Journal of Innovative and Creativity
Journal Homepage: https://joecy.org/index.php/joecy
e-mail: journaljoecy@gmail.com

Faculty of Education
University of Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai
ISSN 2775-771X (Online)
ISSN 2962-570X **(Printed)**
6 (1) 2026, Page: 17708-17719

Asymmetry in Action: Directional Equivalence in Student Translations from an Arts and Ethics Course

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Published: March, 2026

ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the translation strategies of novice translators based on Pym's (2014) concept of directional equivalence. It involved 20 translations of 17 English laboratory and classroom rules into Indonesian by students from an Arts and Ethics course in an English Language Education program. The research examines how translators navigate the formal-dynamic continuum in a non-Western educational context. Key findings include: 1. One-to-many equivalence is the most frequent lexical pattern. 2. Simple syntactic items align more with formal equivalence. 3. Ambiguous source terms lead to translational divergence. 4. Lexical expansion indicates dynamic equivalence. 5. Grammatical verb modality reveals pragmatic tensions. 6. Complex source material results in greater translational variation. These findings support Pym's view that equivalence is asymmetric and derived from interpretation. While dynamic equivalence requires more interpretative skill, it often produces superior target texts, particularly with ambiguous or culturally-bound terms. This research enhances translation pedagogy in Indonesian literature by showing that back-translation tools help students understand equivalence asymmetries and translational polarities.

Keywords: *Directional, Dynamic, Equivalence, Translation, Theory*

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INTRODUCTION

Translation theories offer conceptual frameworks for understanding how texts are transformed across languages, particularly through the notion of equivalence, which considers the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) as possessing equal status (Pym, 2014). Directional equivalence, as an important sub-paradigm, underscores the asymmetrical and one-way character of equivalence, stressing the role of translator agency and contextual decision-making rather than fixed, pre-determined relationships.

Although theoretical scholarship has examined equivalence theories and their consequences, their practical implementation in training novice translators remains limited. Previous studies tend to concentrate on the cognitive processes of professional translators or on how directionality affects translation quality (e.g., Pokorn, 2020; Wang, 2025). Research involving student translations generally discusses equivalence in broad terms but rarely investigates directional equivalence, especially in non-Western language pairs or classroom contexts. This gap is particularly relevant for novice translators who encounter difficulties related to linguistic hierarchy and cultural adjustment.

Empirical investigation into how directional equivalence shapes students' translations, especially in contexts such as Indonesian to English, is still insufficient. Addressing this issue is essential for enhancing instructional strategies, including the use of back-translation to correct misunderstandings regarding equivalence.

This study seeks to analyze directional equivalence using quantitative data obtained from students enrolled in an English Language Education course. The participants translated laboratory rules from English into Indonesian, with the data gathered in February 2026 from classes DIK E and DIK F. The examination of 20 translated texts reveals inconsistencies with the original materials. By classifying the translations along formal and dynamic dimensions and evaluating directionality through back-translation, this paper investigates how the decisions made by novice translators correspond with established theoretical frameworks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Directional Equivalence

Directional equivalence, as formulated by Pym (2014), develops from theoretical perspectives that deny the notion of natural reciprocity between equivalents. Rather, it foregrounds directionality: translating from language A into B produces an equivalent, yet reversing that translation does not necessarily generate the same outcome (p. 75). This asymmetry occurs because translators exercise deliberate choices, which are not determined solely by the ST, resulting in outcomes that are not fully reversible.

The principal characteristics of directional equivalence can be outlined as follows. First, asymmetry and choice: equivalence operates directionally, enabling translators to determine solutions according to context rather than inherent linguistic symmetry (Pym, 2014, p. 76). Second, polarities: many theories simplify translation options into two opposing poles, such as literal/free, formal/dynamic, or foreignizing/domesticating (Pym, 2014, pp. 90–95). For example, Cicero's ut interpres (literal) versus ut orator (free), as well as Schleiermacher's foreignizing versus domesticating approaches, illustrate decisions that presuppose a cultural and linguistic boundary (pp. 91–92). Third, formal versus dynamic equivalence: Eugene Nida's model differentiates formal equivalence (maintaining the form of the ST) from dynamic equivalence (reproducing the function of the ST within the target context) (Pym, 2014, p. 92). Fourth, illusions and representations: scholars such as Jiří Levý (illusory versus anti-illusory) and Lawrence Venuti (fluent versus resistant) conceptualize translations as representations that may construct an illusion of naturalness (Pym, 2014, p. 94). Fifth, the incorporation of relevance theory: Ernst-August Gutt accounts for directional equivalence through the concept of "interpretative resemblance," whereby language offers clues interpreted through context and implicatures, producing either direct (formal) or indirect (dynamic) renderings (Pym, 2014, pp. 102–104).

