Translation Competence of Students and Its Implications for the Development of Syllabus/RPS in the Translation Course at the English Education Department of Sultan Amai State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Gorontalo

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the translation competence of students in the English Education Program at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo and examines its implications for the development of the Translation course syllabus. Translation plays a critical role in education by bridging theoretical understanding and practical application, yet students often struggle with linguistic and cultural accuracy. Employing a mixed methods sequential explanatory design, the study was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved the quantitative analysis of students' translation errors from the textbook *Factfulness*, focusing on morphological, syntactic, semantic, and cultural aspects. The second phase involved qualitative interviews to explore students' translation strategies and cognitive processes. The findings revealed 285 translation errors, with semantic (121) and syntactic (78) errors being the most prevalent. Morphological (58) and cultural (28) errors were also significant, indicating challenges in structural adaptation and intercultural mediation. The qualitative data further highlighted students' reliance on literal translation and limited metalinguistic awareness. These results underscore the need to reformulate the Translation course syllabus to emphasize dynamic equivalence, cultural competence, and contextual meaning. Recommendations include integrating process-based translation instruction, error analysis, and reflective translation practice to enhance pedagogical effectiveness.

Keywords: English Education Program, factfulness, IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo, translation competence; translation errors; syllabus development

INTRODUCTION

Translation occupies a central position in the development of human resources, functioning across both theoretical and practical domains to support the advancement of knowledge and cross-cultural communication (Baihaqi, 2017). As a multifaceted process, translation involves not only the

transference of linguistic units but also the negotiation of meaning within diverse cultural and contextual frameworks. In the academic discourse, translation is often classified into two broad categories: pure translation and applied translation (Baihaqi, 2017, p. 4). Pure translation emphasizes the theoretical underpinnings of translation activities. It includes linguistic studies - covering phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics - as well as cultural studies and translation theory. These elements aim to deepen understanding of how meaning is constructed, transferred, and reinterpreted across languages. Theoretical models such as *skopos theory*, *equivalence theory*, and *dynamic equivalence* provide translators with conceptual tools to approach texts with precision and sensitivity to communicative intent.

Conversely, applied translation pertains to the practical execution of translation theory in real-world contexts. This type of translation demands mastery of source and target language conventions, specialized terminologies, and socio-cultural nuances. It spans various domains such as technical, legal, literary, and educational translation. In applied settings, the translator must not only decode and encode language but also navigate cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and target audience expectations (Puspitasari et al., 2014; Tarmini & Sulstyawati, 2019). Achieving dynamic equivalence in such contexts requires creative adaptation to ensure both semantic accuracy and communicative effectiveness.

Despite the academic foundation provided through formal instruction, many students continue to struggle with producing accurate and readable translations. The frequent reliance on literal translation often results in ambiguity and semantic distortion, especially when dealing with culturally bound expressions (Abarca, 2021). These issues are frequently rooted in inadequate language literacy and uneven proficiency in processing and conveying information across languages.

Within the context of English language education in Indonesia, particularly in teacher training institutions such as IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo, translation competence is not merely an ancillary skill but a formally recognized academic outcome. As stipulated in the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education No. 2500 of 2018, graduates of the English Education Program are expected to possess core competencies as educators, researchers, and developers of instructional materials, as well as additional competencies as translators. This expectation is further aligned with Regulation No. 53 of 2023 issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, which outlines quality assurance standards for higher education, including credit requirements and learning outcomes.

The Translation course at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo is designed as part of a structured curriculum requiring students to complete prior coursework in syntax and semantics. However, despite these preparatory measures, observed performance often reveals persistent challenges in lexical choice, syntactic structure, and the handling of culturally specific concepts. These difficulties underline the need for empirical investigation into students' translation outputs as a basis for pedagogical refinement. A comprehensive understanding of students' translation competence is crucial for informing curriculum development, particularly the design and enhancement of the Translation course syllabus. The textbook *Factfulness* by Hans Rosling serves as the source text for student translation projects in this study. Its use provides a linguistically rich and contextually diverse foundation for assessing translation performance and identifying pedagogical gaps.

