

Thematic Progression in the Translation of Student Translators

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Abstract

Organizing ideas often constitutes a problem for translators, particularly student translators, because translation is a process of reproducing a text in another different language. As a matter of fact, a good target text (TT) should contain well-organized clauses showing how the ideas are related one another. Such good ideas organization can be reflected through their thematic progression, i.e. the progression from theme to rheme, or vice versa. Every clause, according its textual metafunction, contains a message composed of theme, the starting point of the message, and rheme, the rest of the message. This article is aimed at finding out the thematic progression of the TT written by the student translators. This is a descriptive qualitative study taking 15 (fifteen) student translators as the participants who were asked to translate a news item text from English into Bahasa Indonesia. The data were collected using Translog and were analyzed using a content analysis method. Based on the results of the data analysis, it was found that: (i) hypertheme progression (theme progression with derived themes) was dominantly used by the student translators in their TT; and (ii) ideas organization was still a problem in the student translators' TT. The finding of this study confirms the important role of thematic progression as the tool assisting in producing a well-organized text.

Keywords: Ideas organization, news item text, thematic progression, student translator, theme and rheme

Introduction

Translation is an activity of rewriting a source text (ST) in another language, and every writing activity concerns with ideas organization. Every idea contains a message realized in the form of a clause, and every clause carries out one message. Therefore, ideas organization means clauses organization, i.e. how the clauses are organized in order to create a text.

In the point of view of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a clause as a message is the realization of textual metafunction according to which every clause is composed of a theme and rheme (Egins 1994; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). A theme as the starting point of a message plays its role in ensuring that the messages are well organized, while a rheme as the remainder of the message in a clause plays its role in controlling the theme development. A well-organized text is identified through its ability to show a good movement of its theme and rheme, which is known as thematic progression (Danes 1974; Egins 1994).

Egins (1994, p. 303) divides thematic progression into three patterns: (i) simple linear progression, in which the rheme of the first clause becomes the theme in the second sentence; the rheme of the second sentence becomes the theme of the third clause, and so forth; (ii) constant continuous theme, in which the theme of the first clause becomes the theme of the clauses that follow; and (ii) theme progression with derived themes.

The choice of thematic progression is motivated by the information contained in the theme and rheme. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 87-88), the structure of theme and rheme represents the information structure of a message. Theme contains given information, while rheme contains new information; therefore, an interaction between new and given information has an effect to the good organization of clauses in a text.

The patterns of thematic progression of a text may be influenced by the text type and the language where it is produced; in other words, the thematic progression of news item text in English, for example, may be different from the news item text in Bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, translating an English news item text into Bahasa Indonesia does not only mean transferring the language but also all of the text elements. In addition, an Indonesian news item text as the target text (TT) should be different from an English news item text.

However, some Indonesian news item texts have been influenced by English in terms of their textual elements, especially those which have been translated from English. Therefore, studies on Indonesian news item text are necessary to find out typical characteristics of Indonesian news item text, particularly the studies involving translation.

Objective

This research article is particularly aimed at finding out the characteristics of Indonesian news item text through the translation from English into Bahasa Indonesia done by student translators. In particular, this research is aimed at: (i) finding out the pattern of thematic progression dominantly used by the student translators in their TT; and (ii) finding out the translation problems faced by the student translators as reflected in their TT.

Literature Review

Translation as the process of reproducing a text in another different language (Nida 1984, p. 83) is a meaning making activity (Halliday 1992, p. 15). Therefore, meaning is the most important element in translation. The meaning made in translation should not be completely based on dictionaries, but it should be based on a clearly firm linguistic theory. One of the linguistic theories concerning on meaning is systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as Halliday (1992, p. 15) argues that SFL contains a theory of meaning as choice. He further mentions that, in an SFL paradigm, translators must make choices from within the total meaning potential of the language in their clauses because every clause encodes different kind of meanings, which are related to the functions of language. Thus a translator, in order to accomplish his/her delicate task of interpreting and rendering a source text (ST) into a meaningful and effective target text (TT), needs to understand all these meanings, and reproduce them in another language (Rosa 2017, p. 17).