The strengths of directional equivalence include its adaptability to hierarchical language relationships, its acknowledgment of translator agency, and its suitability for empirical investigation (Pym, 2014, pp. 107–108). Critiques, such as the reliance on binary oppositions (Meschonnic, 1973) or the assumption of symmetry (Snell-Hornby, 1988), are countered by its emphasis on creative application rather than fixed structural models (Pym, 2014, pp. 109–110). This framework is especially pertinent for examining student translations, in which errors, cultural adjustments, and functional considerations reflect directional decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Source

The dataset consists of 20 student responses collected on February 18–19, 2026. Each response contains a timestamp, the student's name, class information, and translations of 17 English rules (e.g., "Listen when others are talking") into Indonesian. The rules address classroom conduct and laboratory procedures, with certain inconsistencies in the ST (e.g., "Guess Book," which is likely a typographical error for "Guest Book"). The participants were students of English Language Education enrolled in the Arts and Ethics course, drawn from classes DIK E and DIK F 2023.

3.2 Analysis Procedure

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, classification: the translations were grouped into formal (closely reflecting the form and structure of the ST) or dynamic (adjusted to fulfill target function and clarity), following Nida's polarity as discussed by Pym (2014). Second, the back-translation test: the TTs were translated back into English to evaluate asymmetry when the back-translated version diverges from the ST, directionality is demonstrated (Pym, 2014, p. 75). Third, sampling: selected rules were chosen for in-depth examination, with several translations analyzed for each in order to represent existing variations. Fourth, qualitative insights: errors, modifications, and cultural factors were identified and connected to the virtues of directionality, such as the construction of illusion. The analysis was predominantly qualitative, with emphasis placed on pedagogical implications.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from analysis 20 student translations of 17 English laboratory rules into Indonesian. The analysis applies Pym's (2014) directional equivalence framework, focusing on the two dominant poles: Formal Equivalence (source-oriented, foreignizing) and Dynamic Equivalence

(target-oriented, domesticating). Each finding is supported by textual evidence drawn directly from the students' work.

The overview table below captures a representative sample of student translations, illustrating back-translation asymmetries and classification:

Table 3.1 Representative Student Translations with Back-Translation and Classification

Original English Rule (ST)	Student Name & Class	Indonesian Translation (TT)	Back-Translation to English	Classification & Notes
Listen when others are talking	T.T.S. (DIK E 2023)	*Dengarkan ketika orang lain berbicara.*	Listen when other people are speaking.	Formal: Literal structure; minor asymmetry in 'others' to 'other people.'
Listen when others are talking	N.K.S. (DIK F 23)	*Dengarkan saat orang berbicara.*	Listen when people are speaking.	Dynamic: Omits 'others' for generality; back-translation loses specificity, confirming directionality.
Lecturer must sign the available Guess Book	T.P.D. (DIK E 2023)	*Dosen wajib menandatangani Buku Tamu yang tersedia.*	Lecturer must sign the available Guest Book.	Dynamic: Corrects 'Guess' to 'Tamu' (guest); back-translation fixes ST typo, non-reversible.
Lecturer must sign the available Guess Book	D.T. (DIK E 2023)	*Dosen harus menandatangani Buku Tebakan yang tersedia.*	Lecturer must sign the available Guessing Book.	Dynamic with error: Misinterprets 'Guess'; asymmetry highlights directional mischoice.
No food and drink are permitted	P.L.G. (DIK E 2023)	*Dilarang membawa makanan dan minuman.*	Prohibited to bring food and drinks.	Formal: Adds 'membawa' (bring) for imperative; minor shift in back-translation.
No food and drink are permitted	J.I.A. (DIK F 23)	*Tidak diperbolehkan membawa makanan dan minuman.*	Not permitted to bring food and drinks.	Dynamic: Emphasizes action; back-translation adds behavioral focus, asymmetric.
Sanctions given for breaking the rules: warning, repairing, paying or fined for the broke facilities	A.S.R.S. (DIK E 23)	*Akan diberikan Sanksi jika peraturan dilanggar: Peringatan, Perbaikan, Ganti rugi untuk fasilitas yang rusak dan Skors untuk*	Sanctions will be given if rules are violated: Warning, Repair, Compensation for damaged facilities	Dynamic: Refines ST grammar (e.g., 'broke' to 'rusak'); back-translation improves clarity,

