IN THE SEARCH FOR TEXTS FOR BEGINNER TRANSLATORS TO PRACTICE TRANSLATION

FX Dono Sunardi*

ABSTRACT

This article explores the importance of identifying texts that help a beginner translator improve his/her skills through practice. First, it will define what a beginner translator is and, secondly, what characteristics a text should have to be used as a practice text. The study finds that a beginner translator, characterized by his/her lack of knowledge and skills in translating due to insufficient experience, often faces language and cultural challenges, leading to unnatural translations. To address these issues, practicing with well-suited texts is crucial. Using an online survey distributed to HPI (Association of Indonesian Translators) members, the article identifies five key text characteristics for beginners: grammatical accuracy, low complexity, minimal idiomatic and archaic language, relevance to the translator's field of study, and manageable length (150-200 words or 5-20 pages). To those findings, the study adds that a beginner translator should understand his/her own learning styles to optimize their practice and skill development.

Keywords: Beginner Translators, Texts for Practice, Translation

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini meneroka pentingnya upaya untuk mengidentifikasi teks-teks yang membantu penerjemah pemula meningkatkan keterampilannya melalui praktik. Hal pertama yang dieksplor di sini adalah definisi penerjemah pemula, yang lalu dilanjutkan dengan pembahasan tentang karakteristik-karakteristik teks yang semestinya digunakan sebagai teks latihan. Studi ini menemukan bahwa penerjemah pemula, yang dicirikan oleh kurangnya pengetahuan serta keterampilan menerjemahkan karena pengalaman yang terbatas, sering menghadapi berbagai tantangan linguistik dan budaya, sehingga menghasilkan terjemahan yang tidak alamiah. Untuk mengatasi masalah ini, berlatih dengan teks yang tepat sangatlah penting. Dengan menggunakan survei daring kepada para anggota HPI (Himpunan Penerjemah Indonesia), artikel ini berhasil mendefinisikan lima karakteristik utama teks bagi penerjemah pemula: keakuratan tatabahasa, kompleksitas yang rendah, idiom dan bahasa arkaik yang tidak banyak, relevansi dengan bidang studi si penerjemah, dan panjang teks yang masuk akal (150-200 kata atau 5-20 halaman). Terhadap temuantemuan di atas, artikel ini juga menekankan pentingnya penerjemah pemula mengenal gaya belajarnya yang akan mengoptimalkan latihan serta pengembangan keterampilannya.

Kata kunci: Penerjemah Pemula, Teks Latihan, Penerjemahan

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In today's globalized world, English has become a widely used language across diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, serving as a medium for sharing ideas through literature and books. English-language books and texts,

^{*} FX Dono, Dosen Universitas Ma Chung, Malang, <u>dono.sunardi@machung.ac.id</u>, Villa Puncak Tidar N-01, Malang

in their broadest sense, are distributed worldwide, including in Indonesia, where many readers prefer translated versions in Indonesian over the original English texts. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2015), translation refers to the process of converting words into a different language. Based on this definition, translation can be understood as rendering a text from the source language to the target language without altering its meaning, such as translating from English to Indonesian. Sudarno (2011) defines translation as the transfer of thoughts or ideas from a source language into another language while maintaining the meanings and grammatical rules of the target language.

Translation as a subject is widely taught in universities with English Language programs, attracting students aspiring to become translators. By definition, a translator is someone who translates written texts, and a skilled translator possesses experience and cultural knowledge of both the source and target languages. Before beginning their professional work, however, aspiring translators must practice extensively to improve their translation skills and deepen their understanding of the languages they work with. Even when a translator has achieved proficiency, he must still continue learning to expand his translation skills and knowledge.

The increasing demand for translation services has made skilled translators highly sought after. To become proficient, novice translators must engage in deliberate practice. This article seeks to define what constitutes a beginner translator and identify the qualities or characteristics of texts that can effectively be used to practice and enhance translation skills of the beginner translator.

2. ASPIRING TRANSLATOR AND LEARNING PROCESS

Learning is a fundamental process that occurs throughout life, beginning from infancy. It involves acquiring knowledge from experiences and applying that knowledge in various contexts. Through learning, individuals accumulate knowledge, build upon prior understanding, and organize new information. Hammond (2001) identifies several key aspects of how learning occurs.

