FIVE TRANSLATION COMPETENCIES

Zainurrahman

STKIP Kie Raha Ternate
zainurrahmankalero@gmail.com

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Introduction

Translation is now becoming more than subject studied in the language education and linguistics; it has been interesting a big number of people to take it as their everyday income. Translation is not only taken by linguists or language learners, but also economics students, law students, and so forth. This rising of translation degree builds new aspects in translation and make translation becomes more than language transfer.

Every discipline has its own characteristics and even its own words. Basic translation concept, changing a word from source language to target language, is seemed to be ineffective anymore; this means that translation activity becomes more complex, because it Implies disciplines sense rather than language sense. For the example the translation of economics textbook from English to Indonesian, there will be a good number of terms that must be translated in its discipline sense, to keep the original meaning without adding or distorting it.

Here, translation should be percept as more than changing text from one language to other language(s), but also considering that translation is substituting text form (from lexical to discoursal rank) without changing meaning, without adding or distorting, without destroying the meaning. Here, the translator must have a sort of competencies to legalize the translator as qualified.

This essay will elaborate five competencies that a good translator must have. Mastering these competencies enables a translator to do translation as well as expected. These competencies are: Language competence, textual competence, subject competence, cultural competence, and transfer competence. The elaboration for each competence is in turn.

Language (or Linguistic) Competence

Language competence is the basic competence a translator must have. It departs from the definition of translation as has been mentioned with some considerations above. Without mastering languages, someone is disabled to translate a text from source language to target language. Jakobson (in Munday, 2001:5) categorizes the linguistic aspects of translation,
and one of them is interlingual translation: an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. Here, a translator at least must have competence in both source language and target language. The translator is demanded to have a good understanding of language aspects of source language and target language.

The translator is not only demanded to master target language in one rank, but also every rank. As mentioned before that language ranks are lexical (word), to phrasal, clausal, sentence and discourse.

In translation studies, language is the main item must be discussed about. It is, because translation is about language, both verbal and non-verbal language. Here, theories regard to linguistics or language must be grown deeply on translator mind. Even translation theories must draw upon the general theory of language (Catford in Baker&Malmkjaer, 2001:120).

A translator should master language not from one aspect but whole aspect; it is because a text is a unit of meaning (Baker&Malmkjaer, 2001). In my own opinion, language master role in translation is not only to translate words or sentences, but also to know how the target language receiver says something that is different from source language user. By mastering language, especially sociolinguistic translation, the translator may have bigger chance to do it better than mastering grammar of target language.

Newmark (1988:39) suggests that all translations are based implicitly on a theory of language. The higher translator’s duty beside to master language aspects is that to master language functions. Before we continue to discuss language functions, it should be realized that nothing in translation but the language itself. It is quite wrong to say that translation discussion is not always about language, because the term translation itself was understood in language boundary.

There are at least three major functions of language proposed by Buhler (in Newmark, 1988), they are: expressive, informative and vocative.

The core of the expressive function, as explained by Newmark, is the mind of the speaker, the writer, the originator of the utterance or text. Suppose that you are translating a text, the expressive function of language is the text-writer’s mind, idea, feeling and intention. The language form used in the text will be expressive. You should realize that the core of the text is the writer. And it is essential that you, as translator, should be able to distinguish the personal components of the text: i.e. unusual (‘infrequent’) collocations; original metaphors; ‘untranslatable’ words, particularly adjectives of ‘quality’ that have to be translated one-to-two or three; unconventional syntax; neologisms; strange words (archaisms, dialect, odd technical terms), all these is often characterized as ‘idiolect’ or ‘personal idiolect’ (Newmark, 1988:40).

Based on the suggestion above, without mastering this function of language, or without language competence especially in this regard, a translator must deal with a big difficulty in translating expressive texts. Expressive text type will be discussed later on.

This is essential to understand if you are a translator of foreign languages. For example you are translating a text from a source language (that is not your native language) to a
target language (which is also a foreign language). It does not mean that it is not important for you when translating a text of your native language to a foreign language you mastered; some of words or utterances may exist in your native sense but it may not exist in the target language such as minor clauses.

Still according to Newmark, the core of the informative function of language is external situation, the facts of a topic, reality outside language, including reported ideas or theories. For the purposes of translation, typical informative texts are concerned with any topic of knowledge and the format of informative text is often standard: a textbook, a technical report, an article in a newspaper or a periodical, a scientific paper, a thesis, minutes or agenda of a meeting (1988:40).

