

## **Issues in Translation between English and Malay**

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigates how the differences and similarities between Malay and English play important roles in the translation of materials in two different genres: Recount and Information Report. The characteristics discussed include not only issues at sentence and word levels, but also the morphemes that make up the two languages. The paper also explores the strategies taken by the translators and possible explanations behind each one.

### **Introduction**

It is the translator's responsibility to keep the message in the target language as close as possible to the original in the source language. Hatim (1997, p. 1) notes that translation is

the act of communication which 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 'different purposes' mentioned by Hatim can be interpreted as referring to genres, which can be defined as a types of language utilized by the language user in specific contexts (Baker, 1992, p. 15). Translation can be especially difficult when one considers different text genres.

According to Butt et al. (2001, p. 9) there are seven text types: Recount, Narrative, Procedure, Information Report, Explanation, Exposition and Discussion. The current study focuses on Recount and Information Report.

### **Malay and English**

When one compares Malay and English texts, the former appear to have longer sentences. However, this assumption needs to be checked, and this is one of the main aims of this research. The research focuses on the following questions:

- 1) Are texts in Malay 'wordier' than English equivalents? If so, what factors that can be found to explain the differences in lengths between the two?
- 2) What are the patterns seen in the translation of texts across different registers between English and Malay equivalences?
- 3) What are the strategies used by the translators in overcoming the differences between English and Malay in order to produce acceptable translations?

### **Problems in translation**

Numerous issues can be identified in translating a text from one language to another. Two of them are: non-equivalence; and differences in the construction of sentences. The latter is concerned with the discourse of the two languages.

Baker (2011, pp. 18–23) says that non-equivalence at word level is one of the many difficulties translators face when dealing with texts. Some of the reasons for such non-equivalence are:

- culture-specific concepts: a concept in the source language may not exist in the target language
- a concept is not lexicalized: the concept may be understood in the culture of the target language, but there may be no word to express it
- the source language may have more specific terms (hyponyms) term while the target language only has more a general term (superordinate)

Translators select different strategies in tackling non-equivalence. Baker (2011, pp. 24–43) lists a number of strategies that may be adopted, including:

- cultural substitution
- use of a superordinate in place of a hyponym
- use of words borrowed from the source language
- paraphrase using unrelated words
- omission

## Data

Two different kinds of text were collected for analysis: Recount and Information Report. Details of each follow. Throughout this article, Malay words are italicised while English words are placed in quotes.

### **Recount**

There are two English language newspapers in Brunei: Borneo Bulletin and Brunei Times. There are also two Malay newspapers: *Media Permata* and *Pelita Brunei*. The latter is published by the government's Information Department, but it does not report on daily stories happening in Brunei or other international news, so this study selects texts from *Media Permata*.

Borneo Bulletin and *Media Permata* are published by the same company, which suggests they may offer suitable data for analysis in this research, as it is often possible to find similar articles in both newspapers: an English article appears in Borneo Bulletin, while a Malay equivalent can be found in *Media Permata*.

For the Recount texts, five news articles in English from Borneo Bulletin and five equivalent articles from *Media Permata* were selected:

- **BNS** : about the Brunei Nature Society releasing a pangolin into the wild; dated 5 February 2013
- **UNISSA** : about a visit by a delegation from Malaysia to UNISSA, the religious college in Brunei; dated 28 February 2013
- **Congratulations** : about a message of congratulations to the Prime Minister of Korea; dated 28 February 2013
- **Father** : about a father sentenced to 17 years jail for raping his daughter; dated 1 March 2013
- **Celebration** : about the Sultan celebrating Chinese New Year; dated 1 March 2013

In all cases, a different reporter is shown for the English and Malay articles, so it is not clear if any translation has taken place. Furthermore, if there has been translation, we cannot be certain about which direction it was in. In fact, it seems likely that in some cases, the two articles were written separately. In these cases, the analysis here might be regarded as comparing the structure of English and Malay in reporting the same events rather than strategies involved in translating from one language to another.

