Revealing Myths and the Truth in Translation

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Abstract

Have you ever been asked to do a translation simply because you speak both Indonesian and English? Or even other languages? There is a myth in our society that when you are bilingual, it means that you have the ability to do translation. This paper is to confirm a statement made by Samuelsson-Brown (2010) that 'being bilingual means competence in translation' is only a myth and that the truth is 'being bilingual does not necessarily include the ability to interpret or translate as translation requires additional skills in order to transfer concepts between languages'. Translation has its specific difficulties any translator needs to overcome. This mini research involved four translators who answered an open-ended questionnaire in a quest to answer a research question, "How do bilingual translators deal with difficulties in translation?" The results showed that the four participants confirmed Samuelsson-Brown's (2010) statement. And they found some ways to overcome difficulties in translation.

Keywords: t*ranslation*, *myths*, *the truth*, *bilingual*, *difficulties*

Abstrak

Pernahkah anda diminta menerjemahkan sebuah naskah hanya karena anda mampu berbicara dalam Bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa Inggris? Atau bahkan beberapa bahasa lain? Dalam masyarakat beredar mitos bahwa jika anda bisa berbicara dalam dua bahasa, anda pasti bisa melakukan pekerjaan penerjemahan. Tulisan ini hendak mengkonfirmasi pernyataan Samuelsson-Brown (2010) bahwa "menguasai dua bahasa berarti memiliki kemampuan menerjemahkan" adalah mitos belaka dan bahwa sebenarnya 'menguasai dua bahasa tidak serta merta termasuk memiliki kemampuan menginterpretasikan atau menerjemahkan karena penerjemahan mensyaratkan adanya keterampilan tambahan untuk mentransfer konsep dari satu bahasa ke bahasa yang lain'. Riset kecil ini melibatkan empat orang penerjemah dengan menjawab kuesioner yang mengacu pada pertanyaan riset, "Bagaimana penerjemah yang menguasai dua bahasa mengatasi tantangan dalam penterjemahan?" Hasil riset menunjukkan bahwa keempat responden mengkonfirmasi pernyataan Samuelsson-Brown (2010) tersebut di atas. Dan mereka menemukan dan memiliki cara mengatasi tantangan dalam penterjemahan.

Kata kunci: *translation, myths, the truth, bilingual, difficulties*

A. INTRODUCTION

Many people think that if we speak English and surely, Indonesian, it means that we can translate from Indonesian into English and from English into Indonesian. This situation shows that these myths are prevalent in the society. A translator must be aware of the myths about bilingualism as he/she must not abuse this term for his/her benefits. A translator must also be aware of the truth of

bilingualism: its definition and meaning in relation to the work of a translator, as this awareness will influence his/her work, i.e. producing a text in the target language. Being a bilingual is surely a benefit for a translator as he/she has to operate in two languages, yet there are difficulties in translation which need to be addressed carefully as to produce smooth and natural translation into the target language. Excellent product will surely satisfy the clients.

B. OBJECTIVE

This paper is aimed at confirming statement made by Samuelsson-Brown (2010) that 'being bilingual means competence in translation' is only a myth and that the truth is 'being bilingual does not necessarily include the ability to interpret or translate as translation requires additional skills in order to transfer concepts between languages' (Samuelsson-Brown, 2010, p. 27). In confirming Samuelsson-Brown's (2010) statement, this paper is to answer this research question: How do bilingual translators deal with difficulties in translation?

C. METHODOLOGY

This study involved four participants: two professionals and two freelancers. One participant was a male professional translator who has been in translation profession for 4 years; the second one was a female professional simultaneous interpreter (she wrote in her questionnaire 'Language Assistant') who has been working in translation for a couple of years. The other two were male freelance translators who have been in translation business for more than 10 years. These freelance translators usually do translation work based on demand or offer.

To collect data from the participants, an open-ended questionnaire was used. Printed questionnaire was handed out to the two participants (freelance translators) to be filled it up. The other two participants received the questionnaire via email as they were not in Jakarta area. The participants responded to the questionnaire in

two or three days. The answers were tabulated and the accounts of each questions were noted down. The questionnaire and the accounts of the participants' response are available in the Appendix.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Bilingualism and Ability to Translate

If we speak more than one language, it means we are bilingual? Can we do translation, then? There is a kind of perception (or myth) in many societies that if you are fluent in other languages, it means you are able to translate from those languages to your mother tongue and vice versa. But it seems that this is not always the case. Many people are fluent in two or more languages, but they face difficulties in translating a piece of work in those languages.

