

The Multifaceted World of Translation



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VOICE CHANGES IN TRANSLATION FROM ENGLISH TO INDONESIAN AND VICE VERSA

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Abstract

Voice is a grammatical category of verbs that is related to what thing or person is acting and what thing or person is being acted upon (Crystal, 1997). A verb is in the active voice when used to talk about what people and things do; verbs in the passive voice describe what is done to things (Swan, 1995). According to Swan, not all verbs can be expressed in the passive voice, for example *die*, *arrive* and *have* are all inherently active. This is related to whether a verb is *transitive* or *intransitive*. In translation, ideally, an active verb should be translated to an active verb in the equivalent target language. However, this is not always the case. There are times when an English sentence cannot be translated in the parallel voice in the target language. For an instance, when translating an English sentence “He broke his leg” into its Indonesian counterpart “*Kakinya patah*” (His leg was broken), there is a voice change of the active verb “broke” into a passive one “*patah*” (broken) to make the translation sound more acceptable to the audience of the target language. This paper intends to explore the phenomenon of the voice changes when translating utterance from English to Indonesian and vice versa.

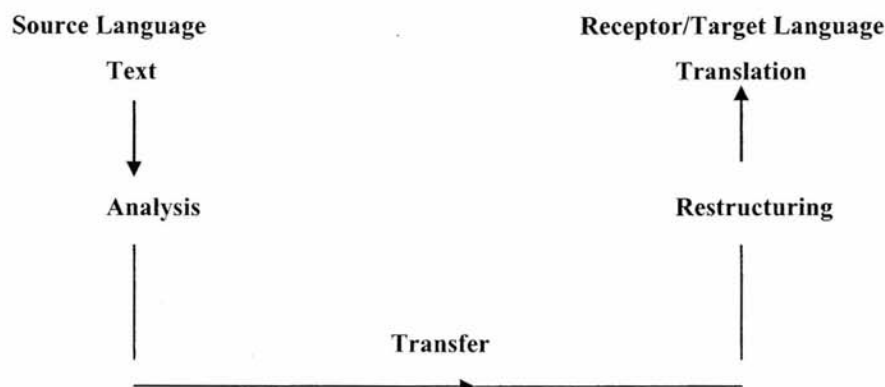
Keywords: voice changes, transitive and intransitive verbs

Introduction

No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality (Sapir, 1929). The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same worlds with different labels attached. Furthermore he declared that no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture, and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structural of natural language, as described as language is the heart within the body of culture.

Nida’s model of the translation process (1964) illustrates the stages involved in translation process as follows:

Diagram 1: Nida’s model of translation process



It is important to bear in mind that the translation process also involves the process of decoding and recoding, in which Jakobson (1959) outlined the principles as follows:

- A translator must accept the untranslatability of the SL (Source Language) phrase in the TL (Target Language) on the linguistic level.
- A translator must accept the lack of similar cultural convention in the TL.
- A translator must consider the range of TL phrases available, having regard to the presentation of class, status, age, sex of the speaker, his relationship to the listener(s), and the context of their meeting in the SL.
- A translator must consider the significance of the phrase in its particular context. i.e. as a moment of high tension in the dramatic text.
- A translator must replace in the TL the invariant core of the SL phrase in its two referential systems (the particular system of the text and the system of culture out of which the text has sprung).

Furthermore, in the process of interlingual translation, one idiom is substituted for another Basnett (1980). The substitution is made not on the basis of the linguistic elements in the phrase but on the function of the idiom where the SL phrase serves the same purpose in the TL culture. In his definition of translation equivalence, Popovic (1976) distinguished four types of equivalence:

1. Linguistic equivalence, where there is homogeneity on the linguistic level of both SL and TL texts, i.e. word for word translation.
2. Paradigmatic equivalence, where there is equivalence of 'the elements of paradigmatic expressive axis', i.e. the elements of grammar, which Popovic saw as being of a higher category than lexical equivalence.
3. Stylistic (syntactic) equivalence, where there is 'functional equivalence of elements in both original and translation aiming at an expressive identity with an invariant of identical meaning'.
4. Textual (syntagmatic) equivalence, where there is equivalence of the syntagmatic structuring of a text, i.e. equivalence of form and shape.