### **Information Report**

For the Information Report, five articles in English and the Malay equivalents in *Muhibah* magazine were chosen.

This magazine is published as a monthly by Royal Brunei Airlines. In each edition, it has a Best of Brunei feature article in both English and Malay. It is assumed that English is the source language, as all the other articles in the magazine are in English and only this article is presented in Malay as well, but we cannot be sure about this. Unfortunately, the translator of the articles is not mentioned.

The five articles are:

- **Art** : about art to celebrate the Sultan's birthday; July/August 2011
- **Monarch** : introducing the Sultan; July/August 2012
- **Images** : about an art exhibition in the Brunei Art Gallery; November/December 2012
- **Impact** : about Earth Hour; March/April 2012
- **Brunei's Best** : about the attractions offered to visitors in Brunei; January/February 2013

### **Quantitative analysis**

For the quantitative analysis, the length of sentences in terms of words and morphemes is investigated, to determine if Malay really does have longer sentences than English

### **Recount**

The analysis of sentence length in terms of words and morphemes for the five English articles from Borneo Bulletin and their Malay equivalents from *Media Permata* is shown in Table 1.

	Words		Morphemes	
	English	Malay	English	Malay
BNS	17.5	22.6	25.4	36.4
UNISSA	22.7	21.4	38.9	47.2
Congratulations	29.8	23.0	35.3	51.3
Father	23.1	18.8	30.6	33.4
Celebration	26.6	30.8	45.4	76.0
<b>Average</b>	23.9	23.3	35.1	48.9

**Table 1** Average length of sentences in the newspaper articles

For UNISSA, Congratulations and Father, the English has more words per sentence. This is largely because of extra function words, including prepositions like ‘of’ and articles such as ‘a’ in the English. For example, in the first paragraph of Congratulations, the English has ‘to send a message of congratulations’ while the Malay equivalent is *menghantar titah perutusan taniah*. In addition, there are some cases where a phrasal verb in the English is matched by a single word in the Malay, so also in the Congratulations text, the equivalent of ‘looked forward’ is *berharap*. However, the greater number of words in the English is not matched in the other two texts, BNS and Celebration. Overall, it is hard to draw any conclusions about the comparative number of words per sentence from these five articles.

In contrast, a clear difference does emerge from the morpheme count: every one of the Malay articles has a larger result for average morphemes per sentence, and overall the difference is significant at the 5% level ( $t=4.0$ ,  $df=4$ , paired-sample, two-tailed,  $p=0.016$ ).

The greatest discrepancy between words per sentence and morphemes per sentence is for the Celebration text, so let us look at this a little further. The number of words per sentence is only a little larger for the Malay article; but the number of morphemes per sentence is much larger. The reason for this is that names are treated as single words, regardless of how long they are, and some names are much longer in the Malay version. For example, one of the people who attended the celebration was ‘HRH Prince ‘Abdul Malik’ (4 morphemes), but this is listed in the Malay article as *Yang Teramat Mulia Paduka Seri Duli Pengiran Muda ‘Abdul Malik* (10 morphemes).

One further example of sentence length comparisons can be gained by looking at the English and Malay versions of the first paragraph of the Father text:

A 44-YEAR-OLD divorced man with five children including an adopted child was sentenced to jail for 17 years with 12 strokes of the cane by Justice Dato Paduka Steven Chong in the High Court yesterday on six charges of rape, outraging modesty and having unlawful sexual acts with his daughter and niece, both underaged at the time of offences.

*Seorang duda berusia 44 tahun hari ini dijatuhi hukuman 17 tahun penjara dan 12 sebatan oleh Hakim Mahkamah Tinggi Dato Paduka Steve Chong setelah didapati bersalah terhadap enam tuduhan rogol, cabul kehormatan dan liwat terhadap anak perempuannya sendiri dan anak saudaranya – kedua-duanya masih berusia bawah umur ketika kejadian.*

The English text is 42 words long, which is a little longer than the 39 words in the Malay text, largely because of the extra information in the first line about the subject’s children – the clause ‘with five children including an adopted child’ is absent from the Malay article.

