

CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS IN QUESTIONNAIRE TRANSLATION

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Abstract

Questionnaire translation seems simple and easy. However, it turns out that the theory of questionnaire translation has evolved since 1970s where the scholars in the fields of medicine, psychology, and business or management have put their efforts to develop the ways and phases of questionnaire translation to obtain a successful and valid result. This study aims to present the challenges and problems in questionnaire translation from the opinions of those scholars and from the analysis of the English to Indonesian questionnaire translation samples. This paper applies library research and uses a qualitative approach to describe and analyze those challenges and problems. The result shows that there are two main problems in the translation of this text type, namely being too literal (faithful) translation and ethnocentricity. It is concluded that a questionnaire should not be translated closely to the source text and attention must be paid to the English culture carried out to the target text.

Keywords:

questionnaire translation; challenges and problems; being too literal; ethnocentricity.

Abstrak

Penerjemahan kuesioner tampaknya sederhana dan mudah. Namun, ternyata teori penerjemahan kuesioner telah berkembang sejak tahun 1970an dimana para ilmuwan di bidang kedokteran, psikologi, dan bisnis atau manajemen telah berupaya mengembangkan cara-cara dan tahapan dalam penerjemahan kuesioner untuk mendapatkan terjemahan yang berhasil dan sahih. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyajikan masalah dan tantangan dalam penerjemahan kuesioner dari pendapat para ilmuwan yang membahas penerjemahan jenis teks ini dan dari analisis contoh terjemahan kuesioner dari Bahasa Inggris ke Bahasa Indonesia. Makalah ini menerapkan penelitian kepustakaan dan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif untuk menjelaskan dan menganalisis masalah dan tantangan itu. Hasilnya menunjukkan ada dua masalah dalam penerjemahan kuesioner, yakni penerjemahan yang terlalu harfiah (setia) dan etnosentrisme.

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Kesimpulannya adalah kuesioner seharusnya tidak diterjemahkan dekat pada teks sumber dan harus diperhatikan terbawanya budaya dalam Bahasa Inggris ke dalam teks sasaran.

Kata kunci:

penerjemahan kuesioner; masalah dan tantangan; terlalu harfiah; etnosentrisme.

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation can happen in any field and can involve many different subjects. Thus, as a discipline, it is multidisciplinary (Snell-Hornby, 1988/1995). The products of translation are from many different areas of expertise. Therefore, there are many text types that usually require translation service, such as legal texts, academic texts, journalistic texts, literary texts, etc. There have been studies discussing a specific text translation as well, including questionnaire translation. However, according to Behr (2018), questionnaire translation is mostly discussed in the fields of social sciences, medical science, and psychology, and it is very little discussed in Translation Studies.

The research on questionnaire translation has been conducted frequently abroad, yet not many studies can be found in Indonesia on this topic despite the frequent translation work demand on questionnaires. Many people in Indonesia have not known or even considered that questionnaires can be challenging to be translated due to lack of studies in this field. Thus, this research will explore the challenges and problems in questionnaire translation occurring in several language pairs and of course in the English and Indonesian language pair. The research aims to provide insights on the challenges and problems in translating this type of text to provide awareness to Indonesian people in general and the Indonesian translators in

particular. Hence, the English to Indonesian questionnaire translation practice can be improved.

2. QUESTIONNAIRES

A questionnaire is one of the means of a survey. Groves, et al. define a survey as a “systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) entities for the purposes of constructing quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members” (2009: 2). There are several types of questions in a questionnaire. Peterson (2000) explains that there are open-ended questions and closed-ended questions. According to Povoroznyuk, et al. (2016), open questionnaires will produce qualitative answers, while the closed questionnaires will lead to quantitative results as they are more structured. The closed-ended questions can have yes/no answers, multiple choice answers, and Likert-scale answers (choosing a range of answers from 1 to 5 usually) (Povoroznyuk, et al., 2016; Tuleja et al., 2011).

A questionnaire is usually used to gather information in the fields of medicine, psychology, and business or management. The medical questionnaires which also include the questionnaires of psychology, have four kinds, namely Quality of Life (QOL), Health-related Quality of Life (HRQOL), Patient-reported Outcome (PRO), and Patient-based Outcome Assessment (PBOA) (Povoroznyuk, et al., 2016: 141). Meanwhile, the questionnaires in the field of business or management focus on indicators and constructs, where indicators refer to questions on concrete elements which can be measured and constructs refer to questions on abstract elements which cannot be measured (Tuleja, et al., 2011: 393).