Voice changes in the translation process are based on the accepted principle that sameness cannot exist between two languages, in which the processes of loss and gain occurred. It means that in the translation process from the SL to the TL some elements are omitted and some other are also added to enrich or to clarify the SL text as a direct result of the translation process. Moreover, what is often seen as 'lost' from the SL context may be

replaced in the TL context. Methven (2006) indicates that in the usage of voice constructions from SL to TL can be distinguished according to five categories between the SL and TL: frequency, dynamicity, agency, semantic prosody and genre distinctions.

Voice

Voice is a grammatical category of verbs that is related to what thing or person is acting and what thing or person is being acted upon (Crystal, 1997). The person or thing we want to talk about is usually expressed as the subject of the clause. If the focus of the sentence is on the actor, it is put as the subject of the verb and an active verb is used. A verb is said to be in the active voice when it is used to talk about what people and things do. On the other hand, verbs in the passive voice describe what is done to things (Swan, 1995). According to Swan, not all verbs can be expressed in the passive voice, for example *die*, *arrive* and *have* are all inherently active. This is related to whether the verb is *transitive* or *intransitive* as only transitive verbs can be expressed in passive voice.

Transitivity and Argument Structures

“Transitivity is a linguistic system in which... categories characterize different kinds of events and process, different kinds of participants in these events and the varying circumstances of place and time within which events occur. These variations in structure of the clause are said to relate to different world views and to relay different ideological slants.”

Hatim and Mason (1997:225)

According to Fromkin et. al (1991), a verb is said to be transitive when it takes a noun phrase (NP) for a complement (direct object); an intransitive verb is one that does not take a complement. The grammatical dependants of the verb are called *arguments* (O’Grady et. al, 1987) and the number of arguments a verb can have is known as the *valency* (Holmer, 1996). We can therefore say that intransitive verbs have one argument (the subject) and a valency of one; and transitive verbs have a valency of two – arguments of the subject and the object. The term *thematic role* determines the role played by a particular entity in a given event (O’Grady et. al 1987). Thematic roles relevant to this study are the *Agent* – the doer, the *Theme* – the entity undergoing action, and the *Goal* – end point of movement.

The object of an active verb corresponds to the subject of a passive verb (Swan, *ibid.*), therefore transitive verbs can have a passive voice and intransitive verbs cannot as the latter

do not have an object to become the subject of the passive sentence. This is therefore why verbs like *die* cannot be passive.

According to Hatim and Mason (ibid.) transitivity, can classify processes into action, material and event processes, therefore usage of the passive for example can change how a process is depicted – relaying notions of power, control and responsibility, and therefore possible intentionality and ideology involved. For example, it is widely accepted that the passive in English can be “exploited in impersonal constructions to avoid explicit blame” (ibid.). It is also noted that transitivity in English is used to generate ‘ideational meanings’, for example the passive can be used to make a notion more salient throughout a text while at the same time diverting attention away from ‘true agency’ – presenting events from a ‘static view’. ‘Transitivity pattern’ through the text can also be used cohesively, for example allowing a series of actors to be identified with each other

English Passive Constructions

English passives are grammatically marked by a copular verb followed by the past participle of a verb. A copular verb is one that joins an adjective or noun compliment to a subject, for example *be*, *seem*, *become* etc. The unmarked passive form in English is *be*+ past participle, but other copular verbs can be used such as *become* and *get*, however other copular verbs tend to be limited by their semantics (Methven, 2006).

Passive constructions in English allow the speaker to avoid mentioning the actor. This is sometimes necessary or desired because the actor is not known, is obvious, or is not important, or because the action is something that can be done by anyone (Sneddon, 2012: 262).

Indonesian Passive Constructions

What distinguishes how Indonesian is used differently from English is the voice of their sentences. Indonesians tend to write and talk in passive voice, putting the subject at the end of the sentence. Active verbs in Indonesian are usually preceded by prefix “me-“, while passive verbs are usually preceded with prefix “di-“. Passive constructions are far more common in Indonesian than in English. Consequently, some Indonesian passive sentences can often only be translated into natural English by an active construction (Sneddon, 2012: 263).

