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THE PROBLEM OF SEMANTIC DIFFERENCES IN TRANSLATION: A STUDY FROM AHMAD MUKHTAR UMAR'S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines semantic challenges in translation with an emphasis on problems related to 'Ilm al-Dilalah (the science of meaning). The method used is qualitative descriptive with a case study design, data collected from observations, interviews, and documents in the form of books, journals, and scientific papers on translation studies and semantic theory. Mukhtar Umar's views were highlighted, emphasizing that the core of the translation problem is the difficulty of choosing the right semantic equivalent. The findings suggest that the main problem lies in translator limitations in finding accurate and contextual equivalents of meanings. The problems that occur are differences in semantic range, contextual distribution, use of majas, partial classification differences, politeness and taboo terms in conversation. This research emphasizes the importance of deep semantic mastery for translators. This approach makes a significant contribution to the theoretical and practical aspects of translation.

Keywords: *Ahmad Mukhtar Umar, Problematics, Semantic, Translation*



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Introduction

There are thousands of languages in this world, and each language has its own system called grammar. There is grammar for Indonesian, grammar for English, grammar for Arabic, and so on (Habib et al., 2025). With the various languages that exist in the world, there is a phenomenon of differences in meanings in very complex languages. The main problem is related to the problem of differences in meaning caused by linguistic and non-linguistic factors (Shan et al., 2025). Meaning can be studied through the form of the function of the relationship with its functional elements. Therefore, meaning is divided into two, namely grammatical meaning (the relationship of functional elements) and lexical meaning (the meaning of the lexem itself) (Mulyanie, 2022).

The word semantics in Indonesian is derived from the Ancient Greek word *sema* (nominal form) which means "sign" or "emblem". The verbal form is *semaino* which means "to mark" or "to symbolize". This semantic word was then agreed upon by many experts to call the field of linguistics that studies the relationship between linguistic signs and the things they mark or in other words (Nuramila & Daud, 2024). Semantics is the study of the meaning contained in human language. Allan in his book *Natural Language Semantics*, explains that the meaning contained in human language refers to natural language, namely natural language as interpreted and understood by language users in the communication process (Saifullah, 2021).

Etymologically, the word translation is a derivative of the root word *tarjamah* which is absorbed from the Arabic word which means to move or divert (Mar et al., 2022). In translation literature, the language to be transferred is generally called the source language and the language that is the purpose of the language transfer is called the target language (Yunianti & Fajria, 2023). In the world of translation, the fundamental problem of translating between two languages is to find a word in one language that has the same meaning in a word and another language (Kwok et al., 2023). The essence of translation is to preserve the meaning between two languages that includes semantic, pragmatic and textual aspects. The semantic aspect refers to the denotative meaning (reference), the pragmatic aspect to the connotative meaning, and the textual aspect to the textual meaning (Sidiq & Anis, 2023).

Research on improving the translation of academic texts for beginners, this study describes the training of translating academic texts from Indonesian to Arabic which is attended by beginner translators. The main focus is on understanding the

structure of academic texts, mastery of the Arabic language structure, as well as problems that often arise such as differences in sentence structure, academic terms, the use of pronouns, aspects of tenses, and cultural equivalence (Nugraha et al., 2025). So is research on the challenges that translators face in retaining the original meaning of Arabic texts when adapting them to social media, with a focus on language and cultural aspects. Using the literature review method, this study analyzes relevant research on translation and cross-cultural communication (Harahap et al., 2024).

From several studies that have been presented, this study will examine and focus on various kinds of problems of differences in meaning in translation according to Ahmad Mukhtar Umar. The research aims to find out what are the problems that occur in the translation of the difference in meaning from the source language to the destination language in a semantic perspective. This research topic is very important to be studied more deeply with the aim of increasing understanding in the translation process supported by the problem of differences in meaning. This research is expected to contribute to solving the problems of translators that are often experienced.

Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach, because it aims to describe in depth the problem of differences in meaning in the translation process. This research was carried out in the Postgraduate Program of UIN Malang by involving 14 students as the main subject. Primary data sources were obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers, as well as direct observation of text or speech translation activities from the source language to the target language. In addition, secondary data sources in the form of relevant journals, articles, papers, and books were also studied to strengthen field findings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2024).

Data collection techniques are carried out through interviews, observations, and documentation. The collected data is then analyzed by data reduction steps, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher used source and technique triangulation techniques, as well as discussions with peers to reduce bias and improve the validity of the research results. The researcher will limit the study area to several languages, namely Arabic, English, and Indonesian. This research is expected to provide references related to problems that occur in the translation of meaning in a language.