By the way, what is bilingualism? What do language experts say about the relation between bilingualism and translation? Butler & Hakuta (2004) offer the following definition: "Bilingualism can be defined as psychological and social states of individuals or groups of people that result from interactions via language in which two or more linguistic codes (including dialects) are used for communication" (Butler, Y.G. & Hakuta, K., 2004, p. 115). While Hamers & Blanc (2004) define bilingualism as 'the state of linguistic community in which two languages are in contact with the result that two codes can be used in the same interaction and that a number of individuals are bilingual (societal bilingualism)'. This is a far wider definition than Bloomfield's (1933 quoted in Romaine (1989, p. 11) definition of bilingualism: a native-like control of two languages' and Mackey's (1968, quoted in Romaine (1989) definition: 'simply the alternate use of two or more languages'. It seems that the definition of the term 'bilingualism' has changed through times and tends to be more 'inclusive', i.e. including people who have access to more than one linguistic code (even dialects). In relation to translation, Samuelsson-Brown (2010) offers the following lengthy definition on bilingualism:

"Bilingualism is usually described as using two languages in daily life
– but not necessarily in the same context. … Bilingual service
providers should have an adequate competence in both languages and
an objective understanding of the implications concerning both
cultures in the subject area in which they work. Being bilingual does
not necessarily include the ability to interpret or translate. This
requires additional skills in order to transfer concepts between
languages" (Samuelsson-Brown, 2010, pp. 26-27).

By citing this piece, Samuelsson-Brown (2010) shows that the common
perception that bilinguals have an ability to translate is merely a myth. The truth is
this ability needs to be acquired and polished through training and hands-on
experience. The statement also reiterates the importance of an adequate competence
in both languages and an objective understanding of the implications concerning
both cultures in the subject area in which the translators work. Being bilingual is
not enough to be a translator.

Samuelsson-Brown (2010, p. xv) states two most important qualifications
for a translator, i.e. being able to express fluently in the target language and having
an understanding of the text being translated. Samuelsson-Brown (2010, p. 26) also
emphasizes the two prerequisites of being bilingual, i.e. understanding both the
language and the culture. This understanding really matters when it is related to the
work of a translator as translation often involves culture-specific items or
expressions. Therefore, one of the challenges of being a translator is having
knowledge and understanding of the culture of the source text as well as of the
target text. A translation work is not merely supplying words in the target language
for the words in the source language. It involves knowledge about the two
languages: the linguistic and cultural aspects (Baker, 2011). The translation work
is expected to be natural and acceptable in the target language without diminishing
the message intended by the author in the source language. Keeping up with cultural
change of the languages a translator is working in will be a great credit to him/her

because this is one of the ways 'to understand a language properly and to translate successfully' (Samuelsson-Brown, 2010, p. 30).

In dealing with the various aspects of translation work, Baker (2011, pp. 3-4) suggests that a translator has to be in control of what they do and that he/she translates well because of his/her efforts in understanding the various aspects of the work. The understanding of the various aspects of translators' works is reflected in the translators' willingness to shun away their egos because "the essential factor to consider is the target reader' (Samuelsson-Brown, 2010, p. 31). With the target reader in their mind, translators are not supposed to treat their translation works as their 'baby' and refuse a 'mere look' or a correction or criticism. Translation work must be checked to ensure that

- it is suitable for the intended market,
- terminology reflects what is in current use, and
- the language used is pitched at the right level.
  (Samuelsson-Brown, 2010, p. 31)

By stating these three reasons for checking the translation work, Samuelsson-Brown (2010) tries to make sure the necessity of 'localization' of the language by having the target reader in mind. This localization leads to word choice and presentation according to the language level of the target reader.

2. The challenges of translation

The end product of a translation work is a text that 'reads naturally and smoothly in the target language' (Baker, 2011, p. 180). The 'localization' offered by Samuelsson-Brown (2010) usually requires extra work in translation, and this creates other challenges of translation. In the same vein, Baker (2011) states that translation work includes both linguistic and cultural aspects which translators must be aware of. This awareness will help them solve the problems and difficulties in translation as to make sure the translation work reads naturally and smoothly in the target language. Baker (2011) offers some information on potential sources of translation difficulties related to the linguistic and cultural aspects, and possible

strategies for resolving them. These two aspects are related to words, grammar and texts as well as the communicative function of a text, including the cultural context.