Contrastive analysis of English and Indonesian passives in translation

English passive voice is usually used when the actor does not need to be mentioned or if there is no way of knowing the actor, to give prominence to the patient, because of politeness, and even for textual convenience (cohesion), whereas in Indonesian the passive is used to express politeness and to reduce the sense of deliberation (Sneddon, 2012:262).

Culturally, modesty is the virtue in Indonesia. Indonesians tend to avoid making blunt negative statements, such as "*Adikmu menabrak kucing sepulang sekolah*" (*Your brother ran over a cat after school*). To hide the subject "*adikmu*" (*your brother*) and emphasize the object "*kucing*" (*cat*), Indonesians prefer to say, "*Kucingnya ditabrak adikmu sepulang sekolah*" (*The cat was run over by your brother after school*).

In everyday conversations, active voice expressions, such as "*Tolong lihat ponselnya*" (*Please check your phone*) and "*Silahkan nikmati hidangannya*" are less commonly spoken than their passive counterparts "*Tolong ponselnya dilihat*" (*Please your phone be checked*) and "*Silahkan hidangannya dinikmati*" (*Please the refreshment be enjoyed*). Hassal (1999) gives some good examples on how Indonesians use passive construction, especially when they're trying to make their commands or requests sound more polite by adding "*tolong*" (*please*):

- "*Mbak, tolong kamarnya dibersihkan nanti ya*" (*Mbak, please the room be cleaned later, alright*)
- "*Pak, tolong dikasih tahu ya kalau sudah sampai di Jalan Kartini*" (*Pak, please I be told, alright, when we get to Jalan Kartini*)
- "*Pintunya ditutup ya*" (*The door be closed, please*)

Students' Translations of English Sentences and Their Choice of Voice

A study was conducted to see the students' voice preferences in translating English sentences to Indonesian. A group of students from the English Department was chosen as the subject of the study, consisting of eight lower semester students (semester 1 and 3) and twelve higher semester students (semester 5 and above). They were given eight sentences in English and asked to translate them into the most natural way that they can think of in Indonesian. The eight sentences along with their usual Indonesian translations are as follows:

Table 1: List of suspected English sentences in active voice that are normally translated into passive in Indonesian

No	English Sentence	Indonesian Translation
1	He broke his leg when skiing	<i>Kakinya patah ketika bermain ski</i> (His leg was broken when skiing)

2	She cut her finger yesterday	<i>Jarinya teriris kemarin</i> (Her finger was cut yesterday)
3	The role that science plays in society	<i>Peran yang dimainkan ilmu sains dalam masyarakat</i> (the role that is played by science in society)
4	These clothes wash well	<i>Baju-baju ini tahan dicuci</i> (These clothes are washed well)
5	Have you checked my research proposal?	<i>Apakah proposal penelitian saya sudah diperiksa?</i> (Has my research proposal been checked?)
6	Have you read and understood all the terms and conditions?	<i>Apakah semua syarat dan ketentuan sudah dibaca dan dipahami?</i> (Have all the terms and conditions been read and understood?)
7	Please enjoy the refreshment	<i>Silahkan dinikmati hidanganannya</i> (Please the refreshment be enjoyed)
8	Please follow up my complaint	<i>Tolong keluhan saya ditindaklanjuti</i> (Please my complaint be followed up)

In the first two sentences, passive voice is used to avoid the sense that the action (of breaking and cutting) is deliberate. If these verbs translated literally maintaining the active voice construction, the listener would get the sense that the action is deliberate and the meaning may lead to a very negative implication.

The third and fourth sentences are examples of the use of notional passive. Although they are in active voice, their meanings are in passive voice. It is not unexpected that the Indonesian translation would also result in passive voice.

Sentences number five and six are translated into passive construction in Indonesian to make it sound more indirect and thus, more polite. It is considered impolite, especially when you are speaking to someone that you barely know or someone of higher social status, to ask whether he/she has done something for your favor or whether he/she understands you. One strategy is by changing the voice of the sentence into passive to make the utterance sound more acceptable.