The first key point is the brain, which serves as the center for learning. It receives, processes, and establishes connections with external information. Contrary to early beliefs, the brain continues to develop throughout life and is not fully determined at birth or within the first three years. Psychological research suggests that learning alters the brain's physical structure through interactions between the learner and their environment. Variations in how

individuals process and perform cognitive tasks are linked to differences in brain structure and function.

The second key point is the learning environment. The external environment significantly impacts the learning process. As mentioned earlier, the brain processes information from the external world, and rich, stimulating environments contribute to cognitive development. These environments provide essential feedback and responses to a learner's efforts, facilitating growth. It is at this point that the choice of suitable and supporting texts with certain characteristics or qualities to practice translation plays a pivotal role in the learning process of a beginner translator.

The third key point is prior knowledge. Learning is a process of connecting previously acquired knowledge with new information. Prior knowledge plays a critical role in helping individuals make connections and draw conclusions between past experiences and newly acquired knowledge. This process involves encoding and storing information, categorizing and organizing materials, and retrieving relevant information to apply it in appropriate situations. Through this dynamic process, new facts, concepts, and ideas are constructed.

Translation, as a complex intellectual activity, involves both conscious and unconscious learning processes. According to Gardner (1985, 1993), as cited by Robinson (2003), there are multiple forms of intelligence, including musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, personal/emotional, logical/mathematical, and linguistic intelligence. Linguistic intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, organize, produce, and manipulate the intricacies of a language—skills commonly associated with poets, novelists, skilled writers, eloquent speakers, and effective teachers. Moreover, linguistic intelligence encompasses the ability to learn foreign languages and navigate the complexities of transferring meaning between them, which is the hallmark of a skilled translator or interpreter.

Linguistic intelligence is the primary intelligence associated with translators. However, translators may also possess other forms of intelligence. For instance, translators of song lyrics must combine linguistic intelligence with musical intelligence to craft lyrics in the target language that align with the rhythm and tone of the original song.

Each individual has unique intelligences and learning styles, including translators. Even experienced translators continue to learn and develop their skills. As Robinson (2003) asserts, "good translators are always in the process of 'becoming' translators," meaning they are continuously improving their translation skills and deepening their understanding of language, culture, and the art of translation. Recognizing various learning styles can assist translators in structuring their work environment to optimize their skills. According to Jensen (1995), as cited by Robinson (2003), individual learning styles vary across four general areas: context, input, processing, and response. An

awareness of these differences can enhance a translator's ability to adapt and improve their performance.

The training of beginner translators has been a subject of various inquiries and research in recent years. One of them is by Karnedi (2015), which argues that training beginner translators requires a multifaceted approach. As such, task-based activities are suitable for early stages, while project-based approaches like translation portfolios are better for advanced students. In line with that, structured self-reflection is crucial for scaffolding learning, helping students regulate their translation process and professional development (Pietrzak, 2019). For a beginner translator, more than for experienced and seasoned translators, motivation plays a key role, with students often envisioning their future selves as translators. However, it is common that these students face both linguistic and non-linguistic challenges during training (Jabu et al., 2021). To address these issues, Petrova and Sdobnikov suggest that translation teachers need specialized training that combines pedagogical and translation competencies (2021). This can be achieved through extensive retraining programs for current teachers and specialized master's degree programs for those with backgrounds in either translation or language teaching. Emphasis should be placed on translation didactics, which is often overlooked in existing programs. None of the above-mentioned studies and others, however, discussed or questioned about the characteristics or qualities of text suitable to practice translation for beginner translators.

A beginner translator must be aware or made aware of these aspects of learning so that they can prepare themselves for what might lay ahead in front of them. They should know themselves: what typically works for them, what is their best way of learning something, what prior knowledge that they might possess and will launch them in the pursuit, etc.? In line with this, the problem this article tries to answer is: what are the characteristics or qualities of texts a beginner translator should take to practice to hone their translation knowledge and skills? It is this knowledge about what kinds of texts and how it needs to be introduced to the beginner translator, after defining first what a beginner translator is, which the focus of this article becomes.