Given the centrality of translation competence in the English Education curriculum and the challenges observed in students' translation performance, it becomes essential to conduct an in-depth and systematic investigation into the nature and patterns of translation errors made by students. This research aims to analyze the translation competence of students in the English Education Program at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo, particularly in translating academic content from English to Indonesian using the textbook *Factfulness* as the translation source. The study also seeks to explore how the findings can inform the revision and improvement of the syllabus for the Translation course. To guide the study, the following research questions are proposed:

1. What types of translation errors are most frequently committed by students when translating excerpts from the textbook *Factfulness*?
2. What do these translation errors indicate about the students' linguistic and cultural translation competence?
3. How can the identified translation issues be used to improve the design and delivery of the Translation course syllabus in the English Education Program at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo?

By addressing these questions, the study is expected to contribute both to the scholarly understanding of translation pedagogy and to the practical improvement of instructional design in translation education at the tertiary level.

METHOD

This study employs a mixed methods sequential explanatory design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches in two consecutive phases. The rationale for adopting this design lies in the need to not only quantify the types and frequency of translation errors, but also to gain a deeper understanding of the cognitive and contextual factors behind those errors through qualitative inquiry. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected and analyzed to identify patterns of translation errors in students' work. This stage served as the foundation for the second phase. In the second phase, qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews to explain and contextualize the quantitative findings. Informants were selected based on specific error patterns found in their translations. The two-phased structure allows for a comprehensive analysis by connecting numeric trends with descriptive insights.

The study was conducted at the English Education Department, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo. The participants consisted of 10 sixth-semester students (class of 2021) who had completed the Theory of Translation course. The translation tasks and observations took place over a five-week period, from April 4 to May 7, 2024, with meetings held twice weekly on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 08:00 to 10:00 AM. All participants were assigned to translate selected excerpts from *Factfulness* by Hans Rosling. These students were chosen purposively, based on their academic background and completion of prerequisite courses in syntax and semantics.

Data collection procedures incorporated three main instruments: translation tests, structured observations, and semi-structured interviews. In the quantitative phase, students' translation outputs were analyzed using a structured error categorization rubric, focusing on linguistic and cultural dimensions. Observational notes were taken during translation activities to document processes and strategies used by the students.

In the qualitative phase, interviews were conducted with selected students to explore their translation decision-making processes. The questions were informed by the results of the quantitative analysis, targeting specific types of errors and translation behaviors. Supporting tools such as bilingual dictionaries, glossaries, and translation software were allowed during translation tasks to replicate authentic translation environments.

The analysis process was aligned with the mixed-method design. In the quantitative stage, translation errors were identified, classified, and tabulated based on categories such as morphological, syntactic, semantic, and cultural errors. Frequencies and patterns of these errors were computed to determine dominant problem areas. In the qualitative stage, interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and coded using a thematic approach. The coding framework was informed by the PACTE model of translation competence and Bathgate's translation process. Data were triangulated across three sources - translation texts, observational notes, and interview responses - to ensure credibility and validity. The final stage involved interpreting findings by connecting error types to students' competence levels and contextual factors. These interpretations were used to formulate practical recommendations for the development and refinement of the Translation course syllabus.

FINDINGS

This study investigated the translation competence of sixth-semester students in the English Education Program at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo through an analysis of their translation outputs based on selected excerpts from the textbook *Factfulness* by Hans Rosling. The findings are presented in accordance with the types of errors identified and categorized under four major aspects: morphological, syntactic, semantic, and cultural.

Morphological errors

Morphological errors were primarily observed in students' mismanagement of word forms and affixation. Table 1 summarizes the frequency and type of errors found in this category:

TABLE 1 Translation problems in the morphological aspect

No	Type of Morphological Error	Number of Errors
1	Singular and Plural Forms	29
2	Affixation	21
3	Reduplication	3
4	Composition	5
	Total	58

The highest number of errors (29) was found in the translation of singular and plural forms, indicating students' struggle to apply correct pluralization rules in both English and Indonesian. Affixation errors (21) reflect challenges in selecting appropriate prefixes and suffixes in target language equivalents. Errors in reduplication and composition were less frequent but still notable, showing inconsistencies in handling compound structures.

Syntactic errors

Syntactic issues were detected at both the phrase and sentence levels. Phrase-level errors (43) included incorrect rendering of idiomatic phrases and technical terms. Sentence-level errors (35) demonstrated difficulties in preserving grammatical structure and logical sequencing when transitioning from source to target language. In total, 78 syntactic errors were recorded, suggesting a need for further emphasis on syntactic construction in translation training, especially regarding structural shifts and functional sentence perspective.