The last two sentences express offer and request. When expressing offer, request, and commands in Indonesian, it is considered more appropriate when using passive as it shifts the focus of the utterance from the doer of the action to the receiver to the action, making the offers, request or commands sound more indirect and polite (Hassal, 1999).

In translating the eight sentences above, the students had the freedom of using active or passive voice that they think sounds the most appropriate and natural to them. Here are the results of the students' translations, in term of voice preference:

Table 2: The students' voice preference in translating English sentences into Indonesian

Sentence	Lower semester		Upper semester		Overall	
	Active	Passive	Active	Passive	Active	Passive
1	3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)	7 (58.3%)	5 (41.7%)	10 (50%)	10 (50%)

2	5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)	6 (50%)	6 (50%)	11 (55%)	9 (45%)
3	1 (12.5%)	7 (87.5%)	2 (16.7%)	10 (83.3%)	3 (15%)	17 (85%)
4	0 (0%)	8 (100%)	0 (0%)	12 (100%)	0 (0%)	20 (100%)
5	5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)	11 (91.7%)	1 (8.3%)	16 (80%)	4 (20%)
6	7 (87.5%)	1 (12.5%)	12 (100%)	0 (0%)	19 (95%)	1 (5%)
7	7 (87.5%)	1 (12.5%)	10 (83.3%)	2 (16.7%)	17 (85%)	3 (15%)
8	3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)	8 (66.7%)	4 (33.3%)	11 (55%)	9 (45%)

The findings of the study surprisingly indicate that despite the fact that the suspected active English sentences are usually translated into passive voice in Indonesian, it was found that the students of the English department possess different preferences in translating the English sentences into active or passive voice. Furthermore, it was also found that there is similar profile between the lower and higher semester students in term of their voice preference in translating the given English sentences into Indonesian.

In the first two sentences, 50% of the students translate the English sentences “*He broke his leg when skiing*” and “*She cut her finger yesterday*” into active Indonesian constructions “*Dia mematahkan kakinya waktu bermain ski*” and “*Dia mengiris jarinya kemarin*” instead of the more acceptable passive translation of “*Kakinya patah waktu bermain ski*” and “*Jarinya teriris kemarin*”. The students’ preference of using active voice resulted in awkward sense of the meaning of the sentence and it is suspected that they chose to maintain the active voice construction due to their ignorance of the meaning of the sentence in the target language.

In sentence number 3 and 4 that express notional passives, the students do not seem to face any difficulty in comprehending the meanings of the notional passives in despite of their active constructions and were able to successfully translate them into passive constructions in Indonesian. Most of the students translated the active English sentences “*The role that science plays in society*” and “*These clothes wash well*” into passive Indonesian constructions “*Peran yang dimainkan oleh ilmu sains di masyarakat*” and “*Baju ini dicuci dengan baik*.” The translation of these sentences in active constructions in Indonesian, for example like “*Peranan yang ilmu sains mainkan dalam masyarakat*” and “*Baju-baju ini mencuci dengan baik*” seems to be unacceptable or unusual. However there are three students who translated the sentence “*The role that science plays in society*” into a noun phrase “*Peran ilmu sains dalam masyarakat*.”

The last four sentences express request, commands and offers, and in Indonesian, ideally they should be constructed in passive voice if the speaker wishes to be polite. However, the result of the study indicates that the majority of the students still prefer to maintain the active constructions in the Indonesian translations of sentence number 5, 6 and 7 (80%, 95% and 85% respectively), with the exception of sentence number 8 where almost 45% of the students shifted the translation of the English verb “*follow up*” into Indonesian passive verb “*ditindaklanjuti*.” This phenomenon indicates that, except in a situation where an active voice request is less common (like in the case of the translation of the verb “*follow up*”).

Conclusion

This article has shown the changes in the translation of English sentences to Indonesian and explored the possibility of the causes. The changes between active and passive voice in translation have also been illustrated. In the majority of translations from English, a change occurs from syntactic active to passive in Indonesian, and therefore a change in transitivity structures occurs. There is also a clear need for further research for what causes the voice changes from English to Indonesian and the changes in transitivity structures encountered in the translation.

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