3. QUESTIONNAIRE TRANSLATION

Almost all those questionnaires in those fields are originally written in English. As a result, the translation direction is mostly from English into another (local) language. In translating a questionnaire, it is not just about doing one type of job. In fact, there are several ways and several phases of doing questionnaire translation according to many scholars in this field who have discussed about them since 1970s. It was Brislin (1970) who started the discussion on one of the phases in questionnaire translation, which is back translation. What is meant by ways here refers to ways of doing questionnaire translation, one of which can be selected to be carried out, and they are also called 'procedures' (Harkness & Schoua-Glusberg, 1998: 98-107). One way is decentering, which is doing a paraphrase of the questionnaire items to recreate a version in a target language that is centered to the culture of that language. This is considered expensive and time-consuming (Povoroznyuk, et al., 2016). Another way is direct (one-for-one) translation which is a traditional way of doing a translation done by an individual translator, and this way is cheap and effective but subjective, neglecting the language differences, and not really prioritizing the data quality (Povoroznyuk, et al., 2016).

Another way is committee (parallel) translation, which involves several translators and each of them produces their own translation. The 'best' translation will be chosen by the coordinator, which is considered subjective. Moreover, this way is thought to be expensive and inefficient (Povoroznyuk, et al., 2016). Next is advance translation, where the translation is conducted while the source text itself is still in drafting, and this way is considered difficult and costly (Ibid.). Another way is "on-the-fly" translation which is done orally in front of a group of respondents participating in a survey, yet this way is considered statistically irrelevant as there are no written data (Ibid.). Then another way is ad hoc translation which involves "individuals with bilingual/multilingual communication skills but little or no training in translation" (Povoroznyuk, et al., 2016: 142). This way is cheap and

accessible, but it leads to dissatisfaction for the professionals and users (Putsch 1985; Simon et al. 2006), being unable to keep things confidential (Haffner 1992), and many communication errors (Flores et al. 2003; Moreno, Otero-Sabogal, & Newman 2007).

Besides those several ways or procedures, there are also several phases or called as protocols. These phases must be followed through in order to obtain valid translation of a questionnaire. According to Kalfoss, the World Health Organization (WHO) has released a standardized translation protocol which consists of a forward translation, a panel of experts, back translation, pretesting, and creation of the final version (2019: 5). A forward translation means working on the translation from a source language to a target language, and the result is examined by a panel of experts. Then it is translated back to a source language, and this way is called back translation. After the back translation has been performed, the result will be tested, which is called pretesting. When all the phases are finished, the final version or the target language questionnaire is created.

With all those ways and phases, it is obvious that questionnaire translation cannot be underestimated as something simple and easy. When the translation is taken for granted, there will be a lot of problems occurring, not to mention that the different languages and cultures create many challenges in questionnaire translation for the instrument to be able to gather as much information as required and to function the same way as the original text. The following part after the method will discuss these challenges and problems in questionnaire translation.

4. METHOD

This paper uses library research and applies a qualitative approach which describes and analyzes challenges and problems from other research and from the samples of several source texts and target

texts. The challenges and problems from the research conducted by other scholars will involve several language pairs, including English and Indonesian. The analysis from the samples only involves the English and Indonesian language pair. The samples have been taken from personal work of a professional translator with the consent.

5. GENERAL CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS IN QUESTIONNAIRE TRANSLATION

There are two problems in questionnaire translation based on the research findings of several scholars, namely too literal translation and ethnocentricity. According to Sperber (2004), Karthikeyan, et al. (2015), and Povoroznyuk et al. (2016), one of the problems in questionnaire translation is that the translation is often literal. Hence, the challenge is to translate or adapt a questionnaire in “a culturally relevant and comprehensible form while maintaining the meaning and intent of the original items (Sperber, 2004: 124). For example, the word ‘family’ in some cultures usually refers to a nuclear family (a father, a mother, and children), while in some other cultures, it might refer to a broader family or extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc., besides a father, a mother, and children). Moreover, Povoroznyuk et al. (2016) observe that questionnaire translation should apply the principle of a “world for world” and not a “word for word”, which means that the translation cannot be literal or too close to the source text; instead, it must pay attention to the context and culture of the target language.

The other problem is since many questionnaires are originally written in English, the translation might carry the problem of ethnocentricity or the English cultural hegemony content in the target text (Sperber, 2004: 125). Thus, the challenge is to be aware of this problem and attempt not to show it in the target text. The same example for this case also uses the word ‘family’ where in English speaking countries, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, it is about a nuclear family. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, family might

refer to a big family or the extended family. Therefore, when this word is translated to collect information in Indonesia, it must be explained clearly which family members are referred to.

