

Shifts of Contextual Meanings in the Translation of Indonesian Public Signs

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Abstract. Public signs that are displayed in Indonesian and English play an important role in promoting Bali as a tourist destination. They function to direct and help the tourists in having information. Considering that adequate translations of public signs are needed to support the tourism development in Bali, this research is to reveal the translations of public signs from Indonesian into English. Language and culture are interrelated. How the public signs are designed in Indonesian and English will be influenced by their cultural contexts. By applying pragmatic translation equivalence (Baker, 1992) and three kinds of meaning (Halliday, 2000), this study is to investigate the changes of contextual meaning in the translation of Indonesian public signs in English. The data were collected in Denpasar city and Badung regency. This research finding showed that the changes of forms in the translations of public signs influence the contextual meanings of the translated texts. The shifts of contextual meanings which occur in their English translations include the following conditions: 1) The speaker softens the message; 2) The speaker makes the instruction more direct; 3) The speaker avoids mentioning the agent; 4) The speaker changes his/her points of view; and 5) The speaker changes the position of the most important information.

Keywords: Public Signs; Translation Equivalence; Contextual Meanings

1 Introduction

Public signs are commonly found in tourist destinations. They are very needed by the visitors who want to get information of in the place. In order that the visitors feel comfortable in having information, public signs are displayed in the places that are commonly visited by the tourists, such as hotel, beaches, shopping malls, court, and some others. Public signs function as the window of the place. Whether the visitors feel comfortable when reading the signs, it depends very much on how the signs are designed. Correct and good public signs will promote the place and help the visitor in having information. So, in order to increase the tourism development, public signs displayed in the tourist destination, such as Bali, are needed to be investigated.

Bali which is believed as international tourist destination supports its tourist development by the use of public signs. To create good image and to help people from all over the world have information, a number of signs are written in two languages. They are Indonesian and English.

Public signs deal with how the information is linguistically designed in such a way that the readers are not annoyed when reading them.

When the information is realized by using language, the cultural consideration cannot be avoided. Indonesian and English are languages which have different culture. The two languages might have different ways in designing public signs that the source texts might be re-contextualized in target language. Conditioning texts based on context is intended to achieve pragmatic equivalence (Baker, 1992).

By this type of equivalence, translation is viewed as an activity which has relation to language in use. The meaning of the source language (SL) texts to be transferred in translation is not the one as generated by the linguistic system, but it is meaning as conveyed and manipulated by participants in a communicative situation. When the context is conditioned in target language (TL), this could impact the contextual meaning of the translated texts. As long as meaning is concerned, translation does not only deal with semantic meaning, it also deals with text analysis.

So, the meaning must be viewed from the three types of meaning as proposed by Halliday (2000). The meaning includes ideational, interpersonal, and textual meaning. According to Halliday, language will vary if the function varies, and it varies in different situation. Understanding this language phenomenon that public signs also deal with language in use, the translation of public signs from Indonesian into English are important to be examined. The research result could inform us whether the signs are appropriately translated or not. When the public signs have been appropriately translated in accordance with the target culture, this could give good impact to the tourism of Bali.

Translation studies on public signs have been conducted by translation researchers in some places (Liu, 2013; Ma, 2014; Beili & Tuo, 2015; Shi, 2014; Bi, 2017; He, 2019; Liang, 2019; Yu, 2019; Jia, 2020). In China a number of research were investigated from some perspectives by using different theories. One research applied Functional Equivalence Theory (Shi, 2014). Some others applied other theories, such as Eco-translatology (Jing, 2014), Linguistic Landscape (Beili & Tuo, 2015), and Skopos Theory (Jia, 2020). This present study investigated the translation of public signs from different perspective. The research was to reveal the translation of public signs from Indonesian into English. Applying pragmatic translation equivalence (Baker, 1992) and three kinds of meaning (Halliday, 2000), it is to investigate the changes of contextual meanings in the translated texts of Indonesian public signs.

2 Research Methods

This study concerns Indonesian public signs as the source texts (ST) and their translation in English as the target texts (TT). The public signs investigated include public notices, guides for tourists, advertisement, and road signs. The data were taken in some areas in Denpasar city and Badung regency. The areas among those are hotels, beaches, shopping malls, court, police stations. The signs were collected by taking photo and taking a note. The data were analyzed by applying descriptive and qualitative approach. The stages of the analysis are as the followings.

