

Translators and Interpreters as Communicators: Ethics and Tips

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ABSTRACT

Translation and Interpreting are forms of communication because the two activities are done for an audience. Whether communication is done online or offline, the audience needs to understand the message. As communicators, translators and interpreters are responsible for getting the right message or ideas from the text writers or the speakers to the audience. Errors in translation and interpretation can cause a world disaster as bad as the Japan bombing in 1945. Many student translators probably do not realize it, as seen in the questionnaires they filled in. Only after they join the translation courses do they realize that translating and interpreting is not so easy, and many things should be paid attention to in getting across the message. There are important points to be followed by both professional and student translators and interpreters to render the right meaning in translation and interpreting to avoid such a calamity. Faithfulness in both written and oral translation and the principle of meaning over form are two of the many important points. In communication, especially across cultures, meaning should be paid attention to because nuances of meaning are very important to attend to. Nuances of meaning cannot be neglected in the comprehension of the source text and the production of the target text. In interpreting, especially when time is a challenge, there are useful tips to fulfill these important points.

Keywords: *audience; faithful; oral and written translation; user-friendly*

INTRODUCTION

Translation and interpreting are forms of communication because both are done for an audience, be it one person, a small group of people, a large group of people, a nation in a specific country, or even all people in the world. Translation and interpreting are never done without an audience. Because there is an audience, both are an act of communication that

attempts to relay, across cultural and linguistic boundaries, another act of communication (which may have been intended for different purposes and different readers/hearers). The common thread here is communication.... (Hatim and Mason, 1997, pp. 1-2).

Munday et al. (2022, p. 108) describe interlingual translation as 'translational action from a source text', which 'focuses very much on producing a TT that is functionally communicative for the receiver.'

This action means, for example, that the form and genre of the TT must be guided by what is functionally suitable in the TT culture rather than merely copying the ST profile. What is functionally suitable must be determined by the translator, who is the expert in translational action and whose role is to ensure that the intercultural transfer takes place satisfactorily. In the 'translational text operations' ... the ST is analyzed solely for its 'construction and function profile' The needs of the receiver are the determining factors for the TT. Thus, as far as terminology is concerned, a technical term in a technical ST may require clarification for a non-technical TT user ... Additionally, to maintain cohesion for the TT reader, a single term will normally need to be translated consistently. (Munday et al., 2022, p. 108)

The above principles must be paid attention to by translators and interpreters to create a translation that is user-friendly or easy to understand.

Student translators and student interpreters are usually not aware of those principles. They think translation and interpreting are just changing words in one language into another. In fact, this is completely wrong. The students' translators also are not aware that in the publishing of a book, there are many people involved. In the process of reading a book of an ST (source text), until the TT (target text) book can be read, many people are involved. According to Munday et al. (2022, p. 109), as a communicative process, translations involve a series of roles and players: the initiator, the commissioner, the ST producer, the TT producer, the TT user, and the TT receiver. It is the same with interpretation. The initiator can be the company or individual needing translation or interpretation. The commissioner is the individual or agency that contacts the translator or interpreter. The ST producer is the individual(s) within the company who writes the ST and who is/are not necessarily involved in the TT production

or the speaker for an event. The TT producer is the translator or interpreter, and the translation or interpretation agency or department. The TT user is the person who uses the TT, for example, a teacher using a translated textbook or a salesman using sales brochures. Finally, the TT receiver is the final recipient of the TT, for example, the students using the textbook in the teacher's class or the clients reading the translated sales brochures. The TT user and the TT receiver are considered the audience for the translation and interpretation. Considering these many people involved, this paper aims to discuss and illustrate the necessary points to be paid attention to in translating and interpreting for an audience to produce good translation and interpretation.

METHODS

At the end of every semester, students of translation and interpreting classes were asked to write a paper summarizing what they had learned in their classes. The paper should include self-evaluations of their knowledge about translation and interpreting, difficulties, and solutions to their problems in translating texts and interpreting. They should include their first opinion about translation and interpreting before they join the translation and interpreting classes. They were also asked to include their opinions after completing all the semester assignments. In short, they should write whether the classes brought a change in their knowledge and practice in translation and interpreting or not. In their essays, points analyzed qualitatively were the changes they notified at the beginning and the end of the courses.

