

An Analysis Of The Students' Difficulties In Translating Indonesian Text Into English

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Published: August , 2025

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the translation difficulties encountered by seventh-semester English Education students at Nurul Jadid University when translating Indonesian texts into English. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected from 15 female students through written translation tests, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. An adapted error analysis framework based on Baker's (1992) categories—lexical, grammatical, semantic/contextual, idiomatic/cultural, and stylistic/structural—was applied to identify and classify errors. Findings reveal that lexical errors (31.6%) and grammatical errors (27.7%) were the most dominant, reflecting students' limited vocabulary and difficulty applying grammar rules in authentic contexts. Other challenges included semantic misunderstandings, literal translation of idioms, and stylistic weaknesses affecting fluency and cohesion. Contributing factors included insufficient English proficiency, lack of translation strategy awareness, overreliance on machine translation tools, limited exposure to authentic English input, and curricular limitations in translation training. The study recommends incorporating strategy-based instruction, expanding exposure to authentic materials, and revising the curriculum to balance English-to-Indonesian and Indonesian-to-English translation practice.

Keywords : translation difficulties, Indonesian-English translation, EFL learners

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INTRODUCTION

English is an international language that plays a vital role in various fields such as education, business, science, and tourism. In Indonesia, English is considered a foreign language, but it is widely taught and learned across all levels of education. For students majoring in English Education, mastering the four basic language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—is essential. In addition to these skills, translation also becomes an important competence, especially the ability to translate texts from Indonesian into English.

Translation is not a simple task. It is a complex process that requires a deep understanding of both the source and target languages, including their grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and cultural contexts. The ability to accurately translate Indonesian texts into English is crucial, especially in today's global era, where students are expected to access international academic materials, engage in cross-cultural communication, and compete at the global level. However, despite the importance of translation skills, many students continue to face serious challenges in this area.

Translation, especially from Indonesian to English, is a complex skill involving cognitive, linguistic, and cultural processes. It requires a deep understanding of grammatical structures, lexical choices, sentence patterns, and cultural nuances in both the source and target languages. In academic settings, this skill is highly needed, as students are often required to translate texts for assignments, thesis writing, scientific publication, and professional communication. Despite its importance, many students majoring in English Education in Indonesia still struggle with translation tasks, particularly those involving Indonesian-to-English translation.

Several previous studies have revealed that translation continues to be a major challenge for students. A study conducted by Widiastuti and Hardiyanto (2024) on seventh-semester students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi found that the most common translation errors involved vocabulary (31%), meaning (26%), context (25%), and grammar (17%). These findings indicate that students lack full control over linguistic elements and contextual understanding when transferring meaning from Indonesian into English. Similar findings were reported by Syukrina (2021), who noted that students struggle with translating idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and complex sentence structures. These difficulties result in translations that are awkward, unnatural, or even misleading. Mulyani and Ardiansyah (2021) further emphasized that students often fail to produce natural-sounding and coherent English sentences due to their reliance on literal translation and a lack of awareness of English stylistic conventions.

Additionally, Suryani and Putra (2023) found that students tend to rely on word-for-word translation when dealing with long and complex Indonesian sentences, without considering the syntactical structure of the English language. This often results in illogical or incomprehensible target texts. Their study, which analyzed student translations of narrative texts, showed that learners failed to understand the relationship between ideas across sentences, leading to a breakdown in logical cohesion. Lestari (2023) also pointed out that students' poor writing skills in English significantly contributed to their low performance in translation tasks. Without the ability to construct grammatically and stylistically appropriate English sentences, students are unable to convey the original meaning accurately.

Although a number of studies have addressed students' difficulties in translation, there are still several notable research gaps. First, most existing studies have focused on translation from English into Indonesian. However, in academic and professional practice, students are increasingly required to perform the reverse: translating texts from Indonesian into English. Second, previous research has primarily categorized types of translation errors, but paid limited attention to the underlying causes of these errors, such as students' learning strategies, perceptions of translation, or the pedagogical approaches employed by instructors. Third, the local context of each institution is rarely taken into account, despite the fact that student characteristics, curricula, and teaching methods vary greatly between universities. Consequently, there is a lack of institution-specific insights that are necessary to develop contextualized translation pedagogy.