Result and Discussion

A. Problems in Translation

a) Semantic Range Differences

Semantic range is a concept in linguistics that describes the variation in meaning that a word has in different contexts. According to S.M Baugh we are aware that each word may have a distinctive and different meaning that arises through use over time and may not have any relationship to each other (Bechko, 2021). In translation, some difficulties are due to the expansion of the meaning of words in one language while in other languages the meaning is narrow. Expansion of meaning is the process by which a word that originally had a specific meaning turns into a more general or broad meaning. According to Ansori, the expansion of meaning is a phenomenon that occurs in a word that initially has only one meaning, but then undergoes changes to more meanings due to various factors, such as social and cultural developments. Meanwhile, the narrowing of meaning is the opposite (Ansori, 2021).

An example of what happens among students a difference in semantic range that can be seen from the comparison of meanings between Arabic and English, such as the word "مكتبة" in Arabic which is said to be equivalent to the word "library" in English in its use has a certain situation. In English there are many situations such as the word "bookstore or bookshop" which means a place to buy and sell books and "book collection" is a place to collect one's books, while in Arabic only use the general term "مكتبة". As for an example of the expansion of meaning, we can see in Indonesian, namely the word "father" originally meant father or male parents, now the term father is used for every adult man, or as a form of respect for someone, such as "Mr. President". In narrowing the meaning, for example, is the word "teacher" whose original meaning was someone who teaches or imparts knowledge while now the term teacher is used to refer to teachers in formal educational institutions such as schools (Hayati & Jadidah, 2022).

b) Differences in Contextual Distribution

Context-dependent change of meaning is a linguistic phenomenon that suggests that the meaning of a word or phrase can vary depending on the situation, culture, and usage in the sentence. Changes in the meaning of words can occur when language users use language in written or oral form with various communication media (Umar, 1998). In contrast to the semantic range, this phenomenon is when two words are considered synonymous in two languages in the general sense, but differ in their application, or in the linguistic context in which they are used. In translation activities, this is a slightly disturbing

phenomenon because a translator must master the target language according to the context and use.

Students use the phrase in English, there is the word "poor" in various contexts such as "poor man", namely people who are in economic difficulty, "poor boy", people who are pitied, "poor opinion", bad ideas, "poor health", health irregularities. However in Arabic we cannot say "ياله من ولد فقير" but we must say "ياله من ولد مسكين" and so on. This shows that the use of words in the same sense is generally not all possible in every language due to different usage contexts. As another example in Indonesian there is the word "bisa" in the sentence "venomous snake", the word bisa in this context is snake venom. While in English there is the word "can" which also means can, but in the context of its use, of course, it is different because can shows the ability or capacity to do something (Wisudawanto, 2021).

c) Use of Majas

Majas is a style of language in written and oral form used in an essay that aims to represent the feelings and thoughts of the author (Ramadhaniati et al., 2024). Majas or language style can be seen from two different perspectives, namely in terms of non-language and in terms of language. In terms of non-language, style can be categorized based on author, time, media, problem, place, purpose, and goal, while in terms of language, language style is categorized based on word choice, tone choice, sentence structure, and sentence delivery (Nafinuddin, 2020). Majas or Language style is a way of expressing thoughts through language in a distinctive way that shows the personality spirit of the writer or language user. In translation, a translator is often caused by the use of majas, which can add complexity in the process of transferring meaning from one language to another.

It is often found among students in English there is a majas "evening of life" which means twilight or old age and the expression cannot be translated into the destination language like Arabic literally, in Arabic this majas is not said with the expression "مساء العمر" but uses the expression "خريف العمر" This proves that the phenomenon of using majas in every language is a difficulty for translators. Another example of the use of majas in Indonesian is the expression "like a cat falling from a tree" which describes someone who is unlucky. In the context of translation into a destination language such as English, this expression is not well understood by English speakers.

d) Partial Classification Differences

Partial classification differences refer to how languages group or define concepts based on culturally and linguistically relevant criteria. This classification is not comprehensive but selective according to what is considered important by the language community (Umar, 1998). Definitions and labels for certain classifications may not be appropriate across languages. For example, Students often use terms in English. it has various terms for cold temperatures such as "freezing", "ice-cold", and "cold", while Arabic tends to use the more common term "التجمد" (freezing). Another example is color categorization. English includes basic terms such as red, blue, green, and yellow, while the Yeli Dnye language in Papua New Guinea has only three basic color terms: red, white, and black. These examples illustrate how translations should take into account different classification systems.