It seems that sentences in the Borneo Bulletin are usually as long as those in *Media Permata*, though the latter are longer in terms of number of morphemes. One possibility, as suggested by Deterding and Salbrina (2013, p. 85), is that Brunei English may have longer sentences than expected in other varieties of English, partly because it has been influenced by the sentence structure typically found in Malay.

### **Information Report**

The analysis of sentence length in terms of words and morphemes for the five English articles and their Malay equivalents from *Muhibah* is shown in Table 2. It can be seen that the average sentence length for all of the articles is almost identical in terms of number of words. Although the overall average is slightly higher for the English (20.9 words) than for the Malay (20.6 words), the difference falls far short of significance ( $t=0.48$ ,  $df=4$ , paired-sample, two-tails,  $p=0.66$ ).

	Words		Morphemes	
	English	Malay	English	Malay
Art	23.8	23.9	37.1	46.5
Monarch	22.0	20.4	31.3	36.5
Images	21.5	19.5	30.5	30.6
Impact	20.4	20.0	28.1	33.1
Brunei's Best	16.8	19.2	24.8	29.8
<b>Average</b>	20.9	20.6	30.4	35.3

**Table 2** Average length of sentences in the *Muhibah* articles

For the average length in terms of morphemes, every single Malay article has more morphemes per sentence than its English equivalent, and the difference is highly significant ( $t=4.70$ ,  $df=4$ , paired-sample, two tails,  $p=0.009$ ). This therefore confirms that, if Malay is indeed 'wordier' than English, it is in terms of number of morphemes rather than number of words.

The comparison of the number of words and morphemes can be illustrated with this sentence from the Impact article, which is calculated as having 15 words (with 'Brunei Darussalam' being treated as a single word) and 18 morphemes (as 'youths', 'Brunei Darussalam' and 'countdown' all consist of two morphemes).

Over 1000 youths from all over Brunei Darussalam will come together for the Earth Day countdown.

The Malay equivalent is shown below. There are 15 words (with *Negara Brunei Darussalam* being treated as one word), so this is the same as the English; but there are 25 morphemes, as *Negara Brunei Darussalam*, *bersama-sama*, *melakukan*, *pengiraan*, and *permulaan* are all single words but three morphemes.

*Lebih 1000 belia dari seluruh Negara Brunei Darussalam akan bersama-sama melakukan pengiraan detik permulaan untuk Earth Hour.*

This example illustrates how the greater length of the Malay words may make the sentences seem longer.

## Qualitative results

For the qualitative analysis, issues in word selection and also omission of information are investigated in the two genres. Furthermore, in the *Muhibah* texts, the discourse structure of sentences will be briefly discussed.

### Recount

Culture-specific differences were found in the newspaper articles. This especially involves giving the full names of important people. For example, in the Congratulations texts, the first mention of the Sultan in English is 'His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam' while in the Malay text we find *Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah, Sultan dan Yang Di Pertuan Negara Brunei Darussalam*. In fact, later references to the Sultan in the same two texts also show a difference, as the English has 'His Majesty' while the Malay refers to him as *Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia*

In addition, the articles in *Media Permata* seem to omit some of the details of the events that are included in the English articles in Borneo Bulletin. For example, the Malay version of the Father text omitted the lurid details of the event (in this case, the instances of rape). This might be due to the nature of the content which is considered a taboo topic in Malay culture. Abdullah and Ainon (2001, pp. 146–148) note that sex is one kind of taboo topic in Malay culture, in addition to fecal matters, disasters and death. If we assume that the Malay text might be a translation of the English article, then the translator utilised Baker's (2011) strategy of translation by omission. Newmark (1988, p. 211) believes that the translator has a moral responsibility in conveying the truth without being offensive, so avoidance of offence is a plausible explanation for the omission of the paragraphs describing the details of rape. Taboo words or topics can sometimes be translated in a less expressive or neutral manner, but in this case omitting the sensitive parts may be the best way to present the material in Malay.