Semantic errors

Semantic errors were the most prevalent, with a total of 121 errors distributed across three subcategories:
1. Lexical Errors (26): involving inappropriate word choices and incorrect word meanings;
2. Connotative Errors (49): reflecting failure to convey implied or context-sensitive meanings;
3. Denotative Errors (46): resulting from inaccurate translation of literal meanings and definitions.

These findings highlight that students often overlook nuances in meaning and struggle to maintain semantic integrity, especially in culturally embedded or abstract expressions.

Cultural errors

Cultural misinterpretations were grouped into three sub-aspects:
1. Material Culture: 13 errors in technology-related terms and 3 in transportation.
2. Social Organization: 10 errors, particularly in government-related terminology.
3. Social Culture: 2 errors related to occupation.

In total, 28 cultural errors were found, indicating that students had limited awareness or knowledge of culturally specific concepts in both languages.

Observation and interview insights

Classroom observations revealed that students frequently relied on direct word-for-word translation strategies and consulted bilingual dictionaries without adequately considering context. Furthermore, interviews conducted with selected participants revealed that many students lacked confidence in adapting expressions and were uncertain about equivalence strategies, especially when translating idiomatic or abstract content. The findings from interviews supported the quantitative results, confirming that many errors were not merely technical but stemmed from gaps in linguistic awareness, cultural knowledge, and metacognitive reflection during the translation process.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal four critical dimensions of students' translation errors: morphological, syntactic, semantic, and cultural. Each dimension reflects specific cognitive, linguistic, and pedagogical challenges that are relevant to the development of translation competence. This discussion is organized into four sub-sections, each corresponding to one of the error dimensions. Drawing on relevant theoretical frameworks and recent literature, this section offers a deeper interpretation of the findings and outlines implications for translation pedagogy.

Morphological competence and structural interference

The prevalence of morphological errors, particularly in pluralization and affixation, indicates that students are struggling with the structural differences between the source and target languages. In Indonesian, plurality is often expressed lexically or contextually, while English relies heavily on morphological markers such as "-s" or irregular plural forms. The misinterpretation of these markers suggests a lack of explicit instruction in contrastive grammar and morphological awareness. Students' translations such as "copies" rendered as "fotokopi" rather than "Salinan" or "beberapa Salinan" exemplify the transfer of L1 semantic associations rather than L2 morphological rules.

This problem aligns with Weinreich's (1953) theory of language interference, which posits that structural habits from the mother tongue persist during second language production. However, more recent models such as Selinker's (1972) Interlanguage Theory provide a more dynamic perspective, suggesting that learners develop temporary linguistic systems that blend elements of both L1 and L2. Morphological errors may thus reflect developmental stages rather than mere negative transfer. This perspective supports the implementation of diagnostic teaching strategies that identify interlanguage patterns and intervene accordingly.

The PACTE model of translation competence further identifies morphological awareness as part of bilingual sub-competence. Without a robust grasp of inflection, derivation, and compounding in both languages, students are unlikely to make informed lexical choices during translation. Hence, fostering morphological competence should be seen not only as a linguistic goal but also as a core component of translational reasoning. Translators must be able to manipulate word forms to meet the grammatical and stylistic norms of the target language.

From a pedagogical standpoint, morphological training should integrate contrastive analysis, error typology, and task-based exercises. For example, learners could be asked to reconstruct translated texts with altered morphological cues or participate in peer review exercises focusing specifically on affixation and plurality. The use of parallel corpora and translation memory tools may also reinforce morphological pattern recognition.

Empirical studies by Fawzia (2020) and Chen et al. (2023) support this need for structured morphological instruction. Their findings show that morphology-related errors are among the most persistent in English-Arabic and English-Chinese translation contexts, underscoring the cross-linguistic relevance of this issue. These results further suggest that morphological instruction should be embedded in both linguistic theory classes and practical translation workshops. Ultimately, addressing morphological errors requires a reconceptualization of translation as not just a transfer of meaning, but also of form. The translator's ability to adapt morphological

constructions is critical for achieving functional equivalence and ensuring that translated texts are both accurate and idiomatic.