As mentioned to you that disciplines have their words. Let us say that a translator tries to translate a textbook of computer. Without mastering words used technically in computer field, the translator must deal with difficulty. i.e. in English the word ‘string’ means ‘rope’ or something similar. But in computer term, ‘string’ means ‘word’ or ‘input in letter or wordy type’. If a translator does not have this competence, it is very possible to give wrong information to the target language receiver. The function of translator in this regard is to translate ‘information’ from source language to target language. However, some languages or disciplines may use ‘different’ word for similar thing; means that the word cannot be translated literally, thus the translator’s role here is to maintain the information. Without ability or competence in this regard, it is impossible to do the translation of informative text as well as expected.

The last one is the vocative function of language. If the core of expressive function of language is the writer (not the translator), the core of informative function of language is the field of the language, here, the core of the vocative function of language is the readership, the addressee. For the purposes of translation, Newmark takes notices, instructions, publicity, propaganda, persuasive writing (request, cases, and theses) and possibly popular fiction, whose purpose is to sell the book or entertain the reader, as the typical vocative text (1988:41).

It is obvious that expressive function suggests to maintain writer or the text producer, informative function suggests to maintain information in the text (it is possible to treat text as independent entity) and vocative function suggests to consider the readership, or the possible reader’s understanding. The ‘reader’ here is the target language receiver. Considering the reader is important, since the translator wishes the reader will be affected by the vocative text he or she is translating as well as expected. The lack of language competence in this regard may create an unintended product of translated text.

From the description above, it is clear that language competence is basic and essential to be mastered by a translator. The language competence covers the competence in language ranks (lexical to discoursal) and language functions (expressive, informative and vocative). If we see deeper, it is found that it is not only linguistic features of the language plays important role, but also metalinguistic feature such as socio-culture aspect of language, psychological aspect of language, they also play important role. The role of the translator to master linguistic competence is to produce a communicative translated text; here linguistic competence is knowledge of language concerned comprising communicative competence and metalinguistic competence.
Textual Competence

Textual competence is knowledge of regularities and convention of texts, genres and text types. It is important to distinguish texts; this is closely related to how a text is translated. For instance, translating a narrative text is different from translating expository text, because the structures of those texts are different. Having competence to distinguish texts is very crucial for a translator.

However, working with text translation is not only about distinguishing texts, but also knowing the convention of those texts. For several foreign languages, similar expression may be written in different way, this phenomenon is really about social convention of the language users. A translator must be competent to look deeply how different is target language receiver utter or write certain expression which differs from source language user; failure on this regard may create misunderstanding on reading the translated text produced. Translating a letter is different from translating advertisement or invitation, translating a novel is different from translating a scientific paper. Word selection in translating texts based on the genre or the text type becomes very important for a translator.

In relationship with this, text as word and vice versa, it should be reminded that word is ‘something’ translated, of course because there is nothing else to translate (Newmark, 1988:73). Text, as well as word, has its own context which needs to be considered in translation. Some text must be translated faithfully, word for word, and some texts are enabled to translate freely. A pragmatic textbook is possible to be translated freely, as long as the translator is competent to keep the information in the text. It is different to translate mathematic textbook that is tightly and prescriptively stated, so the translation should be word for word.

The importance of having textual competence in translation also takes place in teaching translation. In line with this, Ressurreccio et.al (2008) stated that text genre can be useful educational aid when it comes to planning and carrying out the teaching of specialized translation. Students who are studying translation must be introduced with text genres, which they can use as the instrument or even object to be translated. Working translation with text genre finally means giving emphasis on the text itself. The translator or students learning translation ought to be competent to recognize text genre, learning certain text convention, and translate it without ‘destroying’ its convention to make it more communicative and not change its original genre. That is, Ressurreccio (2008) mentioned that genre is conventionalized text form that has a specific function in the culture that it belongs to and which reflects a purpose that is intended by the sender and can be foreseen by the receiver.

Textual competence enables a translator to see how certain text genre functions in certain culture. If a translator does not have or is not qualified in this regard, it is possible that there will be dysfunction of translated text.