Besides the paper, observation was also done when students were asked to present their difficulties and the process of deciding to arrive at a solution for the problems. From their explanations of the difficulties and the process of making solutions to the problems they faced in translating and interpreting during the semester, it could be known how they were aware of faithfulness and the importance of meaning in translation and interpreting.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Nearly each of them mentioned that, at first, they thought translation and interpreting were simply changing languages. Most of them never thought there were so many points to be

considered to convey the ideas in the source text into the target text. They could not clearly define the point of being faithful in conveying the idea of the source text. They did not understand why meaning was more important than form. These two points, faithfulness and the importance of meaning, are discussed below, and examples are given for each in order to make the points clear.

Errors in Translation as a Form of Communication

A clear example of an error in translation was the case that caused the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings in Japan in 1945.

In 1945, Japan was weakened to the point of defeat. The ‘Big Four’ of the allied forces—the U.S., Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the Republic of China—gathered in Potsdam, Germany. They sent their sternly worded terms of surrender to Japanese Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki. If Japan did not meet the terms, the Allies threatened "prompt and utter destruction." They waited tensely for a reply, which could determine how World War II would end.

When Japanese media asked what Japan’s reply was to be, Premier Suzuki said that they hadn’t come to a final decision. For now, they would withhold comment. He used the word *mokusatsu*, a term with a range of meanings from ‘remain in a wise and masterly inactivity’ to ‘withhold comment’ to ‘ignore with contempt’. When the term *tokusatsu* found its way into the hands of English translators, they translated it as ‘ignore with contempt.’ This translation mistake, which did not match Suzuki’s attitude or intention, circulated among American media, stirring outrage. Ten days later, the decision was made. The B-29 *Enola Gay* headed for Hiroshima with the bomb aboard. (Oaster, 2017)

According to Satwika Rumeksa, who also wrote about the translation error in Surya.co.id (Agustus 6, 2010), Suzuki Kantaro’s statement was “Seifu wa kore o tokusatsu shi, aku made sense kanchiku ni main suru,” and the translation was "Government is ignoring the declaration, and until then, we still go forward with the war solution." Rumeksa also identifies that the word *tokusatsu* was a word that was not correctly translated. He further explains that a linguist specializing in translation error, Torikai Kumiko, said the suitable meaning for *tokusatsu* was “give it the silent treatment”; this means that the Japanese would not take any

action and just wait for the Soviet Union's action. The translator's use of the word 'ignoring' was taken as 'rejecting', and thus, ten days afterward, the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. This example provides a clear example of translation as a form of communication. It is also clear that diction or choice of words should be carefully chosen because it can break down communication.

Meaning over Form

Faithfulness is necessary in translation. What needs to be transferred from the source text into the target text is the meaning of the individual words and the features behind the words. Translators and interpreters must stay faithful in transferring the meaning from the source text into the target text. In the example of the Hiroshima bombing, the source text is Japanese, and the target text is English. Whatever the source text and target text, the principle of faithfulness still plays a very important role.

In the example from the Macmillan dictionary below, the source text is English, and the target text is Indonesian. The quotation from the Macmillan online dictionary illustrates the importance of prioritizing meaning over form in the translation from English into Indonesian. From the thirteen meanings of the word 'cut,' the meaning and examples below can create problems in translation.

2. VERB B1

If you **cut yourself** or **cut** a part of your body, you accidentally injure yourself on a sharp object so that you bleed.