The Indonesian public signs as the STs were compared with their English translations in terms of their forms. When they show difference in forms, they were categorized as having a process of re-contextualization in their translated texts. The meanings conveyed by the ST were analyzed. The TTs were also examined in terms of their meaning. The meanings investigated include those of semantic and contextual meanings. The analysis of meaning was conducted by

relating the texts analyzed to their contexts. By comparing the contextual meanings of the STs and the TTs, the changes could be identified.

3 Results and Discussion

By applying certain translation strategies, the translations of Indonesian public signs in English show that some kinds of re-contextualization (House, 2015) occur in their translated texts. Re-contextualization of the source texts in target language gives impact to the meaning of the texts. Semantically the source and target texts are equivalent, but contextually some changes occur. The changes of contextual meanings found in the translations of public signs from Indonesian into English are as the followings.

The Instruction Becomes Softer

A number of public signs are used to give instruction. Based on the meaning proposed by Halliday (2000), language will vary if the function varies. Since there is re-contextualization in the translated texts of the Indonesian public signs, the language used to convey meaning changes. Linguistic change impacts the contextual meaning of the texts. Based on the data found, re-contextualization in the TL makes the message or instruction softer than the ST. The change of this kind of meaning is found in the data when the instruction is formed by using sentence in the SL and translated by using noun phrase in the TL as found in the following translation.

ST: Dilarang berjualan/berjemur di dalam area ini.

TT: No selling and sunbathing in this area.

The ST in the translation above is in the form of sentence constructed by negative imperative marker *dilarang*, Verb *berjualan/berjemur*, and Adverbial *di dalam area ini*. Its translation is in the form of noun phrase by using negative word *no* followed by noun *selling and sunbathing*. In this translation the translator softens the instruction through the use of noun phrase. Instruction which is conveyed by using material process (Halliday, 2014) will be more directive if it is viewed from the perspective of interpersonal meaning. The word *dilarang* meaning 'it is forbidden' belongs to negative verb usually used to forbid people to do something. This is the word which makes the Indonesian instructive more directive.

The change of contextual meaning is also found in other re-contextualization in the TT. The following is the datum which shows that the translation is from imperative sentence into declarative sentence as in:

ST: Dilarang masuk mall bagi semua yang demam/batuk.

TT: For those who have fever/cough are forbidden to enter the mall.

This translation involves ST in the form of imperative sentence and translated text in the form of declarative sentence. When someone wants to instruct someone or to give command, some forms could be used among other are declarative, interrogative, or imperative sentence. From interpersonal meaning point of view, all these forms have different contextual meaning. The forms used depend on the functions which are intended to be conveyed. Based on the contextual meaning, instruction by using imperative sentence sounds more direct if compared with the one using declarative sentence. In datum b) the translator makes the instruction softer by translating imperative sentence into declarative sentence. This re-contextualization is to avoid direct effect to the addressee. Another case which shows how the instruction is conveyed is found in the following translation.

ST: Wajib pakai masker.

TT: Wear face mask.

In Indonesian the instruction can be constructed with or without the word *wajib* meaning ‘it is required’. It is a common phenomenon to see that public signs showing instruction are expressed by adding a word of *wajib*. This word is used to emphasize the instruction. When this word is not translated in TL as found in c) above, the instruction becomes softer.

The Instruction Becomes More Direct

The change of contextual meaning also occurs in other forms of re-contextualization in the translation of public signs. The data a) and b) below include the change of contextual meaning when the TT is added with the word of please. This word is to show direct instruction.

ST: Para pengunjung dan pencari keadilan supaya berpakaian sopan dan rapi.

TT: The visitors and justice seekers please dressed polite and neatly.

ST: Tetap jaga jarak.

TT: Please keep your distance.

The word of please is added in the target texts of a) and b) to give direct effect to the addressee. The translations of a) and b) are semantically equivalent. Both the ST and TT are to instruct people to dress politely and neatly as in a) and to keep distance as in b). Contextually, the STs and TTs have different meaning. The instructions of the TTs are more direct than the STs.

The following datum also implies that context impacts the meaning of the texts. The meaning depends very much on how the linguistic constructions of the texts. The following is another translation having instruction function found. Direct instruction is found in this translation when the translator gives more emphasize to the instruction by adding adverb phrase to one another in the TT although the ST does not realize this meaning in explicit way.

ST: Jaga jarak.

TT: Keep your distance to one another.

Jaga jarak ‘keep distance’ of c) indicates that it has implicit meaning. The speaker leaves the Adverbial of between people implicit. In the TT this information is overtly stated by using to one another. This explicit information makes the instruction more direct.