Moreover, previous studies have rarely addressed affective and metacognitive factors in the translation process. In fact, elements such as self-confidence, reading strategies, and critical thinking ability may significantly influence translation performance. A study by Pratiwi and Hamid revealed that students with high anxiety levels tend to make more mistakes, particularly when translating academic texts. This highlights the need to examine psychological variables alongside linguistic aspects when analyzing student translation difficulties.

This present study aims to address these research gaps by adopting a more comprehensive approach to analyzing the translation challenges faced by students. It focuses on the specific context of seventh-semester students in the English Education Department at Nurul Jadid University, exploring not only the types of errors but also their causes from linguistic, pedagogical, and affective perspectives. This study seeks to understand how students approach translation tasks, how they process meaning, and how their learning environment influences their translation performance.

The novelty of this study lies in its localized, context-based approach, which has been largely overlooked in existing literature. By focusing on students at Nurul Jadid University, this research provides detailed and institution-specific insights into translation difficulties, which can directly inform improvements in teaching strategies within the university. Furthermore, the study introduces a reflective and critical learning approach in which students actively evaluate their own translation errors. This pedagogical innovation aligns with modern educational principles that emphasize learner autonomy, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

The urgency of this research is reinforced by the increasing demands for English proficiency in academic and professional settings. In the current era of globalization, students must be able to access, comprehend, and convey information accurately in English. Without strong translation skills, students may struggle to produce high-quality academic work, engage in international communication, or seize

global academic and career opportunities. Therefore, this study is not only academically relevant but also practically significant for curriculum development and pedagogical improvement.

Based on explanation above, the researcher conduct her research entitles “*An Analysis of The Students’ Difficulties in Translating Indonesian Text into English*”. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on translation studies in Indonesia and provides practical implications for improving English language education. Through a focus on localized data, reflective practice, and need-based teaching strategies, this research can serve as a foundation for developing effective, innovative, and sustainable translation instruction models.

Previous studies have generally focused on translating from English into Indonesian and merely classified types of errors without examining their root causes in depth. Moreover, few studies have addressed Indonesian-to-English translation while considering linguistic, pedagogical, and affective factors simultaneously. This study fills that gap by contextually analyzing the difficulties faced by seventh-semester English Education students at Nurul Jadid University and by providing practical recommendations for curriculum development and teaching strategies tailored to students’ needs.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design aimed at providing a detailed, factual, and systematic account of the translation difficulties experienced by students when translating from Indonesian into English. The choice of a qualitative descriptive approach was based on its suitability for exploring phenomena in their natural context and for capturing participants’ experiences and perspectives without manipulating the research setting (Creswell, 2014). The study sought to describe and interpret the types of translation difficulties and the contributing factors in a manner that is both rich in detail and grounded in the participants’ lived experiences.

The study was conducted in the English Education Department at Nurul Jadid University, located in Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia, during the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants consisted of fifteen (15) female seventh-semester students, all of whom had completed translation-related courses such as “Basic Translation” and “Advanced Translation.” They were selected through purposive sampling, with the inclusion criteria being: (1) enrollment in the seventh semester of the English Education program, (2) prior exposure to formal translation instruction, and (3) willingness to participate in all stages of the research, including testing, observation, and interviews. The choice of an all-female sample reflects the demographic reality of the class cohort rather than a deliberate gender-based selection, and the homogeneity of the group allowed for more focused analysis on linguistic competence without gender-related variability.

Data were collected using four complementary instruments:

A translation test, designed to elicit students’ ability to translate an Indonesian narrative text into English. The test contained sentences and short paragraphs incorporating various grammatical structures, lexical items, idiomatic expressions, and stylistic features, thereby ensuring coverage of all five categories of translation difficulties outlined by Baker (1992).

A semi-structured interview guide, which allowed the researcher to explore participants’ subjective experiences, strategies, and perceived challenges in the translation process. The interview questions were open-ended to encourage elaboration and were conducted in a mix of English and Indonesian to ensure clarity and comfort for the participants.