3. METHOD

This study employs a mixed-method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative research is utilized to quantify the problem and findings by generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into usable statistics. In contrast, qualitative research

seeks to provide a deeper understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations (www.snapsurveys.com).

Data for this article were collected through an online survey consisting of a questionnaire designed using Survey Monkey, an online survey platform. The questionnaire included 8 questions and was distributed via email to 53 certified English-Indonesian and Indonesian-English translators who are members of the Himpunan Penerjemah Indonesia (HPI). The survey was open for one month. The questionnaire contained both open-ended and close-ended questions focusing on the practice of translation and the profile of translators. Questions 1 to 5 aimed to assess the respondents' translation experience. Question 6 focused on identifying the characteristics of a beginner translator, addressing the research question: "What is a beginner translator?" Questions 7 and 8 sought to identify the characteristics of texts suitable for beginner translators to practice and improve their skills, addressing the second research question: "What are the characteristics of texts that can be used by beginner translators for practice?"

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As has been mentioned, the respondents of this article were translators and members of HPI. They were experienced and seasoned translators who have been becoming a translator for more than five years, as shown in the figure below:

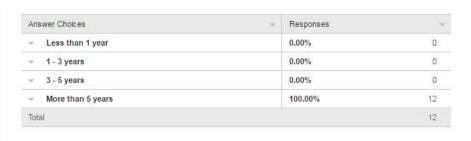


Figure 1. The respondents' years of experience as translators

With those long years behind them, most of them have been translating more than 25 titles of texts or books (see Figure 2). With this, it

furthersupports the claim of the respondents' credibility for suggesting what texts a beginner translator should practice with.

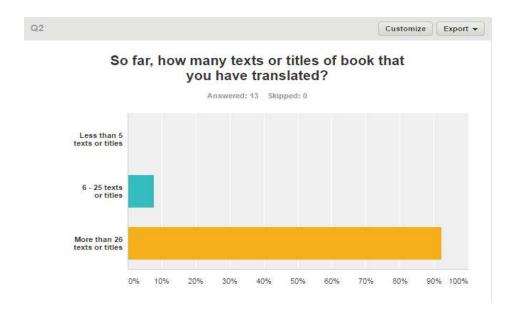


Figure 2. The number of texts or titles of book that the respondents have translated

With this reflection, they were given an open-ended question where they need to define what makes a beginner translator or how a

beginner translator can be characterized. They came up with a quite comprehensive list of qualities of a beginner translator:

- He/she lacks translation skills.
- He/she lacks vocabulary.
- He/she lacks experience to translate naturally.
- He/she does not master the grammar of the source and the target language.
- He/she does translation verbatim (using exactly the same words as were originally used, for example: word for word, letter for letter, line for line).
- There is a delay in completing the task within the period specified by the client.
- He/she has experience in translation for less than three years.
- He/she is still not independent and cannot translate on his/her own.
- He/she has a high enthusiasm and curiosity in translation, but he/she still needs to be directed to the position of a good translator.
- When translating a text, he/she tends to do a literal approach instead of a contextual approach.
- He/she still asks the seniors or more experienced translators to get some help in translating.
- He/she is someone who has a good command of his/her mother tongue and one (or more) foreign language(s) as well as the ability to express ideas using those languages, but there are not yet many people who are willing to pay for his/her service.

In summary, a beginner translator is characterized by a lack of essential translation skills, including limited vocabulary and insufficient mastery of grammar in both the source and target languages. They often rely on verbatim translation, translating word-for-word rather than conveying the meaning naturally, and tend to adopt a literal rather than contextual approach. With less than three years of experience, beginner translators are not yet independent and frequently require guidance from more experienced

professionals. Although they may struggle to meet deadlines and deliver professional-level translations, they typically display high enthusiasm and curiosity for translation, which, when nurtured, can help them progress. Despite having a solid command of their native language and at least one foreign language, they often find it difficult to attract clients willing to pay for their services.

The next question of the questionnaire requires the respondents to list, based on their knowledge and experience, is related to the characteristics of good texts to be used to practice by beginner translators. Below is the list these respondents produce in the form of a table.