e) Politeness in Pronunciation and Taboo Terms

Euphemism is taken from the Greek euphemizein which means to use a word with a good meaning or a good purpose (Habib & Rahmadewi, 2025). Euphemism is a style of comparative language used to minimize conflict (Imamah, 2021). The euphemism style is often used in daily life and we also often find it in writing, where the writer or writer conveys their feelings and thoughts to look more polite and polite. Wardhaugh defines Taboo as the prohibition or avoidance in any society of a behavior that is considered dangerous and inappropriate because it will cause them anxiety, embarrassment, and so on. Because of this, there are certain things or even certain objects that should not be spoken and can only be mentioned in certain circumstances (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021).

For example, students in using politeness in terms of profession, the word ART or domestic assistant is a substitute for the word maid or even babu. In society we hear the terms Homeless for homeless, Deaf for people who have hearing impairments or even deafness and Blind for people who have visual impairments or blindness and many other examples that we can find in daily life. Another example that we can get from the Arabic for euphemism is which المرحاض دور المياه can be smoothed out into. In the context of translation, the use of euphemisms and taboos is crucial to understand, especially since they can affect the way messages are conveyed and received in cross-cultural communication (Wang, 2020).

f) Socio-Cultural Differences of a Translator

The cultural and social differences of a translator greatly affect the translation process. Translators not only serve as a language switcher, but also as a bridge between two different cultures (Harahap et al., 2024). Translators need to have a deep understanding of the source culture and the target culture. Differences in norms, values, and traditions can affect how messages are delivered. There are terms or concepts in one culture that may not have a direct equivalent in another. This is important to avoid misunderstandings and to ensure that the translation is acceptable to readers from different cultures.

Some of the cultural terms spoken by students are very specific and have no direct equivalent in other languages. For example, the term "boy" in the context of racial discrimination in the United States refers to certain stereotypes that refer to black males. In this context, the word contains a deep social and historical meaning that cannot be translated directly into Indonesian without losing that nuance. Another example is an expression, or concept related to the culture of an unknown source in the target culture.

Conclusion

This study shows that the difference in semantic range between the source language and the target language is the main obstacle in translating the specific meaning of a term. This is in line with lexical semantic theory (Zulkarnain, 2023), which asserts that the meaning of words is formed socio-historically. Phenomena such as مكتبة in Arabic, which have a wider scope than libraries alone, reflect the concept of expansion and narrowing of meaning. Corpus-based studies show systematic semantic differences between original texts and translations, reinforcing the idea that meaning cannot be transferred with precision (Ansori, 2021).

Differences in contextual distribution, such as the "poor" nuances in English compared to مسكين or فقير in Arabic, support Eugene Nida's principle of dynamic equality, which prioritizes equality that applies to the target audience over the equality of literal words. This is also consistent with Ogden & Richards' semantic triangle theory, which shows that the relationship between meaning, word, and reference is strongly influenced by context (Apriliya et al., 2020). The figurative language further emphasizes that translation is interpretive and culturally specific. Charles Denroche emphasizes the importance of "reinventing semantic space" rather than translating literally, and suggests a metaphor/metonymy translation strategy within the framework of the overall text (Denroche, 2024).

Differences in partial classifications and euphemisms, as well as taboos for example, color categories and polite or taboo terms indicate that language is not only a coding system but also carries certain cultural values. Wierzbicka & Goddard's Natural Semantic Metalanguage theory also supports this, stating that all

languages share semantic primes but use them in unique configurations that symbolize cultural values and concepts (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2021).

The findings of this study reveal that key issues in translation arise from several phenomena: differences in semantic ranges, contextual variations in meaning, use of figurative language, partial classification of concepts, taboo and euphemistic expressions, and the sociocultural background of the translators themselves. These factors significantly affect how messages are interpreted and conveyed across languages. It is concluded that successful translation requires more than just linguistic proficiency; It demands intercultural awareness and sensitivity to the context in which words and expressions are used.

Translators must be able to identify these linguistic phenomena and adjust their strategies to ensure that the intended meaning is conveyed as accurately and naturally as possible in the target language. Future research may focus on developing practical frameworks or training modules that help translators navigate semantic, cultural, and pragmatic challenges in real-world translation tasks. In addition, comparative studies involving understudied language pairs can reveal further insights into the dynamics of translation shaped by different cultural and cognitive systems.

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