Johnson cut himself shaving. [VERB pronoun-reflexive]

I started to cry because I cut my finger. [VERB noun]

Zoe was badly cut as she scrambled down rocks to reach him. [VERB noun]

Blood from his cut lip trickled over his chin. [VERB-ed]

Figure 1. The dictionary meaning of 'cut' (Collins, 2023a)

The first and the second examples are active sentences in English but mean '**not** doing it **on purpose**.' This meaning (not on purpose) should be included in the Indonesian translation, although the form of the Indonesian sentence is changed into passive. The translation should be (1) *Ketika mencukur, Johnson terluka.*; (2) *Aku mulai menangis ketika jariku teriris*. These are the right translations because the meaning of the English sentences and the meaning of the Indonesian sentences are the same; the form of the active English sentences becomes passive in Indonesian. When the forms are maintained—the Indonesian and the English sentences are active, the meaning will change; the following translations are wrong: (1) *Ketika mencukur, Johnson melukai wajahnya*; (2) *Aku mulai menangis Ketika aku mengiris jariku*. The change is that in English sentences, they are **not** done on purpose, while in Indonesian sentences, they are **done on purpose**. That is a great difference. The change from active to passive makes the meaning of the translation clear.

However, clarity does not always mean faithful to the ST. If the ST intends to keep the text ambiguous in the beginning, faithfulness in translation means to keep the TT ambiguous in the beginning. The following example illustrates the ambiguity needed in the translation, and it is possible to transfer the ambiguity in this kind of joke.

Client: Can I try the dress in the window?

Salesperson: Of course not; you should try it in the fitting room.

(Startsat60, 2022).

This joke should be translated as follows in Indonesian.

Pembeli: Apa saya bisa mencoba baju di etalase itu?

Penjual: Tentu saja tidak boleh. Ibu harus mencobanya di kamar pas.

The joke lies in the double meaning of "try the dress in the window." It can mean "trying the dress in the window" (this is what the client means). It can also mean "the action of wearing the dress is carried out in the window" (and everybody in the street can see it); this is what the client means. Therefore, the ambiguity in this joke should be transferred into the TT.

If the translator translates this way, *Apa saya bisa mencoba baju yang di etalase itu?*, then the joke disappears. The conversation is not logical anymore because it is clear that what the client means is the dress that is displayed in the window. Suppose it is translated as *Apa saya bisa mencoba baju di etalase itu?*. In that case, the client means **the dress displayed** in the window, but the shop assistant thinks **the action of wearing the dress is carried out in the window**. The unmatched perception creates humor.

Translators and interpreters should try to get across the content of the source text as detailed as possible in the target text. Failure to do this can result in confusion for the audience. In other words, the result of the translation and interpretation should be user-friendly.

How to Achieve Faithfulness in Translation and Interpretation

Translation and interpretation do not simply occur from SL sentences or utterances to TL sentences or utterances. The audience sees it that way, but there is a process from ST to TT. The process involves understanding or comprehending the ST, the transfer of the content of the text understood by the translator or interpreter, and afterward, the re-expression or production of the TT.

In order to understand a text completely, translators and interpreters do not only need to understand the language pairs very well, but also the subject matter or topic of the ST. House (2000, p. 55) emphasizes that

"Understanding among translators and interpreters is different from understanding among normal receptors, since it is a deliberate and more analytical act of communication which requires the apprehension of sense in its totality so that sense matches the intended meaning (*vouloir dire*) of the sender of the source text."

The text is analyzed in terms of the idea conveyed through the words, phrases, sentences, and utterances. Like the example above, there is also clarity or ambiguity to be included in the TT. If there are difficulties in the comprehension stage, these difficulties should be solved first before producing the TT.

Translators have ample time to use dictionaries, while interpreters do not. Lexical difficulties, for example, can be dealt with by consulting dictionaries, whether bilingual or monolingual dictionaries. Each type of dictionary has its advantages. Bilingual dictionaries give some ideas for saying something in different languages, but consulting bilingual dictionaries must not be the only effort translators make. Monolingual dictionaries are also important. For example, translators need to consult the monolingual dictionary first, the English-English dictionary in translating from English into Indonesian. Even at this point, translators can consult different English-English dictionaries because different dictionaries give different explanations. Examples of the word 'ambiguous' taken from three different English-English dictionaries can be seen below.

ambiguous

adjective

UK /æmˈbɪɡ.ju.əs/ **US** /æmˈbɪɡ.ju.əs/

having or expressing more than one possible meaning, sometimes intentionally:

His reply to my question was somewhat ambiguous.

The wording of the agreement is ambiguous.

The government has been ambiguous on this issue.