However, other instances of omission in the Malay texts cannot be explained in terms of taboo. For example in the Celebration text, we find:

Upon arrival, Their Majesties and members of the royal family were greeted by the event's Organising Committee Chairman, Dato Paduka Lim Beng Thai, Honorary Advisors, Pehin Kapitan Lela Diraja Dato Paduka Awang Goh King Chin and Pehin Bendahari Cina Dato Paduka Awang Onn Siew Siong and other executive members.

while the equivalent in the Malay article is:

*Keberangkatan Baginda Sultan dan Baginda Raja Isteri dijunjung oleh Penasihat Kehormat Majlis, Yang Berhormat Pehin Kapitan Lela Diraja Dato Paduka Goh King Chin dan ahli jawatankuasa tadbir tertinggi majlis yang lain dan seterusnya.*

In this case, it is not clear why the Malay text omits mention of Lim Beng Thai and also Onn Siew Siong. Perhaps the full listing of all Chinese participants is regarded as less important in a Malay-language newspaper.

Finally, one might note the inclusion of extra information in the English version of the Father text (as already noted above):

A 44-YEAR-OLD divorced man with five children including an adopted child was sentenced ...

*Seorang duda berusia 44 tahun hari ini dijatuhi hukuman ...*

It is not clear why the English text has information about the man's children but the Malay text omits this information. But perhaps these two texts were written independently, so it is not really possible to compare them directly.

### **Information Report**

The texts in *Muhibah* tend to have shorter sentences than the newspaper texts discussed above. It is possible that this reflects the influence of the English, so the writer has been less influenced by the structure of Brunei English. Note in the example below from the Brunei's Best texts how the translator has apparently transferred the short sentence structure of the English into Malay.

Downtown Bandar Seri Begawan is easy to explore on foot.

*Mudah sekali untuk berjalan kaki menerokai pusat Bandar, Bandar Seri Begawan.*

Another observation is the change in focus. A theme is said to be 'the point of departure of the message' (Halliday, 1994, p. 37). In the *Muhibah* texts, there are some instances where

the translator has changed the theme of the sentence. This might be due to a difference in what Malay regards as the central idea of a sentence in comparison to English. The sentences below from the Brunei's Best articles have the same basic meaning, but in the English 'taking pride of place at the centre of town' is the theme, while in Malay the name of the mosque occurs first.

Taking pride of place at the centre of town, the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque is Brunei's architectural showpiece.

*Masjid Omar Ali Saifuddien tersergam indah di tengah-tengah Bandar ini, megah berdiri sebagai mercu tanda keunikan seni bina Brunei.*

Sometimes English loan words are used in the Malay even though there seem to be perfectly good native Malay alternatives. This is seen in the use of the word 'venue' in the in the extracts below from the Impact articles. Instead of translating it as *tempat* ('place'), the translator has chosen to keep it as *venue*. Baker (2011, p. 20) explains that certain languages differentiate meanings of a word in another language, and in this case, the translator might have felt that *tempat* is a more general term (superordinate) compared to the more specific term 'venue', so has decided to keep the English word to ensure accuracy in the translation.

The venue held a lot of significance as Kampong Ayer was thought to give birth to Brunei's civilization.

*Venue ini merupakan pilihan simbolik kerana Kampong Ayer dianggap sebagai tapak bermulanya tamadun Brunei.*

In this extract, one might also note the use of *bermulanya* ('started') in place of the English 'give birth to'. In this case, the idea of giving birth to a civilization cannot be translated literally into Malay, so the Malay text uses a different word. Hence the translator used Baker's (2011) translation by unrelated words to tackle this issue.

## Conclusion

The quantitative findings suggest that sentences in Malay texts do not necessarily have more words, but they do tend to have more morphemes, and this may be what gives rise to the perception that Malay sentences are 'wordier' than English ones. However, it may also be true that the English used in Brunei has been influenced by the structure of Malay, so the English of Borneo Bulletin may have longer sentences than would be expected in newspapers published elsewhere.

The qualitative analysis suggests that titles tend to be shorter in the English texts in both the Recount and the Information Report articles. However, some instances of omission of information are hard to explain.

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