and suspended for breaking the rules repeatedly		*Melanggar peraturan berulang kali.*	and Suspension for repeatedly violating rules.	directional enhancement.
Sanctions given for breaking the rules: warning, repairing, paying or fined for the broke facilities and suspended for breaking the rules repeatedly	R.A.S. (DIK F 2023)	*Sanksi bagi pelanggar aturan: Peringatan, perbaikan barang, penggantian biaya atau denda untuk fasilitas yang rusak, dan skorsing bagi yang melanggar aturan secara berulang.*	Sanctions for rule violators: Warning, item repair, cost replacement or fine for damaged facilities, and suspension for those who violate rules repeatedly.	Dynamic: Expands for enforceability; asymmetry in elaboration for Indonesian context.

4.1 Finding 1: One-to-Many Equivalence Is the Dominant Lexical Pattern

The most consistent finding across the 17 items indicates that the majority of translation divergence does not occur at the sentence level, but rather at the lexical level particularly in cases where a single English word may be translated into several different Indonesian equivalents. This phenomenon corresponds to what Kade (1968, as cited in Pym, 2014) describes as one-to-many (or "optional") equivalence: a single source-language element aligns with more than one potential target-language rendering, thereby obliging the translator to exercise deliberate choice.

Table 4.1 Lexical Divergence Points: One-to-Many Equivalence Across Items

Source Word	Item No.	Indonesian Equivalents Found in Data	Count
direction	2	*arah* • *arahan* • *arahannya* • *arahnya* • *petunjuk* • *petunjuknya* • *instruksinya* • *petunjuk yang diberikan* • *arahan yang diberikan* • *setiap arahan yang diberikan*	10
quietly	4	*diam* • *senyap* • *tenang* • *hening*	4
respect	5	*rasa hormat* • *hormat* • *rasa saling menghargai* • *sikap hormat*	4
must / sign	7	*must: wajib* • *harus* | *sign: menandatangani* • *tandatangani* • *menandai* • *mengisi*	5
warrant	16	*situasi darurat* • *situasi terkini* • *situasi jaminan* • *menjamin situasi* • *situasi surat perintah* • *surat perintah* • *situasi yang wajib* • *situasi mendesak*	8
warning (sanctions)	17	*peringatan* • *teguran*	2

The word 'direction' in Item 2 alone generated ten distinct translation forms across twenty students, making it the single most productive divergence point in the dataset. As Pym (2014, p. 86) explains, in one-to-many cases 'the translator has to make a choice' and there is no guarantee that different translators will make the same choice. Crucially, none of the ten renderings of 'direction' is straightforwardly wrong, yet each reflects a different interpretive decision about whether to preserve the literal sense of the word ('*arah*' = physical direction) or to adapt it to its institutional function ('*petunjuk*' = instruction, '*arahan*' = directive). This is precisely the dynamic vs. formal tension at the heart of directional equivalence.

Table 4.1b Item 2: 'Follow the direction' Full Distribution of Translations

No.	Source Text (EN)	Target Text (ID)	Equivalence Type	Translation Strategy
1	Follow the direction	*Ikuti arah*	Formal	'*arah*' = literal direction
2	Follow the direction	*Ikuti arahnya / arah*	Formal	literal + possessive suffix
3	Follow the direction	*Ikuti arahannya*	Formal-leaning	derived noun, near-literal
4	Follow the direction	*Ikuti instruksinya*	Dynamic	'direction' → 'instruction'
5	Follow the direction	*Ikuti petunjuknya / petunjuk*	Dynamic	'direction' → guidance/instruction
6	Follow the direction	*Ikuti petunjuk yang diberikan*	Dynamic	expansion: adds 'that is given'
7	Follow the direction	*Ikuti arahan yang diberikan*	Dynamic	expansion + derivation
8	Follow the direction	*Ikuti setiap arahan yang diberikan*	Dynamic	further expansion: 'every directive given'

4.2 Finding 2: Simple Items Converge Toward Formal Equivalence

In contrast to the lexical richness seen in ambiguous items, syntactically simple sentences with clear lexical correspondences generated high convergence among students, with most choosing formally equivalent, source-parallel structures. This finding aligns with Pym's (2014) observation that formal equivalence tends to dominate when linguistic correspondence is available and unambiguous.