Figure 2. The dictionary meaning of 'ambiguous' (Cambridge, 2023)

ambiguous

adjective

/æmˈbɪɡjuəs/

/æmˈbɪɡjuəs/

- . that can be understood in more than one way; having different meanings
- *an ambiguous word/term/statement*
- *Her account was deliberately ambiguous.*

Figure 3. The dictionary meaning of 'ambiguous' (Oxford, 2023)

ambiguous

(æmbɪɡjuəs ⓘ)

1. ADJECTIVE

If you **describe** something as **ambiguous**, you mean that it is **unclear** or **confusing** because it can be understood in more than one way.

This agreement is very ambiguous and open to various interpretations.

They may not be fully aware of what they are voting for because of ambiguous language on the ballot paper.

ambiguously **ADVERB** [*usually ADVERB with verb, oft ADVERB adjective*]

Zaire's national conference on democracy ended ambiguously.

2. ADJECTIVE

If you describe something as **ambiguous**, you mean that it contains several different ideas or **attitudes** that do not **fit well** together.

Students have ambiguous feelings about their role in the world.

Figure 4. The dictionary meaning of 'ambiguous' (Collins, 2023b)

These examples show that different dictionaries explain things in different ways. The length of the explanation and the number of examples are not the same. Different translators might find one dictionary better for them than the others. Consulting all three dictionaries makes the translators understand the difficult word better than just consulting one dictionary.

If the ST monolingual dictionaries are needed for comprehending the ST, the TT monolingual dictionaries are needed for the re-expression restructuring, or production of the TT. When translating from English into Indonesian, when the translators have understood what to transfer, they should also consult the Indonesian-Indonesian dictionary, e.g., KBBI (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia) or Tesaurus Bahasa Indonesia. It is always good to check the words that translators seem to know. There might be different nuances of meanings that translators do not know of.

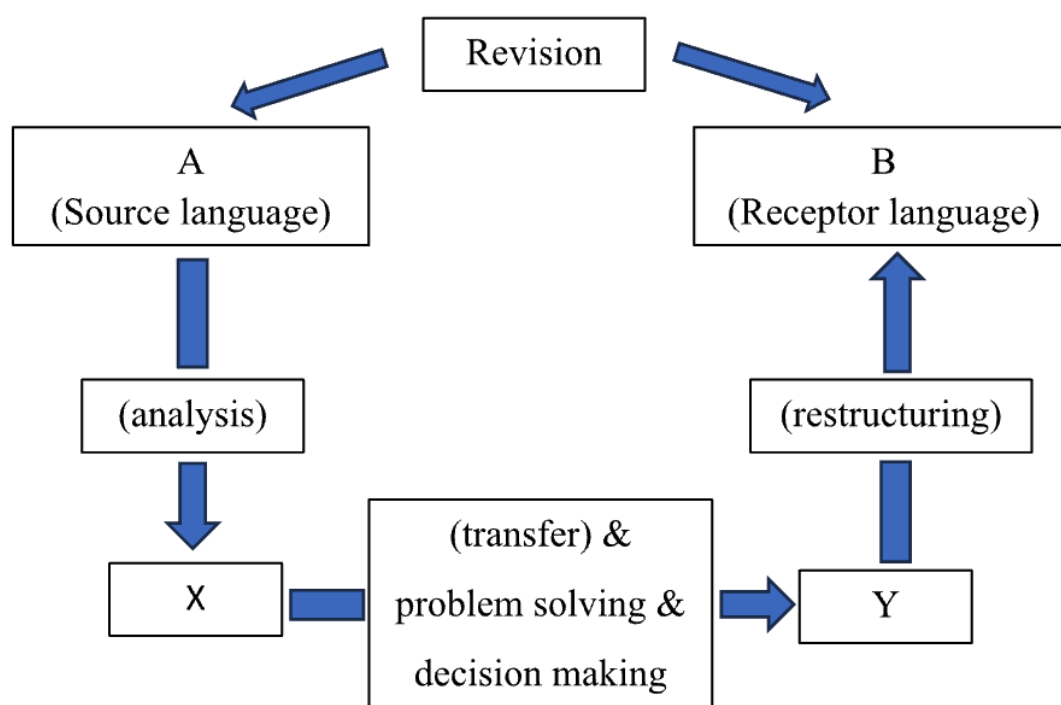
Translators have time to research before or in the middle of translating the text when the topic or subject matter of the ST is unfamiliar to them. Interpreters need to do it before the schedule of interpreting comes. Nowadays, they can use the internet to understand the topic of

the ST. If they lack background knowledge, re-expressing the text's idea in the TT will be difficult.

