Levỳ's Minimax Strategy in Translating a Popular Article: Theory in Practice

Deta Maria Sri Darta
deta.darta@staff.uksw.edu
English Department, Satya Wacana Christian University

Abstract

Translation is not merely a process of changing meaning from source language into the target one. It stretches far beyond to produce the result. To translate means to communicate; it conveys the message through language. As an act of communication, it touches other areas of disciplines, one of which is culture. Thus, in line with Levỳ's proposal, translation is a decision process. This article would like to explore the process of translating an article taken from popular magazine "Reader's Digest Canada". It shows the application of Levỳ's minimax strategy in coping with the problem of translating cultural aspect found in the text. The article concludes that some considerations need to be deeply thought before deciding the best way or choice to translate a text into the target language.

Keywords: *translating culture, minimax strategy, translation shift*

Introduction

Translation is not only an act and result of transferring meaning from one language to another; it is also an act of communicating. As being the act of communicating, translation, which is closely connected to language, cannot be separated from other disciplines. Because language is one of the products of culture, it carries the cultural background which is not always equivalent from one culture to another. Finding the equivalent meaning to replace the meaning from the source language to the target language is not always easy. As Jacobson says that everything can be translated to a certain extent (Hatim & Munday, 2004: 15), translators should try their best to find the equivalent meaning of the source language to target language, but of course there is limit in translation. The limit can be in translating idiomatic language which is sometimes very cultural.

Moreover Mona Baker says that translating cultural aspect of a text is one of the problems commonly emerged in the translation process (2011: 18). Once the translation process is done, the effect starts to appeal. If a cutural aspect is successfully translated, it will make the message conveyed effectively. However, if the translator could not find the right equivalent, the new text might lose its cultural context that identify the source text.

Translating is a decision process as proposed by Levỳ (Hatim & Munday, 2004: 174). It means that in the process of translating, translators almost always face some choices. They have to decide which strategies to use, which style to maintain, which words that are equivalent. I have also been through this kind of decision process in my attempt to translate the articles that I chose. The discussion of this decision process will be further explained in the part of 'procedure in practice'.

This article will analyze the translation result of articles under the title *8 Crazy*

Things You've Never Experienced taken from "Reader's Digest Canada" September 2010. There are eight short articles under the title, but I did not translate all eight articles. I chose only three articles among the eight; I chose them randomly, without any purpose. But, accidently I got two articles written by the persons who got the experience themselves, and one article which is written by the person whom the story was told to by the real person who experienced it. I took the articles because I would like to try to translate articles based on lived experience, to see the way writing style might be different from one writer to another. I also would like to test myself, whether my style of writing influence the process of translating different writing styles of lived experienced articles.

After translating those three articles, I found that I translated some parts of the articles with ease, but also there were some difficulties that I faced, especially in translating some idiomatic expression and contextual situation. I have to go in and out of dictionary, surf in the internet to find the equivalent that suit with the Indonesian context and culture. The analysis of the process of translating and the translation result will be the focus of discussion of this essay. The essay will discuss the procedures conducted in the effort of translating the articles based on the theories studied, and then it is followed by the analysis of the procedures application to see how far the theories can be put into practice. It is followed by the discussion of any shift emerged during the translation and then it is ended by a conclusion which also gives some suggestions.

The Procedure in Theory

There are several theories used in the attempt of translating the three articles. This part of discussion will be divided into three parts. The first part will discuss the translation strategies and which strategies to be used, the second part is about Levý's minimax theory and how to apply it, and the last part talks about the necessity of knowing the text type, genre, and discourse.

a. Text Type

Reiss in her article *Text-types, Translation Types and Translation Assessment* taken from Hatim & Munday (2004: 183 – 185) distinguishes three types of text based on her analysis of three basic types of communication situation. Those three types of text are informative, expressive, and operative.

