

Tourism Promotional Materials: Translation Problems and Implications on the Text's Effectiveness for Tourism Promotion

Novriyanto Napu

Dept. of English Language Education, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia

✉ (e-mail) n.napu@ung.ac.id

Abstract

Translation of tourism information has played an important role in the regional tourism industry promotion in Indonesia. One of the approaches in promoting the Indonesian tourism industry has been by producing promotional materials that contain tourism information in Indonesian with an English translation. This promotional material aims at attracting and encouraging potential visitors to visit the places presented in the materials. However, there is a question of whether these tourism texts translations have functioned well to serve its purpose given the fact that tourism text translation has always been criticized for its poor quality. This paper aims at examining the translation quality of bilingual tourism promotional materials and the implication on the effectiveness for tourism purposes. The data were four tourism brochures collected from the regional tourism board of Gorontalo in Indonesia. Data were analyzed qualitatively to identify the nature of the translation problems in the texts and to consider the implications of these problems for the effectiveness of the text for tourism promotion. The findings revealed that the problems of translation are varied from a low-level linguistic aspect to more significant cultural reference problems. This paper argues that these translation problems have a significant impact on the text for tourism promotion as they undermine the text ability to achieve the purpose of tourism promotional material.

Keywords: tourism promotion material, translation, communicative function, text effectiveness.

Introduction

In the present day, the tourism industry has been directly impacted by the 4th Industrial Revolution. This can be seen from the use of technology for the ease of information access, and this is especially useful for Indonesian tourism as one of the emerging tourist destinations. The tourism industry has been one of the biggest economic sectors in Indonesia besides mining, oil and gas (Purwomarwanto & Ramachandran 2015). With its uniqueness, the country is well known for its natural and cultural assets which have attracted millions of tourists to visit the country each year. This situation has prompted the government to develop and improve its tourism facilities, infrastructure, and communication with overseas tourists.

Indonesia as an archipelago country has a lot to offer to foreign visitors through the tourism attractions available from its 33 provinces. One of the strategies to improve the number of foreign visitors is to give visa-free to many countries. For example, in 2005, there were more than 110 countries granted visa-free to Indonesia for tourism and business (Kertopati 2015). This policy has seen a positive impact on the tourism industry in terms of the visitors' numbers. This policy has also been important for many regional tourism industries in each province as the central government encourages the visitor to visit not only popular place like Bali but also other places.

Gorontalo, as a new province in Eastern Indonesia, also takes part in developing its tourism industry. The government, through the Tourism Board, has been working to introduce and promote the tourism industry to domestic and international visitors. One of the attempts in promoting the industry is by producing promotional materials such as brochures as one of the media to communicate with overseas tourists. Tourism brochures have been chosen by the regional tourism

board in Gorontalo are mostly used materials produced. This condition indicates the fact that brochures as tourism promotional material have been one of the most common strategies in tourism promotion globally (Agorni 2012). These brochures are bilingual written in Indonesian and then translated into English to give information to foreign visitors

It is common that the use of translation in tourism texts have been criticized due to poor quality and this has undermined the tourism promotional texts to function as tourism promotion that functions to entice potential visitors. There have been a number of studies that show that the translation quality used in tourism texts are poor which can be seen in the research done by Kelly (1998), Milton & Garbi (2000), Ko (2010), (Muñoz 2012), Sulaiman (2013) and Napu (2016). Unfortunately, the study of translation quality in the tourism domain remains limited. It is, therefore, the aim of this present study to examine and to find out the nature of the problems of the English translations of the promotional materials and how it may impact on the texts as tourism promotion material. Thus, the problem statement is formulated as “what are the translation problems of the English translation of tourism promotion materials produced by Gorontalo regional tourism board?”

Method

This paper examined bilingual tourism promotional materials in the form of brochures. The data were four tourism brochures collected from the Tourism Board of Gorontalo Province Government in Indonesia which were analyzed qualitatively to identify the nature of the translation problems that are found in the texts and to consider the implications of these problems for the effectiveness of the texts for tourism promotion.