Item 1 ('Listen when others are talking') and Item 12 ('No littering') exemplify this convergence. In Item 1, 19 of 20 students preserved the imperative verb '*Dengarkan*' (Listen) and the subordinate clause structure, differing only in their choice of temporal connective ('*ketika*' vs. 'saat' vs. '*waktu*'). In Item 12, all 20 students converged on the semantic field of *'membuang sampah sembarangan'* (to litter indiscriminately), varying only in the prohibition marker used.

Table 4.2 Distribution of Prohibition Markers in Item 12 ('No littering')

Prohibition Marker	Full Translation	Register/Orientation	Frequency
Dilarang	*Dilarang membuang sampah sembarangan*	Formal Equivalence: official/regulatory register	9 students
Jangan	*Jangan membuang sampah sembarangan*	Dynamic Equivalence: softer, spoken register	6 students
Tidak boleh / Tidak	*Tidak boleh / Tidak membuang sampah sembarangan*	Mixed: negative modal, semi-formal	5 students

While the lexical core of all 20 translations is semantically identical (*'membuang sampah sembarangan'*), the choice of prohibition marker reflects a meaningful stylistic divergence along the formal-dynamic axis. '*Dilarang*' carries a formal, legal, regulatory register consistent with a formal equivalence approach. '*Jangan*' is softer and more conversational, representing a slight domesticating shift. '*Tidak boleh*' occupies a middle ground. This micro-level variation shows that even in highly convergent items, directional decisions are operative at the pragmatic level.

4.3 Finding 3: Ambiguous Source Terms Amplify Divergence and Reveal Individual Strategy

The most analytically productive items are those where the source text contains an ambiguous, unusual, or contextually unclear term. Two items stand out: Item 7 ('Guess Book') and Item 16 ('warrant situation').

4.3.1 Item 7: 'Lecturer must sign the available Guess Book'

The phrase 'Guess Book' appears to be a non-standard or erroneous English term, most likely intended as 'Guest Book' (buku tamu). This created a genuine one-to-none equivalence challenge (Kade, as cited in Pym, 2014, p. 88): students could not find a straightforward equivalent because the source term itself is unusual. Three distinct strategies emerged:

Table 4.3.1 Item 7: Translation Strategies for 'Guess Book'

No.	Source Text (EN)	Target Text (ID)	Equivalence Type	Translation Strategy
1	...Guess Book	...*buku tamu yang tersedia*	Dynamic ✓	Interpreted intent correctly ('Guest Book')
2	...Guess Book	...*Buku Tamu yang tersedia*	Dynamic ✓	Same correct interpretation (15 of 20 students)
3	...Guess Book	...*buku yang tersedia*	Omission	Dropped the book type entirely
4	...Guess Book	...*Buku Tebakan yang tersedia*	Formal ✗	Word-for-word: 'guess' → 'tebakan'; wrong meaning
5	...Guess Book	...*Guess Book yang tersedia*	Borrowing	Retained original English; no translation (1-to-none)
6	...Guess Book	...*guess book yang tersedia*	Borrowing	Lower-case borrowing; same zero-equivalence strategy

Of the 20 students, approximately 15 accurately interpreted "Guess Book" as "*buku tamu*," demonstrating dynamic equivalence, as they moved beyond the literal form of the source term to convey its communicative function. Two students retained the English term through direct borrowing, reflecting a one-to-none strategy. One student, Dinda Tania, rendered it as "*Buku Tebakan*" (guessing book), applying strict formal equivalence to a term that does not withstand word-for-word transfer. This finding strongly reinforces Pym's (2014, p. 86) claim that formal equivalence is neither natural nor universal; rather, it constitutes a choice, and one that may prove unsuccessful when the source text itself is ambiguous or non-standard.

4.3.2 Item 16: 'Please contact the Head of English Laboratory for warrant situation'

"Warrant situation" represents another expression that does not possess a standardized equivalent in Indonesian and remains ambiguous even in English. The term "warrant" may refer to a legal order (*surat perintah*), a guarantee (*jaminan*), or, in more informal usage, an emergency (*darurat*) or an urgent matter (*hal yang mendesak*). This ambiguity resulted in the broadest range of translations across the entire dataset.