An informative text aims to convey plain communication facts including news, knowledge, information, argument, opinions, feelings, judgments, and intentions. While expressive text is a result of a creative composition where the author shapes the content through its form. And the last type is operative text which aims to stimulate behavioural responses.

b. Translation Strategies

There are some translation strategies suggested by Hatim & Munday on their book *Translation: An Advanced Resource Book*.

The first thing is form vs. content. We need to see how far the form needs to be maintained. If we are about to translate a poem or an advertisement, we really need to consider the form, since it gives a certain effect on the meaning or content of the source text. There is a famous paradox by Savory as cited by Carl James on his article reprinted on Hatim & Munday (2004: 195):

> *A translation should read like an original work,*
> *and*
> *A translation should read like a translation*

Thus, the difficult task of translators is when they need to maintain the effect of the source text in the target text but they also need to maintain the target text as a result of translation not a recreation done by the translators.

The second is literal vs. free translation. Literal translation deals with word to word translation, avoiding the translators' interference of the meaning of the source

text. This strategy might be needed when we translate bible. But we need to be careful when we use this strategy since it might raise ambiguity when the meaning does not exist in the target language culture. Free translation is not completely safe either, because the translators' interpretation can ruin the real message. Thus, we need to be very careful in deciding whether we need to use one strategy strictly or dynamically.

c. Levý's Minimax Strategy

Levý in the article entitled "Translation as a Decision Process" as reprinted on Hatim & Munday (2004: 174 – 175) – and it has been mention in the introduction – that translation is a process of deciding. This makes translators have to choose among a certain number of alternatives.

According to Levỳ, the translation theory tends to be normative in giving the translators optimal solution; while in the actual work of translation, it is very pragmatic, the translator must find one possible solution that requires minimum effort but resulted in maximum effect. The term used is MINIMAX strategy.

The strategy will make the translators to investigate the text before translating. First, the translators must know the stylistic of the original text, then to know the effect of the stylistic of the source text to see whether or not to preserve the style of the original text. The last step is to investigate the audience or the readers of the target text to know to what level the audience or the readers might require the preservation of style in order to understand the target text.

The Procedure in Practice

This part discusses the application of the procedure provided in the previous part, started by the analysis of the source text used in this essay.

a. The Analysis of the Text Type

The articles are taken from *Reader's Digest Canada*. They are under the title "8 Crazy Things You've Never Experienced". As I read the articles, I found that they are written based on true stories. Therefore they are considered as informative text. Another consideration to put them under informative texts is because they give information, knowledge, and fact about what had had happened to them. I could not find any behavioural stimuli, although I found that in some articles, the writers used their creativity in conveying their feelings. But still, conveying information is the main communication purpose.

In translating this particular type of text, according to Reiss (Hatim & Munday, 2004: 184), it is considered successful if the translation guarantees direct and full access to the conceptual content of the source language. Thus, the source text should be translated in full, without unnecessary redundancy. This is connected to the controversy whether or not additions and omissions in the target text are allowed in the informative type of text.

Ignoring the controversy, I think additions and omissions in translation cannot be avoided; even though in translating an informative text, where we have to deliver message as it is. Sometimes, it is not possible to avoid additions and omissions if we need to clarify certain information which is not common in the target language culture. In fact, these additions and omissions may become useful tools to make the translation result or the target text can read naturally and not awkward. An example of this situation is when I tried to translate the article 'How It Feels to ...Be Buried in an Avalanche". An expression of "Wow, something is happening." is found on page 81 of *Reader's Digest Canada*; I could not find the Indonesian equivalence of the word 'wow' there, because if I replace it with 'wah', it does not feel right. Because 'wah' is an expression of wonder, while 'wow' there is not only wonder but confuse also (in that particular situational context there). Therefore, the word 'wow' is omitted – I did not translate it.

Another example taken from the same article is when the writer tried to describe the speed and force of the snow.

> *The speed and force of the snow felt strong but not violent* (81).

I translated into 'kecepatan dan kekuatan saljunya sangat kuat namun tidak keras (kuat namun tidak merusak)'. I added more information to show the difference between the word 'strong' and 'violent', because I could not find the exact equivalent words in bahasa Indonesia.