Table 1. An overview summary of a set of texts

Text No.	Text features/sections	Overview
Text 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Olele sea garden - Otanaha fortress - Bajo village - Nantu forest - Saronde island - Pentadio resort 	The text highlights the beauty of nature, an emphasis on pleasure, tradition and unique images of the local sites and the people.
Text 2	Dulohupa traditional house	The text highlights a traditional site which has a significant role and function related to the history and royalty of the local area and people.
Text 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nantu forest - Museum of President Sukarno's landing 	The text emphasizes the idea of unspoiled nature represented through the forest. It describes a historical site related to a past event which is important to the local people.
Text 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Otanaha fortress) - Olele sea garden 	The text highlights the image of an old historical site related to the colonial period and royalty in Gorontalo. It also highlights the idea of beautiful sea garden with unique features.

The analysis included reading and interpretation of the data of the English tourism texts in order to identify any linguistic and cultural reference problems. The first part of the analysis was to look at the linguistic errors in the texts. Linguistic translation problems were identified in terms of syntactic and semantic errors. The cultural problems were focused on how culture-related items in the source text were translated and mediated in the translation as a way to make readers fully understand the texts.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the data findings that will be discussed concurrently to examine the quality of the translations. This is done by looking at translation problems and considering the consequences of the problems on the communicative function and purpose of the texts as tourism promotional texts. The findings reveal that there are a great number of translation problems in the English version of the brochures. For this reason, the discussion will only present examples of the problems that represent and are evident in the texts as a whole.

Linguistic translation problems

The translation problems in this category include syntactic and semantic problems.

Syntactic problems

The syntactic problems in the text involve low-level grammatical errors such as the omission of grammatical items. The missing items include the article 'the' and past participle endings as can be observed below.

- 1) Missing article 'the':
 - a) "This was built in 1925 by (the) Dutch colonial ..." (*tempat ini dibangun pada tahun 1925 oleh kolonial Belanda*).
 - b) "...history of the landing of (the) Catalina Amphibious plane..." (*tempat bersejarah mengenai pendaratan pesawat Amphibi Catalina*).
- 2) Missing past participle ending as in "This place is also use(d) for maleo bird research" (*Tempat ini juga digunakan untuk penelitian burung Maleo*).
- 3) Missing verb 'to be': "The fort is located in Dembe village Kota Barat sub-district and it (is) approximately 8 km from the city center" (*Benteng ini terletak di Desa Dembe kecamatan Kota Barat dan sekitar 8 km dari pusat kota*).
- 4) Inconsistency in the use of tense, as can be observed in the following:

"The fort consisted of three forts. The first fort is called Otanaha. Ota means fort and Naha was taken from ...", "the second was Otahiya which was named after Naha's wife", "the third fort was Ulupahu..." (*Benteng ini terdiri dari tiga benteng. Benteng pertama disebut Otanaha. Ota berarti benteng dan Naha diambil dari...*), "yang kedua adalah Otahiya yang merupakan nama istri Naha", "benteng ketiga bernama Ulupahu).

In this example, there is a mix of tenses shifting from past to present forms of the same verb in one sentence. These problems may be due to the fact that there is no tense marker in the source language and the translator has not been consistent in translating the word in each case.

Further, there are a number of problems in word order. The examples of the problems are discussed below.

- 1) A problem with word order is found as in "Dulohupa custom home is the hall meeting of royal relatives" (*Rumah adat Dulohupa adalah balaimusyawarah dari kerabat kerajaan*).
The translation of 'hall meeting' is a literal translation of *balaimusyawarah* where the phrase has been treated as if it is two independent words and translated each in the order it occurs in the source text. The term is, however, a lexical compound that equates with 'meeting hall' in English.
- 2) In some cases, the components of a sentence are not correctly organized or structured according to the norms of English in the following sentence:

"This house shaped on stilts made of board with Gorontalo's specific roof" (*Rumah ini berbentuk rumah panggung yang terbuat dari papan yang berbentuk atap spesifik daerah Gorontalo*).

There are two dependent phrases underlined in the sentence; 'on stilts made of board' and 'with Gorontalo's specific roof'. In the source text, the phrase 'with Gorontalo's specific roof' modifies the 'house' not the phrase 'on stilts made of board', and therefore the first phrase should follow directly after the sentence subject 'this house' in the target text. The word or phrase order used in the translation which attaches the 'roof' to the 'stilts' instead of to 'house' reflects the source text word order, but this creates a problem in the structure of the target text.

Semantic problems

The cases of semantic problems found in the text relate to lexical choices and also to a missing translation. The problems of lexical choice involve words in the source text that has more than one meaning in the target language and which the word chosen is not appropriate in the context. The missing translation is a case where phrases in the text are left untranslated.