In relation to words, the possible problem is the non-equivalence at the word level which means that the target language has no direct equivalent for a word which occurs in the source text (Baker, 2011, pp. 18-22), for example culture-specific words, semantically-complex words, loan words and words as a result of differences in meaning, form, and perspective. In order to deal with the various problems related to non-equivalence detailed above, Baker (2011) offers strategies for translators: using a general word as an umbrella (super-ordinate), using less expressive words, using cultural substitution, using a loan word or loan word with explanation, using paraphrasing technique, by omitting and by using illustration. These strategies are handy and very useful as a way out when a translator faces problem with non-equivalence. The main point of translation is that it is suitable with the intended market and satisfies the client.

Baker (2011) points out the bigger challenge of translation when it has to do with collocations, idioms and fixed expressions. The most common problem related to these three is 'misinterpretation of the meaning of a source-language collocation which is due to interference from native language (of the translator)'. For example, the Arabic collocation *'modest means'* (unassuming) should not be translated into *'modesty'* in English. The other problem is the tension between accuracy and naturalness. For example, the English word *'hard drink'* (any spirits) means *'alcoholic drink'* in Arabic which refers to any alcoholic drinks, including beer, lager or sherry. Translating English idioms and fixed expressions is more challenging because most of them do not have equivalent in most target languages (Baker, 2011, p. 71). Baker (2011, pp. 76-85) simply suggests finding the expressions which convey the same meaning, borrowing the expressions, paraphrasing, or, in some difficult cases, omitting.

Translation is even more challenging when the source language and the target language have different grammar. To overcome difficulties of translation

related to the text presentation in communicating the message in target language, i.e. the word order, Baker (2011) offers this suggestion:

> "Word-order patterns fulfill a number of functions in all languages: syntactically, they indicate the roles of subject, object and so on; semantically, they indicate roles such as actor, patient, beneficiary; communicatively, they indicate the flow of information" (Baker, 2011, p. 175).

Quoting Johns (1991) and Papegaaij & Schubert (1988), Baker (2011, pp. 176-179) offers some strategies to overcome this problem: change in verb and voice, nominalization, and extraposition.

When grammatical challenge is overcome, how about cultural stereotyping in translation? Samuelsson-Brown (2010, p. 34) mentions cultural stereotyping as another truth related to bilingualism and translation stating that language reflects culture and the translator must understand cultural and stereotypical ways of reproducing the meaning of the source text. A translator must be able to bring about the 'intended meaning' in certain culture in another language without changing the core meaning. Baker (2011, p. 240) offers some strategies to overcome these cultural problems: first, using the conventional meaning of words and the conventionalized expressions and patterns of conveying implicatures. One feature of implicatures is semantic prosody. This is a feature which "gives rise to very subtle implicatures which are often processed subliminally, without the speaker or hearer necessarily being conscious of the attitude being expressed by the item in question" (Sinclair quoted in Baker (2011, p. 241). And translators must be aware of semantic prosody in the source language as to translate it accordingly without ruining the message in it. Another strategy is by cultural substitution. It is replacing a culture-specific item or expression with a target language item which does not have the same propositional meaning but is likely to have a similar impact on the target reader (Baker, 2011, p. 22).

E. FINDINGS

Does being bilingual means ability to translate? Three participants – the professional translator and the two freelancers – agreed that being bilingual does not mean having the ability to translate. They stated that it is necessary for a translator to have a special training; while the simultaneous translator stated that it is not necessary to have a special training for this profession because this is rather an on-the-job training where knowledge comes with experience. It seems that the simultaneous translator emphasized the need of having hands-on experience rather than a special training.

Samuelsson-Brown (2010) stated that a translator must fulfill two qualifications, namely, being able to express fluently of the target language and having an understanding of the text being translated. The four participants agreed to these qualifications. They said that the mastery of the two languages is a must as the nature of the job requires comprehensive text or speech output. Translation is the process of understanding a language, interpreting and expressing it in the target language; the challenge is how to match the target text with the source text. The ability to express fluently in the target language and the understanding of the text or speech being translated determine the success of being a translator.