Table 4.3.2 Item 16: Translation Strategies for 'warrant situation'

No.	Source Text (EN)	Target Text (ID)	Equivalence Type	Translation Strategy

1	...for warrant situation	...*untuk situasi darurat*	Dynamic ✓	'warrant' → '*darurat*' (emergency): functionally appropriate
2	...for warrant situation	...*dalam situasi mendesak*	Dynamic ✓	'warrant' → '*mendesak*' (urgent): correct pragmatic reading
3	...for warrant situation	...*situasi terkait surat perintah*	Formal	'warrant' → '*surat perintah*' (legal warrant); source-literal
4	...for warrant situation	...*untuk situasi jaminan*	Formal	'warrant' → '*jaminan*' (guarantee); partial match
5	...for warrant situation	...*untuk menjamin situasi*	Mistranslation	'warrant' read as verb 'to guarantee'; structural error
6	...for warrant situation	...*untuk situasi yang wajib*	Mistranslation ✗	'warrant' → '*wajib*' (mandatory); incorrect
7	...for warrant situation	...*untuk situasi terkini*	Mistranslation ✗	'warrant' ignored; '*terkini*' = latest/current; no basis

The spread of translations demonstrates, more than any other item, that translation is an inherently interpretive act. Students who adopted dynamic equivalence ('*darurat*', '*mendesak*') prioritized the communicative purpose of the rule over strict lexical fidelity. Students who adopted formal equivalence ('*surat perintah*', '*jaminan*') preserved the denotation of 'warrant' but produced translations that are unclear in context. Three students produced mistranslations by over-trusting the surface form of an ambiguous word. This directly illustrates what Pym (2014, p. 90) identifies as the core problem of formal equivalence: vulnerability to failure at precisely those points where the source form is ambiguous or culturally specific.

4.4 Finding 4: Expansion as a Marker of Dynamic Equivalence

A recurrent characteristic of the dynamically oriented student translations is lexical or syntactic expansion, in which the target text incorporates additional words, clauses, or information that are not explicitly stated in the source text. This does not constitute an error; rather, it represents a recognized aspect of dynamic equivalence, whereby the translator supplies what is necessary for the target reader to grasp the intended meaning. Pym (2014) observes that directional equivalence "can justify quite significant textual expansion or reduction" when the objective is to achieve functional equivalence.

The most evident example appears in Item 3: "Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself." The English expression "to yourself" is idiomatic and conveys the meaning "do not touch others," functioning as a culturally embedded instruction without a direct equivalent in Indonesian.

Table 4.4 Item 3: Translation Strategies for 'to yourself'

No.	Source Text (EN)	Target Text (ID)	Equivalence Type	Translation Strategy
1	Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself	...*untuk dirimu sendiri*	Formal	Literal; 'to yourself' = 'for yourself': grammatically acceptable but not idiomatic in ID

2	...to yourself	...*milik anda sendiri*	Formal-leaning	'to yourself' = 'belonging to you': partially correct reading
3	...to yourself	...*agar tidak mengganggu orang lain*	Dynamic	Expansion: explains the implication: 'so as not to disturb others'
4	...to yourself	...*benda yang kamu pegang agar tidak mengganggu orang lain*	Dynamic	Further expansion: adds 'that you hold'
5	...to yourself	...*benda tetap didekatmu*	Dynamic	'keep near you': simplification, natural and functional
6	...to yourself	...*objek kepadamu*	Formal ✗	'objects' borrowed as 'objek'; 'to yourself' = *'kepadamu'*; unnatural

Students who employed expansion, particularly those who included the phrase "*agar tidak mengganggu orang lain*," produced translations that are longer than the source text yet considerably clearer for Indonesian readers who may be unfamiliar with the English idiom. This reflects what Pym (2014, p. 97) characterizes as the readiness of dynamic equivalence to permit textual expansion in order to achieve functional precision. Expansion is also evident in Item 2, where several students inserted "*yang diberikan*" into "*petunjuk*" or "*arahan*," and in Item 10, where some translated "available tables" as "*meja yang telah disediakan*" instead of the more literal "*meja yang tersedia*."