A number of studies on translation using SFL as the theory underlying their analysis have been done as the effort to find out the typical characteristics of Indonesian texts which are independent from the influence of other languages. Rosa (2017) who did a research on English-Indonesian translation found the characteristics of Indonesian historical recount text that include the frequent use of material process, the frequent use of temporal circumstances, the frequent use of hypertheme and constant continuous theme progressions, and the frequent use of unmarked theme. These characteristics are derived from his research findings involving student and professional translators.

In addition, Nurlela, Gustiaingsih, Sofyan and Rosa (2017) found the typical characteristics of Indonesian narrative text from SFL textual metafunction point of view. The characteristics include the frequent use of marked theme clauses, the frequent use of process and circumstance as the clause theme elements, the dominant use of multiple

theme clauses, and the dominant use of constant continuous theme as the type of thematic progression of the clauses. These characteristics are derived from their research findings on the translation of the book entitled “*Hikayat Deli*” from Malay into Bahasa Indonesia.

The two studies elaborated above were done as the effort to formulate the typical characteristics of Indonesian text through translation studies. In addition, those studies also invite other researchers to do more studies focusing on the characteristics of other Indonesian text types generated from translation. This research, in particular, focuses on the Indonesian news item text, trying to finding out its typical characteristics through the translation done by student translators.

A news item text informs readers about events of the day which are considered newsworthy or important. Newspapers and magazines are good sources in which various news items texts are found. According to Gerot and Wignell (1994, p. 200), a news item text is constructed in the following generic structure: (i) newsworthy events that recount the events in the summary form; (ii) background events that elaborate what happened, to whom and in what circumstances; and (iii) source that include comments from participants, witnesses and authorities expert on the events. The last element of its generic structure is a component that clearly distinguishes a news item text from any other text types.

Methodology

This is a descriptive qualitative research using a content analysis as its design. The data were the source text (ST) entitled “Philippines bank BPI hit by glitch which debited accounts”, composed of 236 words and published by BBC online available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-40183088>, and the target texts produced by the student translators. The readability of the ST was measured using three different readability indices: Flesch Reading Ease Score (FRES), Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (FKGL) and Simple Measure of Gobbledygook (SMOG). The results of the readability measure showed that the ST was fairly difficult to read and deserved to be tested to university students in the non-native English-speaking country. This research took 15 student translators as the research participants. They were the students majoring English Literature at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Sumatera Utara. As translators should be competent in both the TL and SL, their English proficiency has been tested by use of TOEFL, and their lowest score was 500. The data were collected using Translog. The STs and the students’ TTs were analyzed using a content analysis method to find out the different patterns of thematic progression used in the ST and the TTs.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the data analysis, it was found that, despite their few differences, the patterns of thematic progression in the students’ TTs are generally similar with the ST’s thematic progression as shown in Table 1.

THEMATIC PROGRESSION IN THE TRANSLATION OF STUDENT

Table 1
The patterns of thematic progression in the students' TTs

No.	Patterns of Thematic Progression	ST	Frequency (TT)														
			S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15
1	Linear	6	4	5	7	8	5	7	5	6	6	5	7	6	5	6	6
2	Constant	4	4	7	4	4	6	4	9	7	5	7	7	8	5	7	6
3	Hypertheme	12	12	13	10	10	16	14	12	13	14	14	11	11	14	15	13
4	New Theme	1	4	2	2	1	0	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	3	0	3
Total		23	24	27	23	23	27	28	29	28	28	28	27	28	27	28	28

The findings displayed in Table 1 show that, despite its different frequency, the most frequent pattern of thematic progression in the ST and the TTs produced by the students is a theme progression with derived themes. The different frequency is the result of different number of clauses in the TTs. The ST composed of 24 clauses has 23 patterns of thematic progressions similar with the TTs produced by S3 and S4. Meanwhile, the other students' TTs have more clauses than the ST. When compared to the number of clauses, the frequency of the use of theme progression with derived themes in the ST and the TTs is not too much different as it dominates 40% to 59% of the total number of the clauses as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The theme progression with derived themes in the ST and the TTs

