classroom settings, as they primarily communicate in their native languages within their daily lives.

Therefore, this study is going to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the strategies used by the students in translating idiomatic expressions? And 2) What are the challenges faced by the students in translating idiomatic expressions.

METHODS

This study employs qualitative research to collect and analyze data. It applied a semi-structured interview method, which provided a consistent framework with pre-determined questions. Semi-structured interviews offered opportunities for follow-up questions in the form of open-ended inquiries. The researcher customized the interviews based on participants' responses, allowing for more in-depth exploration while maintaining consistency throughout the process. According to Creswell (2009), in a qualitative approach, a case is examined for a specific period using detailed and in-depth data collection, resulting in a comprehensive case description.

In this study, the researcher described the strategies and challenges faced in translating idiomatic expressions as experienced by students, without manipulating data or drawing conclusions.

Additionally, the instruments used in this research were the interview method. The interview method is essential for effective recruitment practices and qualitative research, as it provides structure and consistency, which can enhance the quality of data collection while allowing for a deeper exploration of participants' experiences. This method not only helps achieve specific objectives but also contributes to better decision-making based on reliable information.

According to George (2022), an interview is a qualitative research method that relies on asking questions to collect data. There are three types of interviews: highly structured, semi-structured, and open-structured interviews. This research utilized the semi-structured interview format. Semi-structured interviews are often open-ended, allowing for flexibility while following a predetermined thematic framework, which provides a sense of order.

To analyze the data, the researcher applied Lacey and Luff's (2009) five-step process. Transcription was the initial stage. This was the process of putting information into writing. The obtained data had to be completely transcribed. A researcher could not just transcribe data that was considered important or

exciting because the researcher had to first complete the transcription stage before moving on to the next step.

Data organization was the next step. The researcher kept the identity of the interviewee when collecting data from an interview. Following this, the researcher needed to go through the data familiarization procedure. The researcher read, watched, and listened to the data collected several times in order to facilitate the following stage and guarantee that nothing was overlooked.

The next step was coding. The researcher assigned a code to each incident identified during the interview. The transcript was coded so that the researcher could understand it. The final step involved themes. Transcripts that had passed the coding stage were then sorted again by the researcher to concentrate on occurrences that were highly relevant to the investigation.

Then, the interview results from the participants were analyzed qualitatively. The analysis focused on identifying common challenges faced by students in translating idiomatic expressions, such as cultural differences and issues related to the transparency and frequency of idiomatic expressions. It also analyzed the strategies used by the participants to overcome the challenges in translating idiomatic expressions

Research Design

Use description and figure to present research design.

In the second paragraph and so on given 1 cm indentation. Second and third headings written with following the format provided.

Participant

Use description and table to present the detail or characteristic of participants.

In the second paragraph and so on given 1 cm indentation. Second and third headings written with following the format provided.

Material

Present the instrumen including name of instrumen, indicators in table, also description of the instrumen.

In the second paragraph and so on given 1 cm indentation. Second and third headings written with following the format provided.

Procedure

Present step by step of the research.

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Data Analysis

Present step by step of the data analysis.

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RESULTS

To be able to answer the two research questions posed in this study, the researcher used observation to collect data. During the interview, the researcher asked nine questions related to the strategies students used in translating idiomatic expressions and the challenges they faced when translating idiomatic expressions. After analyzing the data, the researcher found several findings related to this research. Below are the findings from this research which are explained in detail.

After conducting interviews, the researcher had collected answers to the first research question. Based on the interview results, the students used several strategies to translating idiomatic expressions. The strategies had been divided into four parts.

1. Translation by Paraphrasing

This strategy is often used by students when translating idiomatic expressions. They think it is the easiest way to know the meaning of a sentence. In the absence of alternative idioms, paraphrasing is often used. This involves explaining the meaning of the idiom by using non-idiomatic phrases or simpler vocabulary that conveys the message without relying on idiomatic expressions. This method is often used when translating complex or culturally specific idioms.

SDF said that this strategy is easy to do because she can understand the meaning of the whole sentence. she usually paraphrases the whole sentence so that the purpose of the sentence can be understood correctly. According to CDA, this strategy helps her to find the correct meaning and make more sense. When she focuses on the idiomatic expressions found in the text, the meaning of the sentence can become irrelevant.

2. Using an Idiom of Similar Meaning but Dissimilar Forms

This strategy allows for the use of an idiom that conveys a similar meaning but differs in lexical components. Sometimes, an idiom may not have a direct equivalent in the TL, but the meaning can still be consistent. In such cases, the translator may use a different idiom that can capture the essence of the original language. This is often used when encountering idioms where a direct equivalent does not exist. CDA said that when translating idioms, she will focus more on the meaning rather than the literal word. she will look for the meaning of the idiom to find the target language.