- 1) "This is the best tourism object for those who have research interest on flora and fauna" (*Ini adalahobyekwisataerbaikbagimereka yang memilikminatpenelitiantentang flora dan fauna*).

The source text word *obyek* equates to words in English such as *site, place, location or object*. The word 'object' is not the best word in this context because it refers to a thing not a place.

- 2) "This tourism object can be developed as well to preserve natural resources..." (*Obyek wisatainidapatdikembangkanjugauntukmelestarikansumberdayaalam*).

The word 'as well' is a translation of the source text word *juga* which could mean 'also'. In the target text, 'also' normally modifies a verb (developed), whereas 'as well' modifies a clause and is placed at the end of it. Therefore, the word 'also' is more suitable and needs to be placed before the verb 'develop': "This tourism object can also be developed to preserve natural resources..."

There is also a case of problems in terms of lexical choices. The problems with lexical choice are in cases of polysemy where one word in the source language has more than one translation equivalent in the target language. There are a number of examples of these polysemy problems identified in the text.

- 1) The use of the word 'relatives' as in "*Dulohupa* custom home is the hall meeting of royal relatives" (*Rumah adat Dulohupa adalahbalaimusyawahdarikerabatkerajaan*).

The word *kerabat* in the source text represents a type of family membership referring to an extended family that does not exist in English. This word is also polysemous and it can equate with the words 'relatives' or 'family' in English. The concept of the word 'relatives' in the target language, on the other hand, does not denote the type of family membership implied in the source text and the word 'family' is a more suitable equivalent to represent the meaning in the source text.

- 2) "Custom home" (instead of a traditional house).

Both words have more than one equivalent meaning in the target language. The word *ruma* equates to 'house' or 'home' in English, and in this context, the reference is to describe the building as an architectural form and therefore the word 'house' would be the most suitable translation. The word *adat* is also polysemous and could mean 'custom' as a noun or 'traditional' as an adjective. This particular context, however, would require an adjective in order to modify the 'house' and therefore the word 'traditional' is the most suitable translation equivalent.

The examples above show that this particular text has a number of polysemous words where these words are not well translated based on the context in which they occur.

There is also a case of missing translation evident in the text. This example is found as in '*He came to Gorontalo to unify Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*' (*Dia datang untuk menyatukan Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*). In this case, the translator has not translated the official name of the country, which has an official English translation as the *United States of the Republic of Indonesia*. As the phrase is left untranslated, it is not accessible to an English speaker, who cannot identify what is being unified and as a result cannot interpret the significance of the event that is used to promote the significance of the site.

Another semantic problem is concerned with idiomatic expression. There is one instance of a problem with an idiomatic expression in the text. The problem is related to the use of an idiom which has been used in an unidiomatic way that creates a problem. These problems can be seen as the following:

On the back side of the pavilion (*pada bagianbelakangadaanjungan*).

The underlined phrase is problematic as it is a literal translation where the source text has been word for word translated into the target language (*pada* 'on' *bagian* 'side' and *belakang* 'back'). This

literal translation 'on the back side' is however not an idiomatic expression in English referring to relative space and it may have unintended humorous consequences in the target text as it refers idiomatically to a person's bottom. Therefore, a different translation such as 'at the back of' or 'at the rear of' would be more suitable as the appropriate idiomatic expression in the context.

The discussion of the problems shows that this text contains two kinds of problems: syntactic and semantic problems. As discussed in relation to other texts, these problems may result from limited English language competence and the use of a literal word for word translation strategy that does not consider meanings in context.

Cultural reference problems

The cultural reference problem in the text is where the translator has left some cultural items in the source language text untranslated or written them without any adjustment or additional information that could make them understandable to the target language readers. There is one example of a problem related to cultural reference that can be found in the text in the phrase "...looking at the activity of the teenagers playing *Sepak Raga*". The phrase contains local knowledge which is only identifiable to the source language readers but not to the target readers. Some mediational work in this context, such as adding extra information to these animal names, which Liddicoat (2005) has called 'expansion', could have overcome the issue and enabled comprehension by the target language audience: for example adding a description of the activity to help readers to understand the cultural reference, for example *Sepak Raga* (traditional football). The use of intervention of the translator is useful to give the readers a good understanding of the text. Such additions mean that the translator functions a mediator (Katan 2009; Liddicoat 2015) who facilitates communication and understanding between one group to another in terms of language and culture.