The finding displayed in Figure 1 shows that both of the ST and the TTs agree that theme progression with derived themes should be the most frequent pattern of thematic progression used in a news item text. The frequent use of theme progression with derived themes serves as the indicator showing that the clause themes contain parts of the theme that has been mentioned in the first clause. In other words, a news item text needs a hypertheme parts of which are elaborated in the following clauses. This is in line with the generic structure of news item text proposed by Gerot and Wignell (1994) who mention that a news item text is initialized by providing the main event in a summary form. The main event in this context serves as the hypertheme based on which the other clauses are developed.

THEMATIC PROGRESSION IN THE TRANSLATION OF STUDENT

In addition, this finding confirms that different text types have different dominant pattern of thematic progression. An exposition text, for example, uses a simple linear progression as the dominant pattern of thematic progression (Rosa 2013) because it must provide various arguments to support its thesis statement. Besides, the frequent use of simple linear progression facilitates the reader's easy comprehension in reading exposition texts.

The clear difference between the ST and the TTs is found in its pattern of constant continuous theme where it is used much more frequently in the TTs. Figure 2 shows that the pattern of constant continuous theme used in the TTs dominates the use of such pattern in the ST.

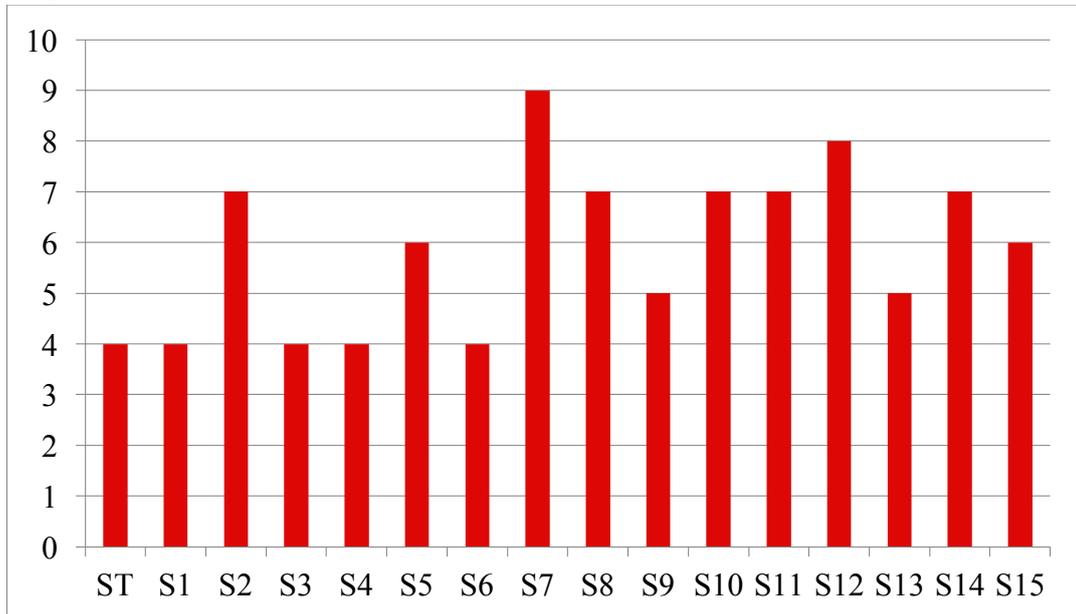


Figure 2. The pattern of constant continuous theme in the ST and the TTs

Based on the findings displayed in Figure 2, the ST uses the pattern of constant continuous theme 4 times, similar to the TTs produced by S1, S3, S4 and S6. However, the other TTs use such pattern much more frequently; S7, for example, even uses it 9 times. This pattern is the second dominant pattern used in the students' TTs, but it is the third dominant pattern used in the ST. A constant continuous theme is closely related to a theme progression with derived themes because both of the patterns generate the clause themes from the previously mentioned theme. Although a news item text is a text which is grouped into the text genre of narration, they share few differences one of which can be seen from its pattern of thematic progression. While a news item text uses a theme progression with derived themes as the dominant pattern, a narrative text uses constant continuous theme most frequently.