Syntactic complexity and transfer limitations

Syntactic errors observed in this study reflect a more profound issue in understanding the structural organization of the English and Indonesian languages. While phrase-level errors, such as awkward translation of idiomatic expressions, suggest lexical limitations, sentence-level errors reveal insufficient mastery of syntactic structures. Students often adhered rigidly to English sentence patterns, resulting in unnatural or ambiguous Indonesian sentences. This phenomenon mirrors the concept of syntactic calque, as defined by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), where source language structures are directly transferred into the target language.

Although the calque strategy may occasionally preserve meaning, it often compromises readability and stylistic coherence. As Göpferich and Jääskeläinen (2018) argue, syntactic competence in translation is not linear and can regress under cognitive load or unfamiliarity with text types. Even advanced learners may revert to literal translation when confronted with complex syntactic forms. Therefore, syntactic errors cannot be attributed solely to lack of knowledge; they also reflect cognitive processing limitations and strategy selection under pressure.

One critical factor here is the typological distance between English and Indonesian. English follows a rigid Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) order and heavily utilizes function words, while Indonesian allows more syntactic flexibility and relies on context for cohesion. Students' failure to adapt to these typological differences suggests a lack of metalinguistic awareness. Li and Lei (2020) emphasize that such awareness is essential for syntactic adjustment in translation tasks.

Translation pedagogy must address these gaps through discourse-level analysis and comparative syntax modules. Exercises should go beyond isolated sentence translation and incorporate textual cohesion, thematic progression, and rheme-theme structures. Students can be trained to identify communicative intent and reorganize sentences accordingly, thereby achieving not just grammatical accuracy but communicative clarity.

The concept of translation as renegotiation of meaning (Pym, 2021) is especially relevant here. Instead of translating word-for-word, students should be encouraged to reframe the syntactic structure based on the target audience and genre conventions. This requires integrating syntactic awareness with pragmatic reasoning, a skill often underemphasized in traditional translation courses. Moreover, reflective translation practice, where students justify syntactic choices post-translation, can foster strategic thinking. When students learn to critically evaluate why a certain structure fails in the target language, they begin to internalize syntactic flexibility as a norm rather than an exception. This reflective competence is a hallmark of advanced translation ability and should be cultivated from early stages of translator training.

Semantic competence and nuance negotiation

Semantic errors, particularly those involving connotative and denotative meanings, were the most frequent in this study, highlighting the complexity of achieving meaning equivalence across languages. Many students failed to convey not only the literal meanings of source language items

but also their contextual and emotional resonance. This breakdown suggests that students may not fully grasp how lexical semantics operates differently across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

The notion of dynamic equivalence proposed by Nida and Taber (1969) is particularly instructive here. It posits that successful translation requires not only a rendering of words but a reproduction of meaning effects on the target audience. Students' failure to achieve this level of communicative alignment reveals a gap in their pragmatic and contextual awareness. For instance, rendering culturally sensitive or emotionally loaded phrases literally often results in awkward or misleading translations.

Part of the issue stems from lexical mismatch - the assumption that dictionary - based equivalence ensures semantic accuracy. However, as Pym (2018) argues, lexical equivalence is often context-dependent and cannot be resolved through word-for-word substitution. The translator must interpret the source language in light of context, register, tone, and intended audience. This interpretative function requires both a deep vocabulary and an ability to infer unstated meaning or implied intention. Developing semantic competence thus involves cultivating inferential skills, which enable the translator to decode implied meanings and render them effectively. Pedagogical strategies may include guided comparison of alternative translations, textual analysis of collocations and idioms, and exposure to varied genre-specific language. Classroom activities that involve predicting or reconstructing meaning from limited cues may also enhance students' sensitivity to semantic nuance.

Another important element is the translator's subjectivity in resolving semantic ambiguity. As Chesterman (1997) notes, the translator is not merely a conduit but a decision-maker who negotiates multiple interpretive possibilities. Encouraging students to reflect on their decision-making process, why they chose one word over another, can improve semantic flexibility and judgment. This reflection can be structured through annotated translations or peer-feedback sessions. Furthermore, corpus-based tools and semantic field mapping can be introduced to help students understand the range and distribution of meanings within and across languages. Such tools offer empirical insights into word usage and help translators identify more idiomatic and contextually appropriate equivalents. This approach is particularly useful for dealing with abstract or culturally loaded terms, which tend to defy direct translation.