In order to serve their clients better, the professional translator and the simultaneous interpreter talked and discussed with their clients to know the purpose of the translation and the target reader. The interpreter did more before assisting a meeting, such as checking the attendees, the translation device needed, and getting 'tuned-in' into the topic of the meeting. These things were quite challenging but had to be done in order to translate the text satisfactorily or to assist the meeting successfully, i.e. when the meeting attendees did not get bothered by communication boundaries since the translation was smooth. One participant did not give the answer specifically while the other one simply turned down any translation work he was not capable of translating.

The four participants agreed to Baker (2011). When there is no equivalent in the target language, one participant preferred to keep it as it is, especially for the special terminology, jargon and terms. The other three relied much on up-to-date and relevant dictionary or corpus, or simply went 'Googling' to support their translation. They were also willing to consult the experts in the field to get a stronger grab of the idea, content, and context of the translation. Reading a lot seemed to be the best tool for the simultaneous interpreter as she had to come up with an equivalent term as quick as possible. The challenge of simultaneous interpreter is bigger because the work is a real-time, on-the-spot translation with almost zero-tolerance of mistakes. Having a vast knowledge of the topic of the meeting and ability to think quickly is a must for a simultaneous interpreter. These participants did their homework before hitting the job.

The four participants received translation work which required them to translate from Indonesian to English and vice versa. Difference in grammar, tense, word-order of the two languages might pose difficulties for them. That's why the professional and the freelance translators stated that excellent mastery of both Indonesian and English is a must for translators operating in the two languages.

To overcome cultural problem in translation, Samuelsson-Brown (2010, p. 30) states that in order to understand a language properly and to translate it successfully, translators must keep up with cultural change of the languages they work in. The four participants also agreed to Samuelsson-Brown's (2010) statement that keeping up with cultural change of the languages a translator is working in is necessary. They agreed citing reasons, 'it is the nature for languages to grow and adopt words rapidly', 'it is necessary to consider culture in translation as to produce a contextual translation', and 'it is necessary to translate as natural as possible so that the target reader will not realize that it is a translated text'. After all, language is inextricably intertwined with culture as language develops together and within culture.

In the end, the goal of translation is to satisfy the clients (target readers). The difficulties of translation must be overcome using the techniques and strategies offered by experts. The three translators claimed that the most rewarding part for their work was when the clients (the target readers) read the translated works and satisfied with the work. For the simultaneous interpreter, when the participants of the meeting were able to communicate well.

Table 1 below shows the participants' responses to the four questions related to bilinguals' ability to translate, the necessity to master Indonesian and English, the need to keep up with cultural changes of the languages, and the need to have a special training for a translator.

Table 1 The participants' responses to the questionnaire

No	Questions	Participants			
		1	2	3	4
1	Bilingual = ability to translate		X		X
2	Indonesian & English mastery				
3	Keeping up with cultural change				
4	Special training	X			

F. CONCLUSION

To sum up, two of the participants agreed to Samuelsson-Brown's statement that being bilingual means ability to translate in the languages he/she is fluent in is only a myth. But, they all agreed that translation works require certain skills acquired through training and hands-on experience. Even with adequate training and years of experience, translation from Indonesian to English and vice versa still posed some difficulties for the participants of the mini research for this paper.

The identified difficulties were grammar differences of both languages, the non-equivalence as the results of different culture, and the clients' demand. The four participants agreed that translators in Indonesian and English must have a mastery of both languages as to overcome translation difficulties related to grammar differences (including tense, word-order) of both languages. Keeping up with cultural changes of both languages was also a great tool for these translators in doing their job and in overcoming translation difficulties related to cultural-bound expressions. These translators made use of dictionary and corpus to overcome translation difficulties such as collocations and idiomatic expressions. Consulting an expert on certain field and reading a lot also empowered them to tackle this difficulty. And in order to satisfy the clients or meet their demand, these participants talked and discussed with their clients about the purpose of the translation and the target readers. By having the target readers in their mind, they were encouraged to produce the translated text suitable for them.

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Appendix The questionnaire

Open-ended Questionnaire

1. Do you think every bilingual has the ability to translate? Why or why not?
2. Do you think a mastery of Indonesian and English is necessary for a translation job? Why?
3. In doing your job as a translator, do you think it is necessary to keep up with cultural change of Indonesian and English? Why?
4. How do you deal with the translation difficulties such as collocations, idioms, and fixed expressions or non-equivalence in the target language?
5. Do you we need to have a special training or educational background to be a translator?
6. How do you deal with your clients' demands?
7. What is the most challenging part of this job for you?
8. What is the most rewarding part of this profession?