4.5 Finding 5: Modal Verb Variation Reflects Formal-Dynamic Tension at the Pragmatic Level

Beyond lexical choices, a consistent pattern of variation appears in how students render the prohibition and obligation markers present throughout the laboratory rules. The source text uses forms such as 'No...', 'Not allowed to...', 'Must...', and 'Please...' each carrying a specific pragmatic force. The variation in how students translate these markers reveals their underlying orientation along the formal-dynamic axis.

Table 4.5 Modal Verb Distribution Across Prohibition and Obligation Items

Source Marker	Indonesian Equivalent	Pragmatic Character	Equivalence Orientation
must (Item 7)	*wajib*	Strong obligation; formal, regulatory (more bureaucratic)	Formal Equivalence
must (Item 7)	*harus*	Obligation; neutral register, commonly used in speech and writing	Dynamic Equivalence
No... / Not allowed	*Dilarang*	Prohibition; strong, official, regulatory, consistent with written institutional rules	Formal Equivalence
No... / Not allowed	*Jangan*	Prohibition; softer, imperative, more natural in spoken instruction	Dynamic Equivalence
No... / Not allowed	*Tidak diperbolehkan / Tidak diizinkan / Tidak boleh*	Modal negation; ranges from formal to semi-formal	Mixed

No... / Not allowed	*Tidak diperkenankan*	Strongest formal prohibition; legalistic register	Formal Equivalence
Please (Item 16)	*Silakan*	Polite request; natural, neutral-formal Indonesian	Dynamic Equivalence
Please (Item 16)	*Tolong*	Polite request; warmer, more conversational than '*silakan*'	Dynamic Equivalence

Students who consistently chose '*Dilarang*' and '*wajib*' throughout the dataset demonstrate a tendency toward formal equivalence: they preserve the institutional, regulatory register of the source text, which is itself an official laboratory rule. Students who preferred '*Jangan*' and '*harus*' adopted a more communicative, target-reader-oriented approach. Notably, Rizka Arni Sagala was the only student to use '*tidak diperkenankan*' (the most formal and legalistic prohibition marker in Indonesian), suggesting a highly formal equivalence orientation throughout.

4.6 Finding 6: Item Complexity Correlates with Degree of Translational Divergence

Across all 17 items, there is a clear correlation between the linguistic complexity of the source sentence and the degree of divergence in student translations. Simple, short imperative sentences (Items 1, 6, 12) generated high convergence. Complex, compound, or idiomatic sentences (Items 3, 7, 16, 17) generated the widest divergence.

Table 4.6 Source Complexity vs. Translational Divergence

Item	Source Sentence	Complexity Level	Convergence Level	Key Divergence Points
1	Listen when others are talking	Low	High (19/20 similar)	'when' connector: *ketika / saat / waktu*
2	Follow the direction	Low (ambiguous lexis)	Low (10 variants)	'direction': *arah / petunjuk / arahan / instruksi*
3	Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself	Medium (idiomatic)	Low-Medium	'to yourself': literal vs. expansion vs. borrowing
4	Work quietly and do not disturb others	Low	High	'quietly': *diam / tenang / senyap / hening*
6	Work and play in a safe manner	Low	Very High	'manner': *cara yang aman / dengan aman:* minor variation
7	Lecturer must sign the available Guess Book	High (unusual term)	Low (4 strategies)	'Guess Book': *buku tamu / Buku Tebakan* / Guess Book / *buku*
12	No littering	Very Low	Very High	Prohibition marker only: *Dilarang / Jangan / Tidak boleh*
16	...for warrant situation	Very High (ambiguous)	Very Low (8 variants)	'warrant': *darurat / surat perintah / jaminan / wajib / mendesak*
17	Sanctions...warning, repairing, paying or fined...suspended	High (compound)	Medium	'warning': *peringatan / teguran*; 'suspended': *skorsing / penangguhan / dikeluarkan*

Item 17 deserves special attention as the longest and most syntactically complex item. Despite its complexity, most students managed to convey the full meaning, suggesting that complex sentences with clear semantic structures are more tractable than short sentences with ambiguous individual words. The variation in Item 17 was mainly at the level of individual sanction terms: 'warning' split between '*peringatan*' (formal) and '*teguran*' (slightly less formal); 'suspended' split between '*skorsing*' (borrowing from English), '*penangguhan*' (formal Indonesian), and *'dikeluarkan*' (dismissed, dynamic equivalent).