Cultural mediation and intercultural sensitivity

Cultural errors, while fewer in frequency, pose significant implications for the accuracy and acceptability of translations. The errors observed in this study, particularly in areas such as government terminology, occupational references, and technological culture, reflect students' insufficient knowledge of the cultural contexts embedded in language. These findings align with Liddicoat's (2015) assertion that translation requires not only linguistic but also intercultural competence.

Cultural translation involves the transfer of implicit knowledge, which is often not directly stated but assumed by speakers within a cultural group. Students' inability to adapt or explain culturally specific terms suggests a need for more explicit instruction in identifying and resolving culture-bound references. For instance, translating "ministerial decree" literally without adjusting to local administrative terms results in confusion or misinformation.

The role of the translator as a cultural mediator has been emphasized by scholars such as Katan (2009), who argues that effective translation involves bridging not only linguistic gaps but also cultural expectations. In this view, the translator must anticipate how a target audience will interpret or misinterpret culturally specific content and adjust the translation accordingly. This function requires both awareness and strategy. To develop intercultural sensitivity, translation pedagogy must incorporate comparative cultural studies, case-based learning, and authentic text analysis. Tasks that involve identifying culture-specific terms and proposing multiple translation strategies can enhance students' ability to negotiate cultural meaning. Role-playing or simulation exercises where students defend their cultural translation choices may also reinforce this competence.

Moreover, ethnographic approaches, such as fieldwork, interviews, or media analysis, can help students understand how language reflects social practices, values, and ideologies. Such exposure moves beyond textbook knowledge and fosters deeper cultural empathy. In translation practice, this translates into more nuanced renderings of culturally embedded texts. Finally, assessment practices should reward not just linguistic fidelity but also cultural appropriateness. Rubrics can be expanded to evaluate whether the translation effectively communicates meaning within the target culture. This shift in assessment reinforces the idea that translation success is measured not by literal equivalence but by communicative and cultural alignment.

By incorporating these strategies, the Translation course at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo can better equip students with the intercultural competence needed for high-quality, culturally sensitive translation. This competence is particularly crucial for future educators and translators operating in increasingly globalized and multilingual environments.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the translation competence of sixth-semester students in the English Education Program at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo through a detailed analysis of their translations of excerpts from *Factfulness*. The findings reveal substantial challenges across four dimensions of translation performance: morphological, syntactic, semantic, and cultural. These dimensions encapsulate both linguistic inaccuracies and deeper cognitive and intercultural limitations.

Morphological errors indicated difficulties in transferring structural features across languages, particularly in handling plural forms and affixation. Syntactic issues revealed students' tendency to mirror English sentence patterns, often resulting in grammatically awkward or semantically unclear Indonesian renderings. Semantic errors were the most prevalent, reflecting struggles in conveying contextual nuance, implied meanings, and lexical appropriateness. Cultural errors, while less frequent, demonstrated insufficient awareness of culturally specific concepts, especially in relation to government, occupation, and technology-related terms.

These translation deficiencies are not merely surface-level mistakes but point to fundamental gaps in metalinguistic awareness, cultural mediation skills, and reflective thinking. The data, supported by classroom observations and interview insights, indicate that students often rely on literal translation strategies, with limited strategic flexibility or adaptive reasoning. Such tendencies highlight the limitations of current instructional approaches that emphasize linguistic knowledge over communicative function and cultural adaptation.

In response to these findings, the Translation course syllabus must undergo a substantive transformation. An effective syllabus should integrate theoretical foundations, contrastive linguistics, and intercultural studies with applied, task-based activities. Emphasis should be placed on fostering functional and dynamic equivalence, genre sensitivity, and contextual appropriateness. Moreover, process-based teaching, including guided practice, error diagnosis, and reflective discussion, should be employed to help students internalize translation as a problem-solving and communicative act.

Assessment frameworks also need to evolve to measure not just fidelity and accuracy, but also fluency, cultural sensitivity, and decision-making quality. Incorporating performance-based evaluation methods, such as portfolio assessment or annotated translation tasks, will offer a more comprehensive measure of students' growing competence. In conclusion, the study underscores that developing translation competence requires a holistic pedagogical approach that encompasses language structure, meaning negotiation, and cultural adaptation. With a thoughtfully revised syllabus and reflective instructional design, the English Education Program at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo can better prepare its graduates to function as competent translators in academic and professional contexts.

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