The other finding of this research shows that a simple linear progression is the second dominant pattern of thematic progression used in the ST, while the TTs use a constant continuous theme as the second dominant pattern as shown in Figure 3.

THEMATIC PROGRESSION IN THE TRANSLATION OF STUDENT

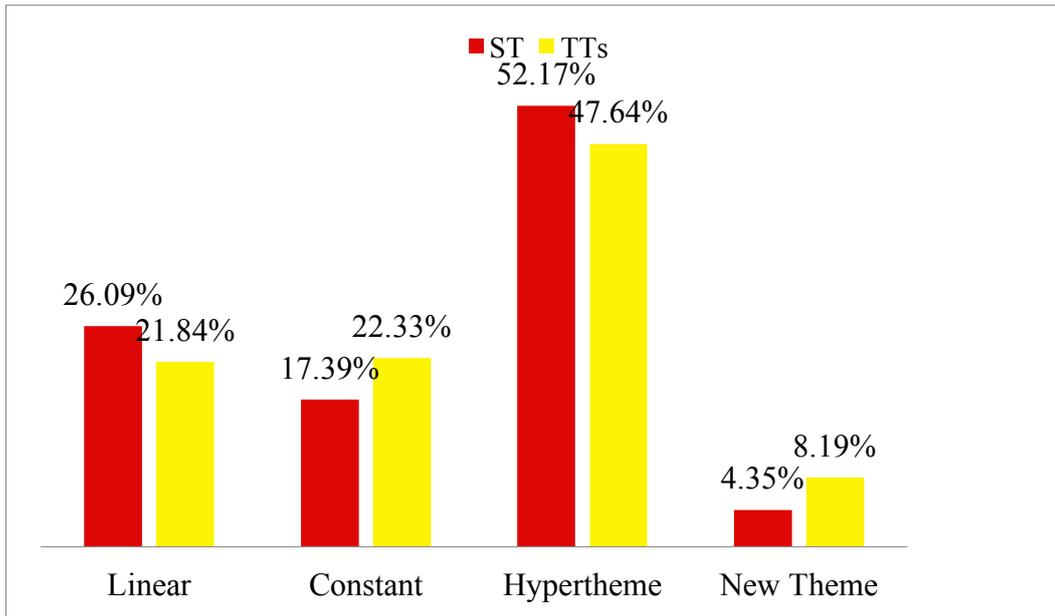


Figure 3. The difference between the patterns of thematic progression used in the ST and the TTs

The finding presented in Figure 3 shows that the rank order of the patterns of thematic progression used in the ST is (i) theme progression with derived themes (52.17%); (ii) simple linear progression (26.09%); (iii) constant continuous theme (17.39%); and (iv) new theme pattern (4.35%). Meanwhile, the rank order of the patterns of thematic progression used in the students' TTs is (i) theme progression with derived themes (47.64%); (ii) constant continuous theme (22.33%); (iii) simple linear progression (21.84%); and (iv) new theme pattern (8.19%). This finding certainly confirms the typical characteristics of Indonesian news item text in terms of its pattern of thematic progression.

The other finding of this research is related to the use of new information as the clause theme. The use of new information as the clause theme may cause lack of cohesion in the ideas organization as mentioned by Wang (2007) and Rosa (2013) who did a research on the thematic progression of exposition texts. However, it is accepted to be used in a news item text due to its characteristics of lexical richness. Therefore, it is possible to use a relatively new information in the theme position. This has once been mentioned by Van Gijssel, Speelman and Geeraerts (2006, p. 958) who argue that a news item text can be characterized by its richer lexical items than the other text types for comprising more formal and prepared components. Nevertheless, very frequent uses of new theme progression will result in lack organization of ideas in the text.