A translator is also the medium or interaction between the originator of source text and the receiver of the target text in different culture. To avoid the misunderstanding and the dysfunction of text is being translated the translator must be qualified of textual competence. Textual competence can help to establish the status of the participants and the
degree of authority they each have, infer and create the purpose of interaction, recognize and establish the situationality of the source and target text, create and infer intentionality of the source texts, have a thorough understanding of the socio-linguistic context, acquire bicultural knowledge, and acquire thematic context Ressurreccio (2008).

By seeing at the description above, the function of textual competence is to enable translator to keep the original genre of the text, to keep the function of the text, to avoid misunderstanding from the receiver on the text, to avoid the dysfunction of the text, and to create communicative situation from both the sender and the addressee interaction. The difference from the linguistic competence is that textual competence gives emphasis on the text type, genre and convention rather than the concept of language understood by the originator of the text and the receiver of the translated text.

Subject Competence

Subject specific or domain competence is knowledge or relevant subject, the area of expertise; for specialist translator, this amounts to a working knowledge of domain. As mentioned very early, that translate text is not only change the language form from one to other language(s). It needs such kind of expertise to acquire the characteristics of text; one of them is the discipline in which the text is taking place.

Each discipline has its own word choice that becomes one of the subject specific competences a translator must have. A good translator will remain the function of the text without changing it arbitrarily. Although free translation is allowed, it does not mean that a translator may translate a text without considering the domain in where the text is working.

Texts are various in certain domain. You will not translate a computer textbook as similar as automotive textbook, because if you do so, the text will dysfunction if not irrelevant. This is closely related to the textual competence mentioned before, that each discipline has certain words that treat different from a language (a domain) to other. Working with domain competence in translating various or specific subject or domain or discipline text is not only about the cultural different, but the convention in which the text user or the receiver will read it also plays role. Here, Venuti (2004:173) mentioned that the various kind of text variety are partly not confined to one language or one culture but the habits of textualization, the patterns of language and structure often differ from one another to a considerable extent. Hence, the establishment of the text variety is of decisive importance for the translator, so that he may not endanger the functional equivalence of the target language text by naively adopting source language conventions. By naively ignoring the specific domain of the source text, the product or translated text will be dysfunctional.

Melby (2007) stated that subject matter can vary even when the audience, text type, and purpose are held constant. A translator in holding the audience (the target text receiver), text type (genre) and the purpose (text function) will also need to specify ‘what kind of text being translated is’. Even the three entities (audience, genre and function) have been held constantly, the translator still find the subject is various. This subject competence will be demanded as well as the two competencies have been explained before.

Sometimes in translating some texts in certain discipline, the translator may deal with some untranslatable words that do not have substitute word in the target language
(Bassnett, 2002:39). This kind of difficulty must be anticipated by having subject competence. The translator, besides having linguistic competence, is also demanded to know the subject of the text he or she is translating.

I have given an example of word ‘string’ in computer domain that has different meaning where the word is applied in other domain. This, in contrary with Bassnett, literally can be substituted, or has meaning in other domain. However, to keep the function of word, the word ‘string’ in computer domain cannot be translated.

Another example I can give here is the word of ‘God’ in Christ domain which is sometimes substituted with ‘He’ in Bible; this word ‘He’ as understood as the third-masculine singular cannot be translated naively by adopting the source domain to Moslem domain, although the object is similar; because God is neuter in Moslem domain.

**Cultural Competence**

Language is one of the culture elements, and nothing to be translated but language. As a culture element, language contains a good number of social conventions in using and understanding words and cultural identities. As well as text that is actually information, intention and ideas those are packaging in language itself. It (text) contains social conventions and cultural identity.

A translator must have cultural competence of both source language and target language (Kastberg, 2007). Some of the expressions in source language may have different way to express in target language, or even does not exist at all. By having cultural competence, the translator may need not to look the substitution but enough to see the equivalence. Equivalence means the expression in target language which is fulfill the sense intended by the originator of text of source language.

However, although translator may use ‘equivalence’ to fulfill the sense of source language, there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units (Jakobson in Munday, 2001:36). Some words in source language may have their equivalence in target language but it does not guarantee to substitute the ‘untranslatable’ words in their nature. Some culture view some words or expression like proverbs in their convention cannot be equaled or at least no similar sense in other languages. Therefore, when a translator does not have qualified cultural competence, the text produced will be weak in sense.

