Parallel corpus as a tool in teaching translation: Translating English phrasal verbs into Malay

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Abstract

Translating English phrasal verbs into Malay is a challenge as the English phrasal verbs are made up of verb plus a preposition or an adverb whereas in Malay its equivalent is almost always a single verb which may have different nuance than the combined words. This study presents the strategies employed by students in translating phrasal verbs and the categories of its Malay equivalents. As an intervention, students are then introduced to a set of parallel corpus of English-Malay company annual reports as their reference because using corpus in translation classroom enables students to gain access to large information on language usage which will help students in choosing the right or appropriate equivalents in translation process. Based on the reports from the students, they are very positive towards the use of corpus as a tool in translation exercise as they are exposed to a wide range of language use that is beneficial in translating.

Keywords:

1. Introduction

Many areas in applied linguistics have benefitted or influenced by findings and methodology in corpus linguistics, translation studies included. The idea of utilizing corpora in translation studies was introduced in 1990s and Baker (1993) in her seminal paper “Corpus Linguistics and Translation Studies: Implications and Applications” proposed utilizing large corpora to uncover the nature of translated text and Laviosa (1998) suggested that corpus-based approach in translation studies is the “new paradigm in translation studies.” Most corpus-based translation studies focus on how corpus studies assist in key issues in translation. Following
Baker’s suggestion, Norsimah Mat Awal et.al (2011) also conducted a corpus-based translation study looking at translation universals. This paper, however, focuses on utilizing corpora, specifically parallel corpus, as a tool in translator training.

The benefit of using corpora in teaching translation is enormous as corpora could provide learners with real examples and virtually unlimited language data (Bernardi et.al 2003). These kind of information are not found in dictionaries, the traditional translator’s tool, as information provided in dictionaries are often limited. However, there could be some drawbacks in utilizing corpora in teaching translation because students might not be ready or unwilling because using corpus in translation entails that students/translators to be efficient in managing the software to access the corpus. This was discovered by Jääskeläinen (2005) who aims to test the usefulness of corpora as a translator’s tool among in-house and freelance translators. It was discovered that electronic tools are not widely used by translators as expected particularly by freelance translators as electronic tools are considered as risky investment. Despite the findings, it cannot be denied that an electronic corpus (parallel or comparable corpus) can be a useful tool for a translator.

Pearson (2003) points to the benefits of using parallel corpus in teaching translation. She explains that parallel corpus contains texts and their translations and therefore, contains evidence not just in source text but also target text. This enables the students to observe how translators behave when constrained by the source text as it will show the strategies employed by the translators. Pearson (2003: 17) said that through parallel corpus students are able to see “how much of the material in a source text is directly transferable to the target language, how much of it needs to be adapted or localized in some way, whether any of it can, or indeed should, be omitted.” These kind of information are nor observable in comparable corpus. Therefore this paper will present the findings on introducing parallel corpus as a tool in translation exercise.

2. Corpus experiment

A group of 31 students in a translation class participated in this experiment. These students enrolled in SKVT1253 Translation of Mass Media Texts class. In this class they are taught to translate mass media texts such as advertisements, newspaper and magazine articles. Prior to this course, these students have taken a basic level translation course.

This experiment involves 3 stages. The first stage is introducing the students to the language aspect to be focused on in the exercise. We decided to focus on phrasal verbs as this is one the language aspects students most often make mistakes in translating. The students were then given a translation exercise comprising 6 sentences with phrasal verbs (Appendix 1). The phrasal verb focused on is set out. We decided to focus on only one phrasal verb because we want to show the students and for them to be aware that set out has various equivalents in the Malay language. Next we discussed with the students the translations that they have completed.

The second stage is introducing to the students the Paraconc software – of what it can do. The students are also introduced to corpus, specifically parallel corpus. They were then shown how the phrasal verb set out is translated in the parallel corpus (see Appendix 2). They observed in the corpus the strategies employed by the professional translators in their translations. Finally, the students were given a short questionnaire seeking their opinion on using parallel corpus as a tool in translation work.

3. The corpus – UKM Parallel Annual Reports Translation Corpus (UKM PART Corpus)

The UKM PART Corpus is a specialised parallel corpus comprising annual reports in English and Malay of public listed companies in Malaysia. The corpus has been compiled for research into using parallel corpora in the teaching of translation studies. Annual reports of public listed companies in Malaysia are part of corporate governance disclosure under S169 ACT 125Companies Act 1965 (REVISED - 1973). There is no stipulation as to the language for annual reports in the Act, however in many cases annual reports are produced in both the national language Malay and English for shareholders as part of good corporate communication strategy.
Currently, the corpus contains 20 texts consisting of 10 text samples of annual reports in English and 10 parallel reports in Malay. The final corpus would contain 100 text samples. The basic statistics of the UKM PART Corpus at present is as follows:

|                | English  | Malay   |
|----------------|----------|---------|
| Text samples   | 10       | 10      |
| No of words (tokens) | 158,620 | 154,148 |
| No of types (distinct words) | 9214    | 8067    |
| Type token ratio (TTR)    | 5.8      | 5.5     |
| No of sentences | 6006     | 6006    |

### 4. Phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs are sometimes called two-word verbs because they usually consist of a verb and a second word that is often referred to as a particle. They are highly productive lexical category in English (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Most phrasal verbs are idiomatic because their meaning are different from the meaning of the verb and the particle and hence will cause difficulty in its translations. Celce-Murcia & Larson-Freeman gave the example of ‘run out’. The meaning of ‘run’ (which means ‘move swiftly on foot, make haste, rush, flee’) and ‘out’ (which means ‘away from or not in a place, position, state, etc.’) does not provide much information on the meaning of the phrasal verb ‘run out’ which means ‘to exhaust’. It is difficult to figure out the meaning of phrasal verb by combining the meaning of its separate parts (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Newmark (1983) pointed out that phrasal verbs is one of the problems encountered in German-English translations because of German’s lacks of informal register to correspond to English’s phrasal verbs. Hence German texts are found to be more formal than its English translations.