The process of translation, analysis (comprehension)-transfer-reexpression can be summarized in this diagram.

Figure 5. Translation process

The translation process described above is what Nida (1969) describes in the translation process. Revision is the idea of Suryawinata (2003), and problem-solving and decision-making are Wills' (1994). In translation and interpreting, lots of things happen in the process. The process does not happen linearly from language A to language B only. There is problem-solving and



decision-making before translators and interpreters produce the final translation. Problem solving deals with difficulties encountered in the process. After having several options for solving the difficulties, translators and interpreters must decide which option they take. For example, in translating the sentence "I find it difficult," the difficulty is likely the word 'find.' The first translation that students usually come up with is *menemukan*. However, in Bahasa

Indonesia, it is only appropriate when the context is about a thing missing; one is looking for it, and finally, one can find it. In that sentence, 'find' is not related to anything missing. It is related to an opinion; this meaning will be transferred into the TT. Therefore, *menemukan* cannot be used. The problem of the translation of 'find' must be solved. The problem-solving stage comes up with three choices; words that can be used are *rasa*, *pikir*, and *kira*. The translations are '*saya rasa itu sulit*', '*saya kira itu sulit*', '*saya pikir itu sulit*.' One of these three should be chosen, considering, among others, formality, politeness, clarity, etc. Then, a decision is to be made.

Suppose the translator chooses the first choice; the process of translation is not finished yet. S/he must check once again whether what is re-expressed in the TT has the same meaning as the ST. This checking is sometimes done repeatedly in a more difficult and long text. First, check and recheck need to be done for the right message and content conveyed in the TT. Second, check and recheck need to be done for writing mechanics, for example, spelling, etc. Usually, student translators do not practice check and rechecking because they do not realize the impact of a wrong translation. Not every student has the ideal of a perfect assignment; they might justify their carelessness of not checking because of the many assignments they have to do. That is why the emphasis on process-oriented translation is better than the product-oriented one. In the case of translating books, after a book has been translated, the translator must read again from the first chapter to the last one. Besides ensuring that the TT's content is the same as the ST and that there is nothing wrong with the writing mechanics, the translator needs to check whether the terminologies, terms of address, and other consistencies have been made.

One important thing to consider in cross-cultural communication, where translation is included, is that persuasive strategies may differ in different cultures. Hatim and Mason (1997, 128) say that "... the choice of argumentative strategy can and often does have serious implications in the pragmatics of language in social life and consequently for translation." They further explained that the factors involved are not only pragmatic, such as politeness and power, but also socio-political or even religious, for example, attitudes to truth, freedom of speech, etc. In one culture, directness and determination are seen as positive and polite; in another, both can be seen as impolite and not positive. A simple utterance such as "Do you have time now to discuss my work?" cannot be directly translated in a personal meeting of an Indonesian student to his/her teacher as "Ibu/Bapak ada waktu sekarang untuk membahas pekerjaan saya?".

Probably in the States or other Western countries, it is not a problem because the person who will reply to that question can freely give two options: yes or no. In Bahasa Indonesia, it sounds too straightforward. The option 'yes' seems bigger than 'no,' although there is still an option to choose. It is better to translate, "Kalau misalnya sekarang, Bapak/Ibu ada waktu untuk membahas pekerjaan saya?" This translation balances the option and, therefore, it sounds more polite in a conversation because it gives more room to the person who should reply to the question. The answer can be "kalau misalnya besok, bisa?" (How about tomorrow).