According to ZAM, he usually analyzes the idiom first and look for the meaning of the idiom in different forms. As well as MSK, she would focus on the idiom she found and then search the dictionary or online tools for the origin, meaning and purpose of the word in a different expression. AFR translates idioms by comparing idioms with different expressions. For example, in English there is an idiom “spilled milk” to express that it is too late. Instead, she can interpret it as “nasi telah menjadi bubur”.

ERD also says that this strategy can be used to guess the meaning of idioms, for example the idiom “felling blue” can be interpreted as sadness, because the word blue refers to something gloomy or a sad situation. IKD interprets idioms by finding the appropriate meaning by using social media or Tiktok. There are several videos on social media that present idioms about the same meaning in other languages.

3. Translation by Omission

This strategy is used if the expression does not contribute significantly to the overall meaning or if including it would confuse the target audience. In some cases, students may choose to omit an idiom if it does not translate well or if it may confuse the target audience. This strategy is used only when other options are not possible. HLY used this strategy when he could not analyze which idiom in the text. According to DHA, she sometimes ignored the idioms in the sentence, when they were not familiar to her. She would just translate the other words to guess the meaning of the idioms.

4. Using an Idiom of Similar Meaning and Form

This strategy involves finding idiomatic expressions in the target language that match the meaning and lexical structure of the source idiom. HLY says that idioms can be interpreted directly as literal words. this strategy can be used when the meaning of the next word is appropriate to the context of the idiom. LDH also explained that using idioms with meaning and form is slightly similar to the word-for-word translation method. This strategy preserves the meaning and structure, while the word-for-word translation strategy for translating idiomatic expressions often changes or removes the original meaning.

Regarding the challenges faced by students when translating idiomatic expressions, participants in this study had many varied responses. They explained that there are various things that must be faced in order to increase their ability to translating idiomatic expressions. Some of the challenges they face were lack of familiarity with idiomatic expressions, insufficient vocabulary mastery, inability to recognize idioms within texts and cultural differences. The following are the challenges:

1. Lack of familiarity with idiomatic expressions

Unfamiliarity with idiomatic expressions can lead to awkward or incorrect translations. This is especially a problem when translating texts where idioms play an important role in conveying tone, humor or emotion. A lack of understanding of idiomatic expressions can have a significant impact on understanding, communication and cultural engagement.

According to ZAM, memorizing and remembering idioms is very helpful in translating idiomatic expressions. In the least, he feels familiar or have encountered many idioms in his daily reading or conversation. AFR also explained that idioms are something that must be familiarized, not just implemented in the scope of learning.

Therefore, she often explores idiomatic expressions more in non-lesson hours. DHA is also arguing that idioms are something to be familiarized with. She finds it difficult to translate idioms that she has never heard before. This is because idioms are not something that can be interpreted word for word.

SDF said that idioms cannot be interpreted by the ordinary meaning of the vocabulary, but must also understand the root meaning of the idiom. Without a strong understanding of the vocabulary, students may end up using a literal translation of the idiomatic expression. For example, translating “spill the beans” directly into another language without understanding its meaning (to reveal a secret).

In addition, ERD said that she had difficulties when translating idiomatic expressions in a text because of her limited understanding about idioms. She cannot define idioms without the help of a dictionary or other online tools. In the same way, IKD finds idioms difficult to understand because there are many forms and different analogies. she often finds idioms that have the same or similar meaning, but with different expressions, making it difficult for her to find the correct meaning of the idiom. MSK said that it was difficult for her to get used to remembering the idioms she learned because the meanings are not literal.

2. Inability to recognize idioms within texts

Many students find it difficult to identify idiomatic expressions. This suggests that students often use literal translation due to their inability to recognize idioms, which leads to failure in conveying the intended meaning of the source text. HLY said that he often could not analyze idioms in the sentences. This is because there are some idiomatic expressions that appear without following standard grammatical rules so it is difficult to recognize them as idioms. LDH also admitted to having the same problem of

not being able to recognize the difference between idioms and non-idioms, so he translated the text or the whole sentence word by word, which led to a failure in conveying the meaning of the text.

3. Cultural differences

Cultural context plays an important role in understanding idioms. Students often encounter idiomatic expressions that have no direct equivalent in their native language, which can lead to confusion and misinterpretation. For example, cultural differences between English and Indonesian can make it difficult to find the right translation, as idioms often reflect specific cultural nuances.