An observation sheet, used during classroom-based translation activities to record behaviors, strategies, and challenges as they occurred in real time.

An error analysis sheet, adapted from Baker’s (1992) framework, which served as the main analytical tool for categorizing and quantifying the types of errors present in the students’ translations.

The data collection procedure was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, the researcher conducted non-participant classroom observations during a translation practice session to gain an initial understanding of the students’ translation behavior, note-taking habits, and strategy use. In the second stage, the translation test was administered under exam-like conditions to minimize external assistance and ensure the authenticity of the students’ work. The students were given 60 minutes to complete the task, and they were not allowed to use online translation tools or dictionaries during the test. In the third stage, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, lasting

approximately 15–20 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded (with participants' consent) and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

For data analysis, the researcher first read through the translation scripts and marked instances of errors or awkward expressions. Each identified issue was then classified according to Baker's (1992) five categories of translation difficulties: lexical, grammatical, semantic/contextual, idiomatic/cultural, and stylistic/structural. Frequency counts were made for each category to determine the most common error types. The interview transcripts were analyzed thematically, with codes assigned to recurring ideas or patterns related to causes of difficulties, strategies employed, and attitudes toward translation learning. Observation notes were used to cross-check and triangulate findings from the tests and interviews, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

To establish the trustworthiness of the findings, the study incorporated several strategies. Credibility was achieved through triangulation of data sources (tests, interviews, and observations) and through member checking, where participants were invited to review and confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts and the researcher's interpretations. Transferability was addressed by providing a thick description of the research context, participant characteristics, and procedures so that other researchers or educators could determine the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a clear audit trail, including detailed documentation of research decisions, coding processes, and data handling procedures. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive journaling, allowing the researcher to identify and minimize personal biases during the analysis process.

In terms of ethical considerations, the study strictly adhered to research ethics protocols. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the research objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, and they were given the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Their identities were kept anonymous through the use of pseudonyms in transcripts, tables, and published reports. All data were stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented in two main subsections: the types of difficulties encountered by students when translating Indonesian texts into English and the factors contributing to these difficulties. The analysis is based on the students' written translation products, the thematic analysis of interview data, and observations conducted during translation practice sessions.

Types of Difficulties in Translation

The classification of students' errors was based on Baker's (1992) five categories of translation difficulties: lexical, grammatical, semantic/contextual, idiomatic/cultural, and stylistic/structural.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Translation Difficulties

Type of Difficulty	Frequency	Percentage
Lexical	97	31.62%
Grammatical	85	27.70%
Semantic/Contextual	67	21.82%
Idiomatic/Cultural	51	16.61%
Stylistic/Structural	43	14.01%

Lexical Difficulties

Lexical errors constituted the largest proportion (31.62%) of all identified difficulties. These errors primarily arose from limited vocabulary mastery, false cognates, and inappropriate word choice. For example, one student translated "*Dia bekerja keras untuk menghidupi keluarganya*" as "*She works hard to life her family*". Here, the verb "life" is a false cognate and should be replaced with "support" or "provide for." Another common problem was the literal translation of institution-specific terms, such as "*kepala sekolah*" rendered as "*head of school*" instead of the standard English term "principal."

Grammatical Difficulties

Grammatical issues accounted for 27.70% of the total. These included errors in verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and word order. For example, "*She go to the market yesterday*" shows both tense and agreement errors; the correct form is "*She went to the market yesterday*." In other cases, students struggled

with forming the passive voice correctly, producing sentences such as “*after be rejected many times*” instead of “*after being rejected many times.*”

Semantic/Contextual Difficulties

Semantic and contextual errors represented 21.82% of all difficulties. These occurred when students misunderstood the intended meaning of a sentence or phrase. For instance, “*Anak itu berbakat sejak kecil*” was rendered as “*That child is talented since small,*” which is a direct word-for-word translation that ignores the natural English expression “since childhood.” Such errors often reflected a lack of awareness of English collocational norms and idiomatic phrasing.