Additional information was also put in the attempt to translate the description of feeling like: ... "- it felt like being in water up to your knees, then suddenly being hit by an overhead wave." I translated it into " rasanya seperti berada di pantai dengan air sebatas lutut, dan kemudian secara tiba – tiba dihantam ombak yang melebihi kepala."

b. The Strategy Used

In the choice of translation strategy form vs. content, first I gave more points on the content, since to my consideration the form does not play big effect on the process of conveying message in target language. But then when I have finished translated the three articles, I found that there was some how different style of writing that should be maintained.

The three articles are all written based on lived experience, but one was written based on the true story retold to the writer by the one who experienced it, and the other two were written by the persons who experienced it. Thus, the style is different. I felt like I have to keep each specific style that was used by each writer. The first and the second articles were written by the same person, but the first article was written based on the retold story and the second was her own story. Although they were written by the same author, they had different style. The second article was felt more 'alive' compared to the first. The last article was quite a different style. It was more direct, full of expression of feelings, a little bit cynical, and had more idiomatic expressions that hard to find in the Indonesian equivalent.

Although I maintained the form a little bit in terms of the writing style, I gave more weight on the content still. The idea of those three articles was to describe what extraordinary experience they had. This was what I had in mind during my attempt to translate the articles.

While in term of choosing which strategy to use between literal vs. free translation, I cannot help to stand in between, since I wanted to stay safe in the process of translating. As I finished analyzing the type of the text to translate, and found that those three articles were informative texts, I had to do literal translation to avoid missing the points of information that should be translated. But I also used free translation in some degree. It was used to keep the dynamic of the texts so that they can read. If I only used literal or word by word translation, the translation result or target texts would be too rigid and difficult to keep up with. It is because there were some idiomatic expressions that I could not find any direct equivalent in bahasa Indonesia.

The example of such idiomatic expression found in the second article. It is written: 'I told myself to breathe and finally got it right'. I could not literally translate into: 'Aku berkata pada diriku untuk bernapas dan akhirnya aku melakukannya dengan benar'. It is because such expression is not common in Indonesian culture. Thus, I replaced that with: 'Kucoba tenangkan diri, kuatur pernapasanku dan akhirnya aku tenang.' This expression is more dynamic and common in the target language culture. Another example is the term 'stonelike hands'. It is odd if we translated it into 'tangan seperti batu'. I tried to use 'tangan sekeras baja'.

c. The Application of Minimax Theory

The application of the minimax theory was actually done unconsciously before I started to translate the three articles. The first step is to analyze the style of the source text. As stated earlier that I found the articles had different style of writing. Then I applied the second step that is to see whether the style should be maintained or not. If it gave effect to the understanding of text, then the style should be kept, but if not then the translators are free to use their own style of writing.

While applying the second step of the minimax strategy, I kept in mind about the text type. The articles are included as informative texts, where should be translated as they are without any redundancy. I came to conclusion that I had to keep the style in such a way that the target texts still show that they are informative texts.

When analyzing the audience of the target text, which is the last step in minimax strategy, I considered that the target audience of the *Reader's Digest* in Indonesia is different to those of the original audience. People in common will not read this magazine in Indonesia, but I dedicate the translation to Indonesian young middle age people who love to read. I tried to use everyday language as natural as possible to meet the audience. When it comes to the idea of preserving the style or not after analyzing the audience, I could not help to fall into confusion. It is because at one point, the style does not give a significant effect to the understanding of the text, but at other point, the articles are considered as informative texts, especially about lived experience. But, finally I decided to keep the style but dynamically.

The Translation Shift

In the attempt to have a smooth translation result, some shifts could not be avoided to take place. To analyze the shift that occurred, I used the procedure listed by Vinay and Darbelnet (Hatim & Munday, 2004: 148 – 151).