Moreover, another problem related to ethnocentricity is the difficulty to translate colloquial phrases, slangs, jargons, idiomatic expressions, and emotionally evocative terms (Sperber, 2004: 125; Karthikeyan, et al. 2015). Willis, et al. (2008) provided an example of the literal translation of the expression 'feeling blue' into Spanish, but the word blue in Spanish 'azul' has a different connotation meaning from the word 'blue' in English or it does not carry the descriptor of mood as in English, where 'blue' could mean 'sad'. In addition, Willis, et al. (2008) elaborated more problems related to ethnocentricity. They showed some issues in an English questionnaire translated into Asian languages. For instance, the question "Have you smoked at least 100 cigarettes in your entire life?" when translated into Cantonese and Vietnamese was not considered clear by the respondents and required further clarification since the expression of 'your entire life' in those two languages means from birth to death, while in English it means until today (2008: 1081-1082). Furthermore, that question was also considered insensitive as in several Asian cultures discussing some circumstances around someone's death will bring bad luck (2008: 1082).

Tuleja, et al. (2011) also discovered several issues on ethnocentricity in business or management questionnaire translation. They stated that most questionnaires translated from English into Chinese are just the extension of Western instruments that do not show the validity for local context (2011: 394). One issue is the biases that may appear from the format of the answers. For example, the Likert-type scale answers which are from 1 to 5 might be misunderstood by some cultures, as several cultures consider number 1 as the highest answer, while some others think number 5 is the highest (2011: 396). Furthermore, based on a study, it has been

discovered that the adult respondents from the Philippines and the US prefer to choose an extreme answer, such as “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree”, while those from China do not really like extreme answers since being humble is an important quality for them, and they probably choose the answer: “agree” or “disagree” only (Ibid.) Another issue might come from idiomatic uses of language according to Tuleja, et al. (2011). They gave an example of the sentence “my job gets to me” which is not translated properly by the translator who did not understand that this is an idiom. After the translator got the explanation that this has a negative connotation, then the expression was translated correctly into “my job upsets me” or “I feel defeated by my job” (2011: 398).

There are only two recent papers focusing on English to Indonesian questionnaire translation from Indonesian scholars. Both studies implicitly agree that a questionnaire should not be translated literally or too close to the source text as the results will be awkward and that ethnocentricity could cause an issue in understanding the questions or statements in a questionnaire. Anggraeni, et al. (2019) discuss the misunderstanding in the answers of a questionnaire since Indonesian culture interferes with the respondents’ comprehension of the questions. For example, in a questionnaire analyzed by Anggreini et al. (2019), the translation of one statement “I sometimes have very vivid dreams” into Indonesian language is misunderstood by Indonesian respondents because in Indonesia superstitions, believing in supernatural things, or cultural belief could influence their interpretation on their dreams. They described the meaning of that statement as follows: “saya mimpi jadi kaya ternyata setelah saya bangun saya tidak kaya” (I dreamed to be rich, but when I woke up I was not), “mengalami mimpi dan mimpi itu akan terjadi” (having a dream and the dream will come true), and “mimpi bertemu orang tua yang sudah meninggal” (dreaming of meeting deceased parents). This means that translators must be really careful when translating

questions and/statements which are supposed to be neutral to collect data into another language because those questions or statements can be interpreted differently with the cultural belief existing in that language. Thus, something that is supposed to be neutral in one language might not be neutral in another or the other way around.

Rahayu, et al. (2020) focus more on the awkward translation results due to the literal translation method. They have recommended some modifications on the translation results to make them sound natural in Indonesian language. One example they mentioned in their paper is about one statement “To get certain facts related to the patient’s condition” which was formerly translated into “untuk mengetahui fakta tertentu terkait kondisi pasien”. That translation is quite literal (actually faithful) which sounds awkward for Indonesian respondents. Therefore, Rahayu, et al. decided to change that into “untuk mengetahui kebenaran kondisi pasien secara jelas” (to find out the truth on the patient’s condition clearly) (2020: 41-42), which has a different meaning from the source text but the same message. This translation is considered as a semantic translation, which is a flexible translation to show the same message, although the meaning might be different (Dewi & Wijaya, 2020).

6. CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS IN ENGLISH TO INDONESIAN QUESTIONNAIRE TRANSLATION

In this section, some analyses will be conducted in the samples taken from several questionnaires obtained from personal work of a professional translator with her consent. The samples were planned to be divided into three parts based on the problems discovered in the research by scholars discussed in the previous section. Those parts should be (1) being too literal or faithful translation, (2) ethnocentricity, (3) the combination of both problems. However, after looking at the data, it turned out there are only two parts, namely being too literal or faithful translation (Table 1) and the combination of being too literal or

faithful translation and ethnocentricity problems (Table 2). The items in each table are not from one whole questionnaire; they are from several questionnaires.