Idiomatic/Cultural Difficulties

Idiomatic and cultural errors, accounting for 16.61% of the total, arose from literal translations of proverbs, idioms, and culturally bound expressions. A notable example is “*Sudah jatuh tertimpa tangga*” being translated as “*Already fall hit by ladder*” instead of the idiomatic English equivalent “*To make things worse.*” These errors suggest that students were often unfamiliar with equivalent idiomatic expressions in English or unaware of the need to culturally adapt such phrases.

Stylistic/Structural Difficulties

Stylistic and structural difficulties (14.01%) manifested in sentences that were grammatically correct but awkward or lacking cohesion. For example, “*She wake up in the morning then she go to market then she come home*” is repetitive and disjointed. The improved version, “*She woke up in the morning, went to the market, and returned home,*” shows how varied sentence structures and cohesive devices improve the flow and readability of the text.

Contributing Factors to Translation Difficulties

The thematic analysis of interview data revealed several key factors that contributed to the difficulties identified above:

Limited English Proficiency – Students frequently reported insufficient vocabulary and a lack of mastery over English grammar rules, leading to frequent lexical and grammatical errors.

Lack of Translation Strategy Awareness – Many students relied heavily on literal, word-for-word translation without applying techniques such as paraphrasing, modulation, or transposition.

Overreliance on Machine Translation Tools – Several students admitted using Google Translate for practice and assignments, often without revising or editing the output, which resulted in unnatural expressions.

Limited Exposure to Authentic English Input – Students’ engagement with English outside the classroom was minimal, restricting their familiarity with natural expressions and idiomatic language.

Curriculum Limitations – The translation curriculum tended to focus more on English-to-Indonesian translation, providing fewer opportunities for Indonesian-to-English practice, particularly with authentic materials.

The predominance of lexical and grammatical difficulties in this study mirrors the findings of Widiastuti and Hardiyanto (2024), who observed similar error patterns in Indonesian EFL learners. The lexical issues identified—false cognates, inappropriate word choice, and literal translations—point to the students’ limited productive vocabulary. While students may recognize certain English words, their understanding of nuanced usage, collocation patterns, and register appears insufficient. This aligns with Nation’s (2001) argument that vocabulary knowledge must include not just form and meaning, but also collocation and pragmatic use.

Grammatical difficulties, particularly in tense usage and subject–verb agreement, suggest that while students may have learned grammatical rules explicitly, their procedural knowledge—applying these rules accurately in real-time translation—is underdeveloped. This is consistent with Ellis’s (2008) view that explicit grammar knowledge does not automatically translate into accurate language production.

The semantic/contextual errors show that comprehension gaps at the discourse level significantly impact translation accuracy. Larson (1998) emphasizes that effective translation requires not just linguistic substitution but also an understanding of the communicative intent of the source text. Misinterpretations such as “since small” instead of “since childhood” indicate that students were not fully processing meaning beyond the word level.

Idiomatic and cultural errors highlight the challenge of achieving equivalence across languages with different cultural frames of reference. As Syukrina (2021) notes, literal translations of idioms often fail to convey the intended meaning and may even confuse the target reader. The lack of familiarity with English idiomatic expressions suggests a need for more targeted instruction in this area.

Stylistic/structural issues reveal that students often focus on sentence-level translation without considering overall text cohesion and flow. This confirms Newark's (1988) argument that good translation involves both accuracy and stylistic appropriateness. Sentences that read as repetitive or disjointed, even if grammatically correct, can hinder reader comprehension and reduce the overall quality of the translation.

The identified contributing factors—especially limited exposure to authentic input and curriculum imbalance—suggest that translation competence is not solely a matter of individual skill but also of instructional design. Groves and Mundt's (2015) findings on machine translation reliance further resonate here: while tools like Google Translate can be helpful, overdependence without critical editing fosters passivity and inhibits the development of independent translation skills.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for a pedagogical shift toward strategy-based translation training that integrates linguistic accuracy, cultural adaptation, and stylistic awareness. By expanding exposure to authentic materials and balancing translation direction in the curriculum, students can develop more nuanced and contextually appropriate translation skills.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study investigated the translation difficulties experienced by seventh-semester English Education students at Nurul Jadid University, focusing on two primary objectives: (1) to identify the types of difficulties encountered when translating from Indonesian into English, and (2) to analyze the underlying factors contributing to those difficulties.