### 5. Findings and Discussions

Collins Cobuild Essential English Dictionary (1991: 725) lists out 4 definitions for *set out* namely (1) when you set out, you start a journey; (2) if you set out to do something, you start trying to do it; (3) if you set things out, you arrange or display it somewhere; (4) if you set out a number of facts, beliefs, or argument, you give them in writing or speech in a clear, organized way.

The sentences in the translation exercise mainly focus on meaning no. (3) and (4). This is because the sentences are taken from the UKM PART Corpus which consists of annual reports from public listed companies. Generally, an annual report is a report from a company to let the investors know the company performance over the past year, hence it is not surprising that the phrasal verb *set out* in the exercise functions as meaning no (3) and (4) because the information in the report is displayed in an organized way. The following are details on the meaning of *set out* in the exercise:

| Sentences | Meaning |
|-----------|---------|
| No. 1, 2, & 3 | if you set things out, you arrange or display it somewhere (meaning no. 3) |
| No. 7, 8, & 9 | if you set out a number of facts, beliefs, or argument, you give them in writing or speech in a clear, organized way (meaning no. 4) |

However, in the Malay translated texts in the corpus for sentences (1) to (3) there are 3 equivalents for *set out* namely, *dikemukakan*, *disediakan* and *dibentangkan*. For sentences (4) to (6), there are also 3 equivalents for *set out*.
out, namely, *dinyatakan*, *disediakan*, and *menggemukakan*. We will next show how *set out* is translated by the students.

The phrasal verbs translation exercise and questionnaires were given out to a total of 31 students. However, only 17 students completed the exercise. From the translation exercise completed by the students, majority of the students did not use the equivalents found in the corpus, except for sentence (4) where 5 students used similar equivalent that was used in the in the corpus. *Set out* in sentence (4) was translated as *dinyatakan* by 5 students, similar to the equivalent used by the professional translator. Generally, in the exercise given, majority of the students used equivalents different from the ones used by professional translators in the corpus (of translated texts). There are also cases where the students did not translate the phrasal verbs at all.

Therefore, based on the students’ performance in the translation exercise, we decided to expose the students to parallel corpus because information found in the corpus will show “how much of the material in a source text is directly transferable to the target language, how much of it needs to be adapted or localized in some way, whether any of it can, or indeed should, be omitted.” (Pearson: 17). It is also an opportunity for the students to observe the translation product of professional translators and be familiar with the specific registers of the text.

The students were introduced to the Paraconc software and the UKM PART parallel corpus. They were shown the source text and its parallel target text. They were informed of the possibility and advantages of using corpus as one of a translator’s tools such as getting access the full context of the sentences, and lexical choices of the translator in the target texts. The students were later given a simple questionnaire to fill-in. The questionnaire seeks their opinion on using corpus as a tool in translation practices. Even though only 17 students completed the translation exercises, 25 students completed the questionnaire. Out of the 25 students, only 3 students indicated that they would not consider using corpus as one of translator’s tool but would consider using corpus in the future if the need arises. An overwhelming majority of the students are receptive towards using corpora in translation exercises as it enables them to revise their work and at the same time compare their work with that of professional translators.

6. Conclusion

On the whole, our study showed that corpus-based translation study is indeed “the new paradigm” in translation studies. We chose to focus on a specific aspect of language, namely phrasal verbs and how parallel corpus can provide evidence to help students make better choices in their translations. Although the parallel corpus that we have built is rather small but it has managed to offer the students the various information that students need in their translation exercises and they are very receptive towards employing corpus as one of a translator’s tools.

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Appendix A.

Terjemahkan ayat-ayat berikut ke dalam bahasa Melayu (Translate the following sentences into Malay).

1. The Group's Statement on Internal Control is set out on pages 106 to 109.

2. The information pertaining to the two Directors who are retiring by rotation and standing for re-election pursuant to Article 90 of the Company's Articles of Association is set out on pages 16 and 17 of the Annual Report.

3. The Directors consider that, in preparing the financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2009 as set out on pages 38 to 80 of this Annual Report, the Group has used appropriate accounting policies and applied them consistently and made judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent.

4. In addition to the duties and responsibilities set out under its terms of reference, the BAC assists the Board by providing an objective non-executive review of the effectiveness and efficiency of the internal control and governance processes of TM Group.

5. A statement by the Directors of their responsibilities for preparing the financial statements is set out under the Statement of Directors' Responsibility on page 35 of this Annual Report.
6. This note also sets out the recurrent transactions conducted during the period in accordance with the general mandate obtained from shareholders at the Extraordinary General Meeting held on 26 August 2008.

Appendix 2