Table 1 Being too literal or faithful translation

No	TSu	TSa
1	If my child loses some prized possession and reacts with tears, I would....	Apabila anak saya kehilangan miliknya yang berharga dan bereaksi dengan airmata, saya akan....
2	Actively participating in treatment decisions	Secara aktif berpartisipasi dalam keputusan perawatan
3	Stand back to get the seriousness of your illness into proportion	Berpikir sejenak untuk memahami keseriusan penyakit anda dalam proporsi yang sesuai
4	Answering back worrying thoughts	Menjawab kembali pikiran-pikiran yang mengkhawatirkan
5	I think that as if I did not do anything that has contribution towards others.	Saya berpikir sepertinya saya tidak melakukan apapun memiliki kontribusi pada orang lain.
6	I have responsibility to improve the quality of the neighboring community where I live.	Saya memiliki tanggung jawab untuk meningkatkan kualitas komunitas tetangga tempat saya tinggal.
7	Attempts to create change usually meet with resistance.	Usaha-usaha menciptakan perubahan biasanya bertemu dengan penolakan.
8	Is the current financial position adequate to look after the patient?	Apakah posisi keuangan terkini cukup untuk merawat pasien?
9	Are you concerned that you are largely responsible to meet	Apakah anda prihatin kalau anda sangat bertanggung jawab untuk memenuhi kebutuhan

	the patient's financial need?	keuangan pasien?
10	Do you feel forced into going to work to support the patient?	Apakah anda merasa dipaksa untuk pergi bekerja mendukung pasien?
11	Do you think you have to compensate the patient's shortcomings, in general?	Apakah anda pikir anda harus mengkompensasikan kekurangan pasien, secara umum?
12	Does your spouse help with family responsibility?	Apakah pasangan anda membantu dengan tanggung jawab keluarga?

Out of 12 items in Table 1 above, the literalness or faithfulness of the translation can be divided into two kinds, namely requiring small modification and requiring substantial modification. Prior to the analysis, the terms literalness and faithfulness must be addressed as they are actually different. The scholars discussing questionnaire translation who are mostly not from the field of Translation Studies always use the term literal translation and even 'word for word' translation to refer to the translation that is very close to the source text. Meanwhile, Newmark (1988) and Dewi & Wijaya (2020) clearly explain that word for word translation and literal translation cannot be applied as the translation methods for the end results since those two methods ignore the context when translating words or expressions in a text. Thus, when translation is close to the source text, yet it can be applied for the end results as the translation pays attention to the context, it actually applies a faithful translation method. Hence, in this analysis, the proper term use is the faithfulness or being too faithful, not too literal.

From Table 1, several items require small modification whose change involves only a word or a phrase. First is the item number 1 which should be translated into just 'menangis' (cries) instead of

'bereaksi dengan airmata' (reacts with tears). Second is number 6 where the word 'neighboring' should not be translated into 'tetangga' as it actually refers to the place the person is living in, so by deleting the word 'tetangga' the translation becomes less awkward. Third is number 7 where the expression 'meet with resistance' should be translated into 'mendapatkan penolakan' (are refused) instead the very faithful translation 'bertemu dengan penolakan' (meet with resistance). The expression might be fine in English, but in Indonesian it is rather awkward. Fourth is number 9 where the expression 'you are largely responsible' should be translated into 'anda memikul tanggungjawab yang besar' (you carry a big burden) instead of the expression 'anda sangat bertanggung jawab' (you are very responsible) as this expression sounds positive, while in the English item it actually refers to something negative.

Moreover, there are several other items that require substantial modification whose change involves almost or even the whole sentence. First is number 2 where the whole phrase must be translated into 'secara aktif ikut memutuskan perawatan apa yang diinginkan' (actively involved in deciding which treatment is desired) because it will sound more natural. Second is number 3 whose translation sounds confusing due to its faithfulness, and it should be 'berpikir sejenak untuk tidak berlebihan menanggapi keseriusan penyakit anda' (stand back to not overthink the seriousness of your illness). Third is number 4 which should be translated into 'menanggapi pikiran-pikiran yang mengkhawatirkan' (responding to worrying thoughts) that sounds more acceptable in Indonesian language. Fourth is number 5 that could be translated into 'saya rasa sepertinya saya belum memberikan kontribusi kepada sesama' (I think that I haven't given my contribution to fellow humans) which is more natural and communicative in Indonesian language.