Non-book Text	Book
Short text	• 150-200 pages
Grammatically correct	
Simple language, referring to lower level of complexity and difficulty	
Suitable linguistic competency, for example the competency on grammar, vocabulary, etc	
Relevant to the educational background and area of interest	
Factual	
Familiar topics, for example day to day activities.	
Contextual non-fiction, for example presentation materials	
Less idiom and archaic language	
Longer deadline for submission	

Table 1. Respondents' responses on the characteristics of text suitable to practice translation

Texts suitable for beginner translators, whether non-book materials or books, should meet certain criteria to support skill development. Non-book texts, such as short articles (150-200 words), and books, which can range from 150-200 pages, should be grammatically correct and use simple language with a lower level of complexity and difficulty. These texts must align with the translator's linguistic competence, particularly in areas like grammar and vocabulary, and be relevant to their educational background and area of interest. Ideal texts are factual and deal with familiar topics, such as day-to-day activities or contextual non-fiction, like presentation materials.

Additionally, they should feature minimal idiomatic and archaic language, allowing beginner translators to work with more manageable deadlines.

Below, we discuss in a more detailed way, those qualities of texts that are suitable to help a beginner translator sharpen his/her skills and knowledge of translation:

1. Grammatically Correct Texts

The first quality of a suitable text to practice translation is related to grammar. Grammar plays an important role in the phrase or sentence structure. A text which is grammatically correct is important for practicing translation because this is how the phrases and sentences are structured and create their meanings.

The texts below are the examples of the short story laden with grammatical errors (text 1) and its corrected version (text 2):

Text 1:

THE MONKEY'S PAW

Mr. and Mrs. White and their son Herbert was sitting in their living-room on (a) cold, windy night, when suddenly they have heard a knock on the door. It was Morris, an old friend of Mr. White. He told stories about his journeys around the world and show them a monkey's paw what he got from a man in India. The paw was magic and could grant three wishes. Morris **throwed** the paw on the fire because **he** was dangerous, but Mr. White took it and, after Morris had went, he wished for \$400. Nothing happened and Herbert went to work in his factory. When he didn't arrive back at usual time, Mrs. White **starts** to worry. Then a man came to the door and told them the terrible news - Herbert had been **died** in a big machine in the factory. A week after the death of her son, Mrs. White suddenly remembered that they still have two wishes. She looked for monkey's paw and wished her son alive again. A little later they heard a loud banging on a door and Mrs. White ran to see her son. Mr. White knew that his wife will be killed if she opened the door and made the final wish - for Herbert **being** dead again.

Text 2:

THE MONKEY'S PAW

Mr. and Mrs. White and their son Herbert **were** sitting in their living-room on **a** cold, windy night, when suddenly they **heard** a knock on the door. It was Morris, an old friend of Mr. White. He told stories about his journeys around the world and **showed** them a monkey's paw **that he** got from a man in India. The paw was magic and could grant three wishes. Morris **threw** the paw on the fire because **it** was dangerous, but Mr. White took it

and, after Morris had **gone**, he wished for \$400. Nothing happened and Herbert went to work in his factory. When he didn't arrive back at **the** usual time, Mrs. White **started** to worry. Then a man came to the door and told them the terrible news – Herbert had been **killed** in a big machine in the factory. A week after the death of her son, Mrs. White suddenly remembered that they still **had** two wishes. She looked for **the** monkey's paw and wished her son was alive again. A little later they heard a loud banging on **the** door and Mrs. White ran to see her son. Mr. White knew that his wife **would** be killed if she opened the door and made the final wish-for Herbert **to be** dead again.

(http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/correctText/paw.htm)

From the two texts above, Text 2, which is grammatically correct, would be more suitable as practice material for beginner translators. This is because it does not confuse the translator or force them to first correct mistakes or guess the correct version. Additionally, the text aligns with what they have been taught by their language instructors. As a result, what they have previously learned, which constitutes their prior knowledge, is reinforced and affirmed.

2. Lower Level of Complexity and Difficulty

The text or book should have a lower level of complexity and difficulty. The level of complexity and difficulty is based on the beginner translator's competence on grammar and capability to memorize various vocabularies both in the source language and the target language. A beginner translator can use a text or a book written in simple language. An example of this would be a children's story book or a fairy tale.