These problems suggest that the translator lacks sufficient English language competence to do the translation and this impact on the quality of the translation in the form of the frequent errors evident in the text. The use of a literal translation approach in some parts of the text and a lack of mediation also indicate a limited translation competence, and this creates a less professional image for the translated text as a tourism advertisement.

Conclusions

The translations give evidence of the use of a literal translation approach and a lack of mediational work in the texts, and this indicated that the translator had a limited translation competence or lacked familiarity with translation practices. Kelly (1998) and Muñoz (2012) have also argued that the problems in tourism translation reflect translators' lack of translation competence. This indicates that there are problems with the selection of translators for tourism translation.

Ideally, the translated texts should be able to present the information of the source text in an informative, persuasive way and free from any translation problems or errors (Kelly 1997; Newmark 1991) in order to achieve the communicative purpose and in the case of tourism texts, be able to attract readers (tourists). As the functional approach suggests the quality of a translation is seen in the way the text is translated to achieve the function and purpose for the readers of the target text. However, the frequent problems of translation errors evident in most of the texts may detract from the purpose of the text in being persuasive and attractive and so may not work well with target readers. The translation errors and the problems caused by the translator's interventions may alter the communicative function that has been designed in the source language text. These problems have therefore undermined the achievement of the purpose of the translation and consequently created an image of the text being less professional because of the low translation quality that impacts on the text's effectiveness as promotional texts to attract tourists.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the regional tourism board of Gorontalo for helping with the data collection process. I would also like to say my gratitude to Dikti and Universitas Negeri Gorontalo for the funding assistance.

References

- Agorni, Mirela.(2012). Tourism communication: the translator's responsibility in the translation of cultural difference, *PASOS. Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural*, vol. 10, no. 4. Retrieved from http://www.pasosonline.org/Publicados/10412special/PS0412_02.pdf
- Katan, David.(1999). *Translating cultures: an introduction for translators, interpreters and mediators*, St. Jerome,
- Kelly, Dorothy A.(1998). The translation of texts from the tourist sector: textual conventions, cultural distance and other constraints, *TRANS: revista de traductología*, no. 2, pp. 33-42.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24310/TRANS.1998.v0i2.2354>
- Kertopati, L.(2015). 'Total 174 negara bebas visa kunjungan ke Indonesia', CNN Indonesia, 21 November. Retrieved from <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/gaya-hidup/20151221171051-269-99671/total-174-negara-bebas-visa-kunjungan-ke-indonesia/>
- Ko, Leong. (2010). Chinese-English translation of public signs for tourism, *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, vol. 13. Retrieved from https://www.jostrans.org/issue13/art_ko.pdf
- Liddicoat, Anthony J.(2015). Intercultural mediation, intercultural communication and translation', *Perspectives*. DOI: 10.1080/0907676X.2014.980279
- Milton, J & Garbi A 2000, 'Error types in the computer-aided translation of tourism texts', *Database and Expert Systems Applications, 2000. Proceedings.*, Wasington DC, 2000. Retrieved from <https://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=790433>
- Muñoz, DI.(2012). Characterization of tourist translation: problems, difficulties, *Revista de Linguística y Lenguas Aplicadas (RLLA)*, vol. 7, 2012, pp. 103-114. Retrieved from <https://polipapers.upv.es/index.php/rdlyla/article/view/1127/1205>
- Napu, N. (2016). Translating Tourism Promotional Texts: Translation Quality and Its Relationship to the Commissioning Process. In: *Cultus: the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication*, issue 9, vol.2, pp. 47-62. Retrieved from: <http://www.cultusjournal.com/index.php/archive>
- Newmark, P 1991, *About translation*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon England; Philadelphia.
- Purwomarwanto, YL & Ramachandran, J 2015, 'Performance of tourism sector with regard to the global crisis-a comparative study between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore', *The Journal of Developing Areas*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 325-339. DOI:[10.1353/jda.2015.0149](https://doi.org/10.1353/jda.2015.0149)
- Sulaiman, MZ. (2014). Translating Urban Tourist Icons across Cultures: An English-Malay Perspective, *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17576/GEMA-2014-1403-10>