Fifth is number 8 which should be translated into 'apakah keadaan keuangan anda mencukupi untuk merawat orang yang

sedang sakit?’ (is your financial condition adequate to care for the sick person?) as this will be understood more than the former translation in Table 1. Sixth is number 10 that could be translated into ‘apakah anda merasa terpaksa bekerja untuk dapat merawat orang yang sedang sakit? (do you feel forced to work to be able to look after the sick person?) since that question will be clearer than the former translation. Seventh is number 11 whose former translation is not clear and not easy to be understood, so it should be translated into ‘apakah anda merasa harus menutupi kelemahan orang yang sedang sakit secara umum?’ (do you feel that you have to compensate the shortcomings of the sick person in general?). Eighth or the last one is number 12 whose translation also sounds awkward and it should be ‘apakah pasangan anda turut memikul tanggung jawab keluarga?’ (does your spouse also carry out the family responsibility?). All the translation results in Table 1 show the faithfulness which makes the translation sound awkward and not natural in the target language. Therefore, modifications, either small or substantial, are required to have more understandable results for the target readers. These modifications usually happen in the semantic or communicative translation (Dewi & Wijaya, 2020).

Table 2 The combination of both problems

No	TSu	TSa
1	Partnership status? (1) married/living together (2) single (3) other_____	Status hubungan? (1) menikah/hidup bersama (2) bujangan (3) lainnya_____
2	Religion (1) Catholic (2) Evangelical	Agama (1) Katolik (2) Penginjilan/Evangelisme

	(3) other_____	(3) lainnya_____
3	I feel that I have not done anything that could last after I die later.	Saya merasa saya tidak melakukan apapun yang dapat bertahan setelah saya meninggal nanti.
4	I would be best described as someone who tends to wait for information about change to reach me.	Saya akan secara terbaik dideskripsikan sebagai seseorang yang cenderung menunggu informasi mengenai perubahan untuk sampai pada saya.
5	I would be best described as someone who seeks out information about change at X Organization.	Saya akan secara terbaik dideskripsikan sebagai seseorang yang mencari informasi mengenai perubahan pada Organisasi X.

In Table 2, the problems are about the combination of ethnocentricity and being too faithful. For item number 1, the answer choice 'living together' should not be translated as in Indonesia it is forbidden to live together without being married, so such an answer will be considered a taboo. In item number 2, the choices must be added with Islam as it is the religion of the majority in Indonesia. For item number 3, the translation sounds awkward and confusing for the target readers as it suggests that we can still do something after we die. Although what it means in English is the legacy we leave behind, most Indonesian people do not actually think about that. What is important for many Indonesian people is to be good and when they die, they can go to heavens. Rarely do many Indonesians think about the legacy they leave behind in the world, and that idea must probably derive from the English-speaking country culture. Furthermore, the translation for number 3 should be 'saya merasa belum memberikan kontribusi yang dapat dikenang lama bahkan setelah saya telah tiada' (I feel that I haven't contributed to the world that can be memorable even long after I pass away).

For items numbers 4 and 5, they are actually similar that the expression 'I would be best described' seems to sound bragging when translated into Indonesian, even though it does not sound that way in English. Therefore, it cannot be translated faithfully. Some modifications must be made to avoid the word 'terbaik' (best) being mentioned. The recommendation for a better translation would be 'saya sebaiknya digambarkan sebagai seseorang...' (I should be described as someone...). The problems occurring in the translation results in Table 2 are due to ethnocentricity since the translator has been faithful to the meaning of the source text. There should be some modifications made, such as deletion, addition, or complete rephrasing or paraphrasing the whole sentence.

7. CONCLUSION

In summary, questionnaire translation is not as simple as it might have been thought by many people. There have been several ways (procedures) and phases (protocols) developed in doing the translation of this text type. In fact, the theory discussing questionnaire translation has evolved since 1970s, although it has not been discussed intensively in the field of Translation Studies. Many scholars writing on questionnaire translation come from the fields of medicine, psychology, and business or management where many questionnaires are made and then translated. They concluded that the two main problems in questionnaire translation are being too literal (faithful) and ethnocentricity. Those problems certainly lead to challenges to provide successful translation of a questionnaire.

Those scholars have discovered more ethnocentricity issues than being too literal (faithful) translation in their findings. However, from the analysis of the English to Indonesian questionnaire translation samples, the finding shows that being too faithful translation occurs more than ethnocentricity as the problem. Even the ethnocentricity

problem that happens is due to the translator being too faithful to the source text. The research has not found the ethnocentricity problem as in itself, not combined with the other problem. This might be the limitation of this study because of time constraints, and thus a small number of data that can be obtained. For future research, big data must be involved with the help of corpus tools to carry out with the analysis to discover more challenges and problems in questionnaire translation.

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