The message sounds more formal

The change of text realization in TL also affects the contextual meaning of the TT. The following translations show different text realizations which show different contextual meanings

ST: Terima kasih untuk tidak membawa makanan dan minuman dari luar Starbucks.

TT: We appreciate your cooperation not to bring outside food and beverage into Starbucks.

ST: Tetap jaga jarak.

TT: Please keep your distance.

ST: Semoga liburan anda menyenangkan.

TT: Hopefully you will have a pleasant holiday.

The translations of a), b), and c) above show that the change of contextual meaning is viewed from formality viewpoints. The re-contextualization of the ST in TL by restructuring the texts makes the TT more formal. The different contextual meanings between the source text and target text are due to the change of the text structures of the ST in TL. In a) personalization occurs in TT by using subject we that the TT becomes more formal. In b) the TT becomes more formal by the addition of the word please. The TT of c) is realized in the form of a clause using transitive verb represented by the verb will have, while the ST in the form of a clause using intensive clause.

There is a change of viewpoint

Re-contextualization in TT, in some cases, results in changes of viewpoints. This implies that the readers of the STs catch the meaning from one point of view, while the readers of the

TTs from another point of view. Some data, such as data a) and b) below, show that in the STs the instruction is realized by using a certain process and the TTs by using noun. By avoiding using process, the addressee turns his/her viewpoint in having the instructions or information.

ST: Masuk

TT: Entrance

ST: Keluar

TT: Exit

When the ST is realized by using process represented by masuk in a) and keluar in b), the addressee will have in mind that he or she could enter or go out through the place where the sign is displayed. When the TT is realized by using noun, he or she will have in mind that it is through that place where he or she could enter or go out.

The change of viewpoints is also found in the following datum:

ST: Motor dilarang naik.

TT: No motor allowed.

This translation shows that there is different position of negation marker between the source and target texts. In the ST the negation marker represented by dilarang meaning 'it is forbidden' is before the verb naik meaning 'go upstairs'. This implies that the focus of the addressee in this text is on the verb naik. What is negated is the action of naik. In the TT the negation marker represented by no is positioned before the motor. This means that what is negated is the motor. The shift of contextual meaning between the ST and TT deals with the difference of the negation focus. The addressee of the text will also catch different meaning in reading the public signs.

There is a change in emphasizing the importance

Some data show that the translations applied strategy of reordering to achieve equivalence in TL. By this strategy the elements of the clause are structured in different way in TL. As a result, the contextual meaning changes. The data found are as the followings.

ST: Segala kehilangan & kerusakan menjadi tanggung jawab pemilik sepeda.

TT: The bicycle owner is responsible for any loss & damage to the bicycle.

ST: Semoga liburan anda menyenangkan.

TT: Hopefully you will have a pleasant holiday.

To emphasize the most importance of the information conveyed, the speaker could put the element to be emphasized at the beginning of the sentence. By the ST of a), the speaker considers that the most important information to be conveyed is segala kehilangan & kerusakan meaning 'any loss & damage to the bicycle'. In the TT, the most important information is the bicycle owner 'pemilik sepeda'. In the ST of b), the information which is of the most importance is liburan anda 'your holiday', while in the TT, it is you 'anda'. Semantically, the two translations express similar meanings, but contextually they have different meanings.

To sum up, translators of public signs from Indonesian into English are always faced with the fact that the contexts of Indonesian and English are not easy to be conditioned. The difference of context between the Indonesian and English texts could result in changes of contextual meanings in translation. This is in accordance with the concept proposed by Halliday (2000) that language varies if the function varies. It depends on the situation of the public signs. A number of data show that public signs are used in different situation.

In some cases, the speakers of Indonesian tend to add a specific word of wajib when instructing people, but the speakers of English do not. Another data also show that the changes of contextual meaning are induced by the use of a word please which is used to make the instruction more direct. These are examples of the use of Indonesian and English words which are related to culture. As long as semantic meaning could be achieved while translating, changes of contextual meanings become a common phenomenon faced by the translators.

4 Conclusion

Shifts of contextual meanings tend to be found in the translation of Indonesian public signs in English. The Indonesian and English public signs are constructed based on the context of culture of the two languages. Changes of context in the re-contextualization process will mean changes of contextual meaning. The changes are to make the translated texts appropriate for the English speakers. Changes of contextual meaning must be considered as one of the translation conditions which are hard to be avoided.

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