These challenges were reported by a large number of students, who expressed difficulty in recognizing and interpreting idioms due to these cultural differences. CDA said that the main difficulty when translating idiomatic expressions is that they are deeply connected to the cultural context, so their meaning is highly dependent on the situation. For example, the idiom “a head turner” literally means *pemutar kepala*, but on the other hand, it is interpreted as a person who is attractive and looks stunning. ZAM and LDH also said that when translating idioms, we should look into the cultural context and situation that the idiom is referring to.

on the other hand, IKD claimed that it was difficult for her to relate to the cultural context and the language used. she thinks that when translating idiomatic expressions, we are required to have a deep understanding of both the source culture and the target culture in order to convey the meaning of the idiom effectively

DISCUSSION

The following section is a discussion of the findings of the above research. There are two research questions in this study. These two research questions have been answered through the data collected during the interviews.

1. Strategies in translating idiomatic expressions

To answer the first research question, “What are the strategies used by the students in translating idiomatic expressions?”. The results showed that in translating idiomatic expressions, students used different strategies. The strategies used are translation by paraphrasing, using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, translation by omission, and using an idiom of similar meaning and form.

Translation by paraphrasing was reported as the most frequently used strategy among English education department students. The participants mentioned that paraphrasing helps them understand the overall context and meaning of the original text, making it easier to convey the intended message. This is similar to research (Ardhiani, 2018) which shows that paraphrasing is popular due to its simplicity and effectiveness in conveying meaning.

The second strategy most used by English education department students in translating idiomatic expressions is to use idioms that have the similar meaning but different forms. This is supported by the statement (Chung & Ahn, 2022), these idiomatic expressions are eliminated in the target language because there is no equivalent in the target language and cannot be easily paraphrased. Therefore, students use idioms that have similar meaning but different forms. The aim is to maintain the meaning.

2. Challenges in translating idiomatic expressions

The second research question in this study is “What are the challenges faced by the students in translating idiomatic expressions?”. The researcher found that there were several challenges faced by students in translating idiomatic expressions. These

challenges were lack of familiarity with idiomatic expressions, inability to recognize idioms within texts and cultural differences (Andayani, (2023). The Idioms come from different cultures, and therefore, the translation of idioms should be approached in a different way from the translation of other components of natural language use. Many participants admitted to a low level of familiarity with idiomatic expressions in the source language, which challenged their ability to interpret and translate them accurately (Seran, 2020). In this case, they tend to translate the idiom literally due to the lack of vocabulary and unfamiliarity with idioms.

Another difficulty faced by EFL students is that they cannot determine the context of the sentence. As a result, they fail to determine the meaning of the given idiomatic expression (Dewayanti, 2024). Idioms are deeply rooted in cultural context, often reflecting historical, social and linguistic nuances that may not have direct equivalents in other languages. The translator should have a strong understanding not only of the spoken forms of the source and target languages, but also an understanding of how culture affects cognition and projects in both languages.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the strategies and challenges faced by college students majoring in English education when translating idiomatic expressions. Through interviews with ten students, the research aims to uncover their approaches to translation and the difficulties encountered in the process. The findings emphasize the significance of idioms in language learning and translation.

One prominent strategy employed by students is paraphrasing. Rather than translating idioms directly, students explained their meanings in their own words. This method proved beneficial as it allowed them to grasp the overall context better, facilitating a more accurate conveyance of the intended message. Paraphrasing emphasizes understanding meaning over specific wording, which aids in clearer communication.

Another effective strategy identified was the use of idioms with similar meanings but different forms. When students could not find a direct equivalent in the target language, they opted for idioms that expressed similar ideas. This adaptability showcases students' resourcefulness and their ability to maintain the original meaning despite linguistic differences.

Despite these strategies, several challenges emerged during the translation process. A significant number of participants reported a lack of familiarity with idioms in the source language, which hindered accurate translations. Many students resorted to literal translations, leading to confusion and misinterpretation of meanings. Additionally, cultural differences presented a notable barrier; idioms are often deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts, and without a solid understanding of these backgrounds, students struggled to grasp the true meanings behind certain expressions.

In conclusion, this study underscores the necessity for improved teaching methodologies focused on idiomatic expressions within language education. By enhancing students' familiarity with idioms and their cultural contexts, educators can significantly bolster translation skills. Understanding idiomatic expressions is vital for effective communication across languages; thus, addressing these challenges will empower students to become more confident translators

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