Table 2a
Thematic progression of the ST

Theme	Rheme
BPI (Th1) a major system glitch (Th2=Th1)	says (Rh1) led to customers being hit by unauthorised money withdrawals and deposits. (Rh2)
The problematic transactions (Th3=Rh2) Some users (Th4=Th1) that their accounts (Th5=Th4)	reached up to thousands of pesos. (Rh3) claimed on social media (Rh4) had even gone into the red. (Rh5)

Table 2b
Thematic progression of the TT of S1

Theme	Rheme
<i>BPI (Th1)</i>	<i>menyatakan (Rh1)</i>
<i>bahwa gangguan teknis yang serius (Th2=Th1)</i>	<i>mengakibatkan rekening nasabah mengalami penarikan dan deposit yang tidak sah. (Rh2)</i>
<i>Transaksi bermasalah ini (Th3=Rh2)</i>	<i>sudah mencapai ribuan peso jumlahnya. (Rh3)</i>
<i>Di sosial media (Th4)</i>	<i>juga ditemukan (Rh4)</i>
<i>beberapa nasabah (Th5=Th1)</i>	<i>kesal (Rh5)</i>
<i>karena rekening mereka (Th6=Th5)</i>	<i>menjadi minus. (Rh6)</i>

Based on its thematic progression displayed in Table 2a, the ST is more cohesive because none of its themes contains a new information. Theme progression is closely related to ideas organization in which a translator has a freedom to organize the ideas by paying attention to the applicable structure and text cohesiveness. However, the choice of ‘*Di sosial media*’ as the fourth theme of the TT (see Table 2b) makes the TT less cohesive because it is the new information, the information which has not yet been mentioned anywhere in the previous clause. It is well understood that the decision of S1 to make it the theme of the fourth clause is motivated by his effort to do a theme shift; nevertheless, it is not a good decision. There is a plenty of information provided in the theme and rheme of the previous clauses that can be developed as the theme of the fourth clause.

The findings elaborated above show that ideas organization is still a problem faced by the student translators. This problem emerges because of their tendency to imitate the patterns of thematic progression used in the ST. Although differences are found in the ST and the students’ TTs, such differences were mainly caused by the different number of clauses produced by the students in their TTs. As presented in Figure 3, the patterns of thematic progression used in the ST and the students’ TTs are not significantly different. This problem is mainly caused by their lack ability of avoiding the ST style. They focus more on how the ST form is successfully transferred into the TT, but give less attention to how the meaning is transferred into the TT.

Conclusions

Based on the research findings, it is concluded that an Indonesian news item text, in terms of its pattern of thematic progression, is characterized by the frequent use of theme progression with derived themes and constant continuous theme. In addition, the use of new information as the clause theme is permitted. Furthermore, the problem faced by the students is mainly the incapability of avoiding the ST style, in terms of the patterns of thematic progression used in their TTs, because their TTs still reflects the ST style. Moreover, the problem is also related to their lack ability in doing translation shifts, particularly inter-rank shifts (Matthiessen 2001).

Limitations

The findings of this research have several limitations. First, the research participants are student translators who still have lack ability in translation practices that might contribute to the quality of their TTs. Second, the participants are only asked to write one text that makes it difficult to generalize this research finding.

Recommendations

Based on the research limitations elaborated above it is suggested that (i) in terms of the research participants, it is suggested to other researchers to take professional translators as the research participants to get the data of better quality translation product; (ii) in terms of the data sources, it is suggested to ask the research participants to translate more than one text in order to facilitate easier generalization of the findings; and (iii) in terms of text types, it is suggested to do the similar research to other types of text in order to produce typical characteristics of other Indonesian text types. The more Indonesian texts have their own typical characteristics, the more independent Bahasa Indonesia will be.

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