Below is the example of a children short story, Little Red Riding Hood by Grimm Brothers in its simplified version:

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

Little Red Riding Hood lived in a wood with her mother. One day Little Red Riding Hood went to visit her granny. She had a nice cake in her basket.

On her way Little Red Riding Hood met a wolf. "Hello!" said the wolf. "Where are you going?" "I'm going to see my grandmother. She lives in a house behind those trees."

The wolf ran to Granny's house and ate Granny up. He got into Granny's bed. A little later, Little Red Riding Hood reached the house. She looked at the wolf.

"Granny, what big eyes you have!"

"All the better to see you with!" said the wolf.

"Granny, what big ears you have!"

"All the better to hear you with!" said the wolf.

"Granny, what a big nose you have!"

"All the better to smell you with!" said the wolf.

"Granny, what big teeth you have!"

"All the better to eat you with!" shouted the wolf.

A woodcutter was in the wood. He heard a loud scream and ran to the house. The woodcutter hit the wolf over the head. The wolf opened his mouth wide and shouted and Granny jumped out. The wolf ran away and Little Red Riding Hood never saw the wolf again.

(learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org)

The original version of children short story Little Red Riding Hood as the one we can read at https://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/story089.pdf has more complex from the simplified version in terms of the sentence structures: the use of complex and compound sentences; the dictions, such as the words 'latch', 'nosegay', 'haste', 'flask', 'darting', 'feeble'; and the phrase such as 'Once she sent her a little riding hood of red velvet'. The simplified version is shorter than the original version and uses more simple sentences, so this latter version is good for a beginner translator to practice translation.

3. Fewer Idioms and Archaic Languages

It is common for a text or book to contain idioms and archaic languages. According to Cambridge Dictionary (2016), idiom is a group of words, which has different meanings from the meanings of each word on its own and it is in a fixed order. It is also the style of expression which is used by a particular person or period, for example in writing, speech, or song's lyric.

Below is a short story with idioms written in bold:

The Chance of a Lifetime - Missed

I have an uncle who is one of the most honest men I've ever met. He's a real **nuts and bolts** sort of guy. However, he once got into a shady business deal because greed got to him. He freely admits he made a huge mistake

by not having shut his trap. Still, his eyes glisten when he tells the story and he still believes things could have been different... Here's the story:

As a young man, my uncle made a reputation as being an **out of the box** thinker. He came up with all sorts of crazy ideas, and some that became very successful. This skill attracted attention and an advertising agency thought he was **just what the doctor ordered**.

They sent a **suit** to offer him a job. My uncle, being young and **full of** himself, gave the suit a **ball park estimate** for how much his services would cost. Unfortunately, my uncle didn't know his real worth. His estimate was much too low. Well, the suit immediately saw a **mark** and agreed to his request. The first day at work, my uncle immediately knew that the suit **had done a number** on him. It seems the man had **lined his pockets** by bringing in such cheap talent.

My uncle thought for a few days and then went storming into the director's office. He **shoots from the hip**, so he demanded that the suit be fired on the spot for what he called '**monkey business**'. Well, the director asked him if he had **lost all of his marbles** and told him to collect his things and leave. My uncle quickly learned that when it comes to business it's best to go **old school** and shut one's mouth.

(esl.about.com)

There are 14 (fourteen) idioms being used in the story above, making it a challenging text to translate by a beginner translator. The text like this, therefore, is not suitable to be used by a beginner translator to practice.

Archaism or archaic diction is the older versions of language and art in writing or speech. It came from a Greek word, archaïkós, which means beginning or ancient. According to Cambridge Dictionary (2016), archaism is a word or expression that is not generally used any more. The text below is the example of the use of archaic language:

"Perhaps he loves you now,

And now no soil nor **cautel doth** besmirch

The virtue of his will

There- my blessing with **thee!**

And these few precepts in thy memory

Look **thou** character. Give **thy** thoughts no tongue, 545....

I find **thee** apt;

And **duller shouldst thou** be than the fat weed

That rots itself in ease on Lethe wharf, 770

Wouldst **thou** not stir in this..."