Being Faithful as Ethics

Being faithful in conveying the ideas in the source text into the target text is a part of the ethics in translation and interpretation. The audience has the right to get what they deserve. The translator and interpreter have the duty to give as much as they can to the audience regarding the translation and interpretation content. They need to work hard to achieve this point. Indeed, it is not easy to achieve it; at some point, it is even very difficult or impossible to achieve it 100%. However, translators and interpreters must try to achieve nearly 100%. Translators and interpreters must not take it for granted that as long as the translation and interpretation have already been done, their duty is finished; it is now up to the audience whether the audience can understand their translation and interpretation. This kind of attitude is very unethical. They must not pretend that they understand the content when they cannot. Although they assume that the audience does not understand this the audience can feel it. In communication, messages can be communicated without any verbal communication. The audience can feel whether the translation and interpretation are seriously done.

Another important aspect of faithfulness is user-friendliness. This aspect means that the audience can easily understand the translation and interpretation. To achieve this, it is not the words that should be changed but the meaning of the source text that should be transferred to the target text. For example, in a business letter, the sentence "Paid annual vacation time stands at 42 days" cannot be translated into *dibayarkan liburan tahunan selama 42 hari*, but it is easier for the audience to understand if they read *jatah cuti atau libur tahunan adalah 42 hari*. *Jatah* includes the meaning of "paid although the person is not coming to the office," while *dibayarkan liburan tahunan* implies the meaning of "the expenses spent in the vacation are

going to be paid by the office." Translators and interpreters should consider whether their translated sentences or utterances can cause such an audience's wrong perception.

An important thing to consider is, like writer, translators and interpreters influence people, especially in the translation of news. "Understanding how the news affects readers' and viewers' perceptions of events is an important aspect of understanding how the media influence people's decisions and understanding of the world" (Evans, 2022, pp. 80-81). Therefore, translators and interpreters must keep updated with world events. Wrong translation might bring disasters, whether on a small or big scale. Although it is probably not as serious as the Hiroshima bomb, an unnecessary negative result of a wrong translation should be avoided.

Tips

In interpreting, especially in simultaneous interpreting, where the speaker and the interpreter speak simultaneously, probably just a few seconds difference, interpreters do not have the time to ask the speaker what is not clear to the interpreters. Usually, in conference interpreting, interpreters sit on the balcony at the back of the room, and the speaker is in front of the audience. In terms of time and distance, it is not possible for them to communicate. In that case, if interpreters are not sure whether they understand what the speaker means, s/he can say to the audience phrases to indicate her/his uncertainty, for example, I think what s/he means is... or I am not sure if I translate it correctly or I can get his utterances clearly, etc. In short, interpreters need to be honest.

In consecutive interpreting, where interpreters speak after the speaker talks, interpreters usually have some time to ask speakers when there is something they do not understand, provided that the interpreter sits or stands next to the speaker. Therefore, before the interpreting event begins, one day or one week before, interpreters should contact the person in charge to know where they stand or sit. They can request to be seated or stand next to the speakers. If the interpreter and the speaker are far from each other, they cannot communicate directly. The worst is when the interpreter cannot hear the speaker comfortably and has to restrain the ears because the sound system is not good. Sitting or standing next to each other is the best choice to prevent it from happening.

In translation, translators are not as limited in time as interpreters. They indeed have time constraints from the clients or publishers. It is usually in terms of weeks, months, or days.

The point is that they have time to consult dictionaries or experts in the fields or encyclopedias. Being a translator indeed means working hard with a great number of thick books. The research comes before the action of translating.

If translators are offered translation jobs with no background knowledge and the time given to do the translation is very limited, it is better not to accept the job than to accept the job and submit the translation product with bad quality. The latter can have a bad influence on the career. It is in itself a negative advertisement.

CONCLUSION

Translators and interpreters are communicators. They communicate with the audience of translation and interpretation. Therefore, clarity and faithfulness in translation and interpretation are necessary. In order to achieve clarity and faithfulness in translation, the translation process should be done correctly, and meaning should be prioritized. Errors in translation and interpretation can likely happen if the form is over-meaning. When the audience is confused or cannot understand the translation, it means that there is an obstacle in the communication. Therefore, translators and interpreters need to do the job seriously. Evaluation and revision are necessary whether the translators and interpreters are student translators or student interpreters or they are already professionals.

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