There are seven procedures listed by Vinay and Darbelnet, but I did not use all of them. The common thing that I used was borrowing. This was done when I could not find the exact equivalent word in bahasa Indonesia, for example the word 'transceiver' and 'raspberry'. Although I borrowed the term, I gave additional information to explain the term. In that case, I added 'alat pelacak' for the transceiver and 'buah – buahan perdu' for the word raspberry.

Another common procedure used was equivalence. I used this when I found a certain idiom that is odd if translated literally, for example the word 'stonelike hands'. That expression is not common in bahasa Indonesia, therefore I used 'tangan sekeras baja'. Another example is the replacement of 'his face was a mask of blood' into 'wajahnya bermandikan darah.'

The shifts happened were mostly on the level of text. I did not change the genre or the discourse of the text. The shifts occurred because the different cultural background between English and Indonesian that make some of the expression cannot directly translate. As far as I analyzed there is not any negative effect on the shifts. I got the impression that the shifts happened are helping the target audience to understand the information conveyed (but yet, I have not yet tested this translated articles to be read by any target audience, except myself).

Shift is also happened on the grammar aspect. I could not transfer the tenses indication into bahasa Indonesia, since there is no significant change of tense in bahasa Indonesia. Thus, the sense of activities happened in the past is not successfully translated into the target language. But this shift, I consider, does not give any significant changes in meaning, since it is not common to have tenses markers in bahasa Indonesia.

Mostly, throughout the translation process, gains are more cultivated than loss. That is because I tended to add more information to explain a certain situation, rather than omit it. But, of course, I also did omit some words as had been explained on page 4 under the sub title the analysis of the text type.

Conclusion

After practicing to apply the theories of translation in translating several articles from English into Indonesian, I come up with some conclusion.

Translating is a dynamic activity of transferring message from one language to another, which changes from time to time. The translators' knowledge and experiences, which are formed by practices, play an important role in the success of translating.

The theories are there to help in exploring the world of translation especially

for 'a new comer' in the translation industry. But theories of translation are in line with the act of translation itself, that is subject to change. Thus, the theories are not fix and rigid rules for the translators to obey, but they must be wise in applying which theories suitable for having their work done.

It is important for translators to stick to the purpose of translating; therefore they can maintain their best to have their job done successfully. There are many examples of translation results especially in translating cultural aspect that show the importance of a careful decision in the process of translation. Translating literary text, for example, will make a certain cultural aspect be invisible in the target text as well as be perceptible in the target text (2012: 140).

The analysis confirms Levỳ that translation is a process of deciding. During my attempt to translate the articles, I had to face many choices; the choice of what kind of text, what strategy should be used, what kind of style, what kind of audience, etc. Those kinds of choices forced me to make up my mind. I had to decide most of the time. Thus, I agree with Levỳ to say that translation is a decision process.

The general wisdom in translation, which says that the translators should always translate into their mother tongue or 'language of habitual use', should be wisely considered. Since in translation there are many other aspects than merely transforming one word to another word in other language. When we deal with language, we must also deal with culture. If we are familiar with the language, we should also familiar with the culture of that language to make our job in translation lighten.

References

Baker, Mona. *In Other Words*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.

Sri Darta, Deta Maria. "World Literature and Its Effect on Cultural Aspects". *Proceeding: UNNES ELTL: English Language Teaching and Literature in Relation to Culture.* 2012 pp. 139 -143.

Glodjović, Anica. "Translation as a Means of Cross-Cultural Communication: Some Problems in Literary Text". *Facta Universitatis*. Vol. 8 No. 2 2010 pp. 141 – 151.

Hatim, Basil & Jeremy Munday. *Translation: An Advanced Resource Book*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Hatim, Basil and Ian Mason. *The Translator as Communicator*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.

"8 Crazy Things You've Never Experienced". Articles in *Reader's Digest Canada* page 80–87. September 2010. (www. readersdigest.ca). Web. October, 25 2010.

Roucek, J. S., and R.L. Warren. *Sociology: An Introduction*. New Jersey: Little, Brown and Co., 1963. Print.

Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. *Theory of Literature.* Binding: Paperback, 1977. Print.