Some translators may focus on the text and some other translators may focus on the reader of the target text. Cultural competence in text-based translation is important in terms of translating some expressions that the equivalence or substitution word does not exist in the translator’s native language. Thus, the translator can select some of the procedures of translation which allow making small changes on the text.

The procedures are packaged in a strategy which is known in translation studies as ‘shifts’. The term shift itself means small linguistic changes occurring in translation of source text to target text (Munday, 2001:55). There are a good number of shifting procedures in translation studies. Shift can occur in language ranks (lexical, phrase, clause, sentence, and discourse). Shift is chosen as a way to do the translation in certain ‘situation’ to fill semantic gap.
However, it is quite impossible if the translator does not have enough knowledge regard to the source text culture. Some texts may be created for internal culture use only, when the text are translated into other language(s) which have different culture, it can be guessed if the text will be dysfunctional unless the translator does not have enough capability to acquire the culture where the text was created and used.

Without cultural competence, the translator needs to work harder to do shifting. One of the shifting procedures is ‘borrowing’. Borrowing means to borrow words from source language to fill semantic gap (or sense gap) if there is no substitution word or equal expression in the target language. The purpose of the borrowing, besides to fill semantic and sense gap, is to emphasize the cultural color in the text.

Shifts are not only occurred in terms of linguistic feature in the text, but also, if I dare to add, ideas that may be unknown or inexperienced by other language user with their culture. For the example ‘khitan (Indonesian)’ in the Moslem culture which is unknown in English earlier. To translate this word, to make the sense up, the translator should use original word rather than change it ‘circumcision’; ‘khitan’ in Moslem culture is not only cut a part of genital skin for medical purpose, but also a kind of obligation must be done. Here, the word circumcision which means make a circular cut of the genital skin does not fulfill the sense. This is the example of how cultural competence is demanded to be had by a translator.

**Transfer Competence**

Transfer competence is an ability of transferring message from source text to target text communicatively. The word ‘transfer’ itself means to carry over or across. According to Pym (1992) there are three relationships between transfer and translation, they are: (1) **transferring** of process which is “not-exist” to “exist” that is done by the translator based on the knowledge he have; (2) translating that is the process of message transformation from source to target text; and (3) **translated text** that is the text produced by the translation process.

For having transfer competence, the translator is demanded to have enough linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge, especially which is relevant with the text content is being translated. It seems like transfer competence will be assumed as the highest competence demanded for all translators in this world; translators are demanded to be able to transfer not only words, or grammatical and semantic aspects of language, but also mental images implied in the text, to make the produced text makes sense as well as hoped.

Transfer competence is heavily supported by four other competencies have been elaborated before. The transfer competence is needed mostly in the while-translation process rather than pre and post-translation. The translator may have to analyze the source text to attain the text type, the purpose and the function of the text before start to translate the text. Furthermore, the translator needs to consider for whom this text is translated to. In the process of consideration, the translator’s competencies (linguistic, textual and subject) really work, if the translator has enough. In the translating process, the transfer competence is more demanded, again, with support by other competencies.
Transfer, finally becomes one of the translation procedures named transference. Newmark (1988:81) mentions that transference is the process of transferring a source language word to a target language text as a translation procedure. Until this time, I personally believe that transfer is the suitable term rather than translate, because people use word as their conventional creation (table is not a translation from meja, vice versa). People give everything name without considering what name given to the thing by other people with their linguistic convention. Therefore, in translating a text, it is actually transferring. A translator explains how certain language users say or express certain phenomenon.

As mentioned before, some words may be unknown or unfamiliar or not suitable or irrelevant from source language to target language. When the translator has to decide whether or not to transfer a word unfamiliar in the target language, which in principle should be a source language cultural word whose referent is peculiar to the source language culture then he usually complements it with transliteration. In principle, the names of source language objects, inventions, devices, processes to be imported into the target language community should be creatively, preferably ‘authoritatively’ translated, if they are neologisms, although brand names have to be transferred (Newmark, 1988).

Considering those all, transfer competence is very crucial for a translator. Some words may have to be borrowed from source language to avoid misunderstanding, dysfunction, or even wasting time. Finally, those are the competencies the translator must have or at least to learn. Those competencies promise a successful translation, if a translator does not have enough competencies as explained, the translated text will be dysfunction or even it is better to do nothing than wasting time to translate a text.
Bibliography