The findings indicate that the students faced a wide range of challenges that can be classified into five major types: lexical, grammatical, semantic/contextual, idiomatic/cultural, and stylistic/structural difficulties. Among these, lexical difficulties were the most frequently observed. Students often used incorrect word choices, relied on literal translation, and showed weak awareness of collocations or idiomatic expressions. These issues were mostly caused by limited vocabulary and over reliance on dictionaries or machine translation. For example, literal translations such as *"life her family"* for *"menghidupi keluarganya"* demonstrated a failure to capture the intended meaning in natural English.

Grammatical difficulties were also prominent. Students made frequent mistakes related to subject-verb agreement, tenses, passive voice construction, and article usage. These issues were rooted in interference from Bahasa Indonesia structures and a lack of practice in applying English grammar rules in context. Many students reported that although they had learned grammar in earlier courses, they found it difficult to apply when translating whole texts, often prioritizing meaning over form.

Semantic and contextual errors occurred when students misunderstood the broader meaning or failed to convey implied or figurative expressions. Translations such as *"broke her hope"* instead of *"gave up"* indicate a literal and surface-level understanding of the source text, lacking deeper semantic awareness. Similarly, idiomatic and cultural expressions posed significant problems. Students often translated idioms word-for-word, producing inaccurate or confusing results. They were generally unaware that such expressions required adaptation or substitution to preserve meaning across cultural contexts.

Finally, structural and stylistic issues were found in the students' writing. Many used repetitive sentence patterns, overly simple structures, and retained Indonesian syntax in their English translations. This resulted in translations that were grammatically acceptable but unnatural or stylistically weak. Students also mixed formal and informal registers, indicating a lack of awareness of stylistic conventions in English writing.

In relation to the second objective, the study found several contributing factors behind these difficulties. First and foremost, limited English proficiency was a recurring theme. Students acknowledged that their vocabulary and grammar knowledge were not sufficient for accurate and fluent translation. Second, there was a clear lack of strategy awareness. Most students reported never learning how to approach translation beyond word-for-word rendering, and they were unfamiliar with translation techniques such as paraphrasing, modulation, or transposition.

Another factor was the over dependence on Google Translate or similar tools. Students often accepted the output from these tools without critically evaluating or revising the results. This practice limited their opportunities to engage with the language and build translation skills. Moreover, insufficient exposure to authentic English input outside the classroom contributed to their lack of familiarity with idiomatic expressions, natural sentence flow, and stylistic variety. Many students admitted to rarely reading or listening to English content outside of academic assignments.

Lastly, instructional and curriculum-related limitations played a significant role. Translation was only briefly taught in one or two semesters, often with more emphasis on translating English to Indonesian rather than the reverse. There was little opportunity for students to revise translations, receive detailed feedback, or explore cultural and stylistic differences. As a result, students lacked the scaffolding necessary to develop deeper translation competence.

In conclusion, the translation difficulties faced by English Education students at Nurul Jadid University are the result of a complex interplay between linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and instructional factors. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes not only strengthening students' language proficiency but also enhancing strategy use, providing meaningful feedback, encouraging engagement with authentic English input, and improving the design and delivery of translation instruction. By focusing on both the product and process of translation, educators can better prepare students to meet the demands of academic and professional communication in a global context. Based on the conclusions above, the researcher offers the following suggestions:

For Students:

Improve English vocabulary and grammar knowledge continuously through reading and practice.

Pay attention to cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions by engaging with authentic English materials, such as books, movies, or conversations.

Practice translating a variety of texts regularly to build confidence and accuracy.

For Lecturers:

Design translation exercises that focus on problematic areas such as vocabulary and grammar while integrating cultural context.

Provide feedback that highlights not only language errors but also cultural and pragmatic issues.

Encourage students to use translation strategies and discuss common difficulties openly in class.

For Future Researchers:

Conduct further research with a larger sample size or different educational settings to generalize the findings.

Explore the effectiveness of specific teaching methods or tools in improving students' translation competence.

Investigate the role of technology, such as computer-assisted translation tools, in assisting student translators.

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