-Hamlet by William Shakespeare

(literarydevices.net)

Cautel, doth, thee, thy, duller, shouldst, thou are the examples of archaic words. Archaic words are often used in poetry and prose. Those words are used by accident or on purpose. Whatever the reasons behind the use of archaic words, a text full with them is definitely challenging and, therefore, unsuitable for a beginner translator to practice translation with.

4. In-line with the Background of the Study or Area of Interest, and Familiar and Factual

The topic should be suitable for a beginner translator's field of study or area of interest, as well as being familiar and factual. Examples of topics include medicine, tourism, cooking, literature, fashion, or perhaps comics and children's storybooks with pictures. A beginner translator can select articles from magazines, newspapers, or online sources such as *Yahoo.com*. The article below is an example of a text on tourism:

What do people eat and drink:

In Switzerland, breakfast typically includes bread, butter or margarine, marmalade or honey, maybe some cheese or cereals, plus milk, cold or hot chocolate, tea or coffee. Lunch may be as simple as a sandwich or a birchermüesli or it could be a complete meal. Depending on what people had for lunch, dinner can be a full main course or just some bread, cheese, maybe some dried meat or any other light meal. Drinks range from plain water, over different types of soft drinks including most internationally well known brands plus some local products, to a great variety of beers and wines. Hot drinks include many different flavors of tea and coffee.

(www.about.ch)

5. CONCLUSION

The research conducted provided valuable insights into the characteristics of beginner translators and the types of texts most appropriate for their practice. The first finding is related to the first problem research, i.e. the definition of a beginner translator. This research finds and defines a beginner translator as someone with limited experience in translation and a lack of proficiency in core skills, such as grammar and vocabulary. Such a translator often produces literal, word-for-word translations, as opposed to the more

nuanced, sense-for-sense translations typically expected from more experienced professionals.

The second thing that this research also finds and identifies is related with the five essential characteristics of texts suitable for beginner translators, namely (1) grammatical correctness, (2) lower complexity and difficulty, (3) alignment with the translator's field of study or area of interest, (4) familiarity and factual accuracy, and (5) minimal use of idiomatic or archaic language. For practice, beginner translators are encouraged to work with shorter texts (150-200 words) or books ranging from 5 to 20 pages. Suitable practice materials include articles from magazines or newspapers like *Reader's Digest*, online content from platforms like *Yahoo.com*, or short children's stories. Additionally, books sourced from *Goodreads.com* are recommended. Besides understanding the appropriate text types, beginner translators should also consider their individual learning styles. Being aware of one's learning style can help in selecting effective practice methods, which will contribute to the development of translation skills.

This research has certain limitations, particularly in its lack of consideration for recent advancements in the field of translation teaching and training, especially those associated with the rapid rise and integration of artificial intelligence (AI). Over the past two to three years, AI has introduced unprecedented disruptions within the translation industry, affecting various facets of translation work, education, and practice in both beneficial and challenging ways. The impact of AI has been transformative, automating certain tasks, enhancing productivity, and providing new tools for efficiency, while simultaneously raising concerns over accuracy, dependency, and the evolving role of human translators.

As this study focuses on identifying suitable texts for beginner translators to practice with, it does not address the influence of AI on this process. Given AI's growing presence, future research could undertake a detailed investigation into how AI may alter the selection and preparation of practice materials for novice translators. Such research might examine whether AI-generated texts are suitable for translation practice, how AI can support or hinder skill acquisition, and the ways in which instructors can integrate AI-based tools into their curricula to optimize training for beginners.

Furthermore, the integration of AI in translation training for beginners could provide substantial benefits as well as unique challenges. On the one hand, AI could assist novice translators by offering tools for terminology management, machine translation post-editing, and real-time feedback, helping them to improve their skills and gain exposure to industry-relevant technologies. On the other hand, reliance on AI could potentially weaken foundational skills in language and translation, making it crucial to design training programs that balance human expertise with AI support. Therefore,

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future studies could play a critical role in addressing these issues, ensuring that beginner translators are equipped to navigate both traditional translation tasks and the evolving demands of an AI-enhanced translation landscape.

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