DISCUSSION

The findings outlined above, when considered collectively, present a coherent illustration of how Indonesian-speaking translation students negotiate the formal–dynamic continuum articulated by Pym (2014) in his discussion of directional equivalence.

5.1 The Asymmetry of Directional Equivalence Is Empirically Confirmed

Pym's (2014) central assertion regarding directional equivalence is that the translation relationship is inherently asymmetric: it proceeds in a single direction, from source to target, and different translators will arrive at different decisions when moving along that direction. The data provides strong support for this assertion. Twenty students translating the same seventeen source sentences generated a broad range of Indonesian renderings, especially at points characterized by lexical ambiguity. There is no case within the dataset in which all twenty students produced identical translations. Even for the simplest item, "No littering" (Item 12), three distinct prohibition markers were employed.

This asymmetry is particularly evident in Items 2, 7, and 16, where the spectrum of translations extends across what Pym describes as different "poles" of equivalence, ranging from strictly formal word-for-word renderings to fully dynamic functional paraphrases, and even to complete borrowing under a one-to-none strategy. As Pym (2014, p. 95) concludes, "A choice made by the translator is not necessarily determined by the start text." The data substantiates this position: students working with the same source text made genuinely varied translational decisions, reflecting differing orientations and levels of competence.

5.2 The Risk of Formal Equivalence: When Source-Fidelity Produces Failure

One of the most important theoretical insights reinforced by this data is that formal equivalence, although it appears safe and transparent, entails a particular risk: when the source text includes non-standard, erroneous, or culturally embedded expressions, rigid formal equivalence can result in translations that do not effectively communicate meaning. This is evident in the cases of "Guess Book" (Item 7) and "warrant situation" (Item 16).

Dinda Tania's rendering of "Guess Book" as "*Buku Tebakan*" represents a clear example. The translation is formally consistent, as "Guess" corresponds to "*Tebakan*" and "Book" corresponds to "*Buku*," yet the outcome is communicatively inappropriate within the context of a laboratory rule requiring registration. In a similar manner, translating "warrant situation" as "*situasi yang wajib*" illustrates the risk of aligning source-language terms with their nearest formal equivalents without considering contextual relevance.

In contrast, students who applied dynamic equivalence in these items by interpreting the communicative purpose of the source rule rather than adhering to its literal wording produced translations that are not only accurate but also more effective as institutional instructions. Patricia Lumban Gaol's rendering of "warrant situation" as "*situasi darurat*" serves as an example: although the translation is not formally equivalent to the source expression, it achieves functional accuracy and greater communicative adequacy.

5.3 Dynamic Equivalence Requires Interpretive Competence

An important implication of these findings is that dynamic equivalence should not be regarded merely as a "freer" or "easier" alternative; rather, it demands a higher level of interpretive competence than formal equivalence. To generate a dynamic rendering of "warrant situation," a student must first recognize the ambiguity of the English term, then consider the institutional context of the text, infer the likely intention behind the rule, and determine the most appropriate Indonesian expression to convey that intention.

This helps explain why, throughout the dataset, students who consistently adopted dynamic strategies also tended to commit fewer substantive errors. R.A.S., N.S.R., J., and J.I.A., whose translations predominantly reflected a dynamic orientation, produced the most natural and communicatively effective Indonesian versions across the seventeen items. In contrast, students whose translations were more

formally oriented, such as S.M., D.T., and A.S.R.S., made more errors in the ambiguous items, largely because their formal strategies were insufficient to address uncertainty within the source text.

This observation corresponds with what Pym (2014, p. 108) identifies as a strength of directional equivalence: "it can be applied without contradiction to situations where there are hierarchical relations between languages." Within this dataset, English occupies the dominant institutional role as the language of the laboratory's original regulations, while Indonesian functions as the target language. Dynamic equivalence allows students to negotiate this hierarchy by prioritizing the needs of Indonesian readers rather than adhering strictly to English source forms.

5.4 Expansion Is a Legitimate Translation Strategy, Not an Error

A significant finding that merits particular attention is the frequent occurrence of lexical expansion in the student translations. Several students introduced additional words, phrases, or clauses that are not explicitly present in the source text, most clearly in Item 3, where "to yourself" was expanded into "*agar tidak mengganggu orang lain*" (so as not to disturb others). From the standpoint of formal equivalence, this may appear to constitute over-translation or even an error.

However, when viewed through the lens of directional equivalence, and more specifically dynamic equivalence, such expansion represents a deliberate and theoretically grounded strategy. As Pym (2014, p. 97) observes, directional equivalence can "justify quite significant textual expansion" when the objective is to attain functional equivalence for the reader. The idiomatic English expression "to yourself" conveys the sense of "do not impose on others," a meaning readily understood by native English speakers but not transparent if translated literally into Indonesian. The expansion renders the implicit meaning explicit, thereby prioritizing the target reader's comprehension over strict formal correspondence.

5.5 The Role of Individual Translator Agency

Perhaps the most theoretically significant issue arising from this data concerns what it demonstrates about individual translator agency. Pym (2014, p. 95) maintains that within directional equivalence, "there is no guarantee that two translations of the same text will ever be the same." This is not a limitation but an inherent characteristic, reflecting the reality that translation is an active, interpretive, and ultimately personal act.

The twenty students in this study worked with the same seventeen sentences, yet no two produced identical outcomes across all items. Each student's collection of translations effectively represents an individual translation style, a relatively coherent, though at times inconsistent, pattern of decisions that indicates their orientation toward the source text and the target audience. Such individual variation should not be regarded as incidental; rather, it constitutes the central phenomenon that directional equivalence theory seeks to account for. As Pym (2014, p. 109) explains, "directional equivalence becomes compatible with the Skopos paradigm…recognizing that translators have a broad range of renditions to choose from, and allowing that the factors influencing their choices are not restricted to those of the start text."

5.6 Pedagogical Implications

The results align with directional equivalence: students' choices create one-way equivalents, often dynamic to enhance functionality (e.g., correcting 'Guess Book' to '*Buku Tamu*'). Back-translations expose asymmetries, such as lost nuances or added clarifications, underscoring that equivalence is constructed, not natural (Pym, 2014, p. 83). In an Indonesian English Language Education context, particularly within the Arts and Ethics subject, adaptations reflect cultural priorities like explicitness in rules, supporting Pym's virtue of applicability to hierarchical relations (p. 108).

Implications for pedagogy include using back-translation exercises to teach awareness of polarities and illusions (Pym, 2014, p. 94). Such exercises would help students recognize when formal strategies are appropriate and when dynamic interpretation is necessary particularly when encountering ambiguous or erroneous source texts.

5.7 Limitations

Several limitations of this analysis should be acknowledged. First, the source text contains grammatical and typographical errors ('Guess Book', 'broke facilities') that complicate the analysis: it is not always possible to determine whether a student's translation diverges because of a strategic choice or because they were misled by a non-standard source form. Second, the analysis focuses on the product of translation (the target text) without access to the process (the student's reasoning) a limitation acknowledged by Pym (2014, p. 109) who notes that process studies are a direction for future research

within the descriptive paradigm. Third, with only 20 students, the dataset is sufficient for qualitative analysis but not large enough to support statistical generalizations about translation strategy frequency.

CONCLUSION

This study applied Pym's (2014) directional equivalence framework to analyze the translation strategies of 20 students who translated 17 English laboratory rules into Indonesian. Six key findings were identified: (1) one-to-many equivalence is the dominant lexical pattern; (2) simple items converge toward formal equivalence; (3) ambiguous source terms amplify divergence and reveal individual strategy; (4) expansion is a marker of dynamic equivalence; (5) modal verb variation reflects formal-dynamic tension at the pragmatic level; and (6) source complexity correlates with translational divergence.

The discussion demonstrated that dynamic equivalence, while requiring greater interpretive effort from the translator, generally produces more communicatively effective Indonesian translations particularly when the source text contains ambiguous, non-standard, or culturally embedded terms. Formal equivalence, while more conservative and safer for clear one-to-one correspondences, is vulnerable to failure at precisely those points where source-text clarity breaks down.

Most importantly, the data confirms Pym's (2014) core theoretical claim: directional equivalence is not a property of language systems, but a property of translational acts. It is the result of choices made by individual translators who face the one-way, asymmetric challenge of carrying meaning from one language into another. The twenty students in this study, working from the same source text, produced twenty different records of that challenge each one a distinct trace of the translational decisions that directional equivalence theory was designed to illuminate. Future research could expand to larger datasets or compare with natural equivalence paradigms.

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