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Analysis of Errors in the Translation of Arabic prepositions into Malay: A Case Study Among Islamic University Students

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Abstract: The problem of this study refers to the need for evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process of the Arabic language among students at the Islamic University. A descriptive analysis methodology was employed to identify the types of errors made. The focus of the research was on the phenomenon of translating Arabic prepositions into Malay. The study sample was taken from translation exercises conducted by students during lecture sessions. This served as a systematic evaluation of their translation ability and skills, while also identifying the forms and aspects that led to such errors. One (1) set of sample texts (containing 20 selected Arabic sentences with prepositions) was translated by thirty-three (33) research participants. Their translations were then analyzed based on error categories and dimensions, such as the accuracy of preposition choice and whether any modifications were made to the selection of prepositions in the translation. How did these occur? Why were they made? The findings recorded nine translation errors of prepositions in the target texts. This indicates that some participants lacked systematic skills in producing their translations. The semantic deviations clearly demonstrate that they did not fully comprehend the meaning of the source text, making it difficult to transfer it accurately into the target text.

Keyword: translation analysis, semantic deviations, prepositions

INTRODUCTION

Translation is a crucial process in communication between different languages. In the context of globalization and the growing interactions among diverse cultures, translation plays an important role in enabling the exchange of information and fostering understanding among individuals from various linguistic backgrounds. However, translation often presents challenges and errors that arise from differences in structure, syntax, and semantics between the source language and the target language. Such differences between two languages are evident, especially in Arabic, which heavily relies on the use of prepositions or *hurūf al-jar* as the smallest units in *nahw* (syntax) (Napis, 2019). Zainur Rijal emphasizes that Arabic is

indeed rich in vocabulary, terminology, and its own grammar system. Clearly, Arabic grammar differs significantly from Malay grammar (Zainurrijal, 2014).

In the Malay context, Arabic is frequently required in education, particularly among students of Islamic universities who study religious sciences and Arabic literature. These university students are often tasked with translation exercises, especially in translating Arabic prepositions into Malay. Arabic prepositions essentially refer to words that link phrases or sentences in Arabic, such as connectors, pronouns, and possessive markers. They not only carry various grammatical meanings but also perform highly significant functions in Arabic. For example, research has shown that the Arabic preposition *ba* (الباء) carries 14 distinct meanings in Arabic, and likewise, other Arabic prepositions also convey more than one meaning (Muh. Saifullah, Mukhtar, Rahmat R., Basri Mahmud, Hamzah, 2021).

Nevertheless, translating Arabic prepositions into Malay is not an easy task. There are several important differences in the structure and usage of prepositions between the two languages. Errors in translation within this context can have serious implications for the comprehension and interpretation of texts, particularly religious and literary Arabic texts, which are highly significant in the studies of Islamic university students. According to Azman, one of the main challenges often faced by Arabic language students or Arabic–Malay translators is mastery of Arabic prepositional phrases (Azman Che Mat, 2005). The use of Arabic prepositional phrases can be categorized into three levels: lexical, phrasal, and syntagmatic. Furthermore, the inability to fully understand the diverse functions of Arabic prepositions often leads to errors in interpreting Arabic texts across various genres (Ismail Muhamad & Azman Bin Che Mat, 2010).

This case study aims to analyze the errors made by Islamic university students in translating Arabic prepositions into Malay. The main objectives of this study are to identify the common types of errors, to explore the factors contributing to such errors, and to propose appropriate strategies for improving the translation of Arabic prepositions into Malay.

METHOD

This study is a descriptive research that aims to describe, examine, and analyze specific phenomena in a clear and systematic manner. This approach enables the researcher to collect data, analyze errors, and draw conclusions based on the facts obtained. In this study, the methodology will be applied using a set of forms containing Arabic prepositional sentences to be translated into Malay. Subsequently, an analysis will be conducted on the translation errors made by 33 students of the Islamic University.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result:

Based on the descriptive analysis outlined above, the main findings of this study are as follows:

1. **The need to understand grammar in the translation process:** In Arabic, there are various prepositions that influence the changes in the form of accompanying verbs or nouns. The use of grammar in the translation of Arabic–Malay prepositions must be emphasized in terms of its function within sentence structure. In this regard, university students are often confused when selecting the appropriate preposition in their translations. This can lead to sentence structure errors and result in inaccurate effects on readers or listeners.

2. **Errors in word usage during the translation process:** One common mistake is the use of inappropriate words in the context of translation. Arabic and Malay differ in their use of certain words. Students often encounter difficulties in selecting suitable words to convey the intended meaning in translation. Such errors may cause ambiguity and misunderstanding in communication, as well as reduce the overall effectiveness of the translation.
3. **Errors in understanding meaning during the translation process:** Arabic and Malay have cultural and social differences that influence the meaning of certain words. Errors often occur when students misunderstand the actual meaning of Arabic prepositions and consequently convey incorrect meanings in Malay. Common issues include a lack of awareness of the cultural and social contexts surrounding word usage in translation.

Discussion

The word translation itself etymologically originates from the Arabic term *tarjama* (ترجم), which means “to translate” or “to interpret” (Ahmad Warson Munawwir, 1997). Terminologically, translation refers to the transfer or rendering of speech from one language into another (Faisol Fatawi, 2017). Manna’ al-Qaṭṭān defines translation as the transference of an expression from one language into equivalent expressions in another language, with the arrangement and order of the second language corresponding to that of the first (Al-Qattan, 2000). According to Ibnu Burdah, translation is the effort to transfer a message from a source text into its equivalent in the target language. He emphasizes the importance of equivalence, highlighting the need for a balance between the source text and the translated text in order to limit and regulate the translator’s freedom during the process (Ibnu Burdah, 2004).

Prepositions are better known as *ḥarf al-jarr* in Arabic and as *kata sendi nama* in Malay. Al-Ghalāyīnī defines *ḥarf al-jarr* as a particle that connects a word with a noun, a particle with a verb, or anything else that corresponds with it (Al-Ghalayini, 1993). In Malay, however, *kata sendi nama* is considered an essential element of grammar. Nik Safiah states that a preposition is “a word placed before a noun phrase” (Nik Safiah, 1996). On the other hand, Za’ba defines it as “special words used with nouns or pronouns to indicate their relationship with another word in a sentence” (Za’ba, 2000). Asmah further explains that “a preposition is a prepositional phrase that begins with a preposition, followed by a word or its subgroup” (Asmah Haji Omar, 1984).

Accurate and precise translation is crucial to ensure clear and effective communication between Arabic and Malay speakers. In the context of Arabic language teaching at universities, students often face difficulties in translating Arabic prepositions into Malay. These errors may occur due to differences in the structure and usage of prepositions, as well as cultural differences between the two languages. Cultural differences may lead to certain concepts being interpreted or translated differently across distinct cultures (Haslina Haroon, 2015). Therefore, it is important to identify the types of errors commonly made by students in translating Arabic prepositions into Malay.

Translation Analysis

This study focuses on the analysis of translation errors in Arabic prepositions translated into Malay among Islamic university students, using a descriptive analysis methodology to identify the types of errors. The study sample was taken from translation exercises carried out by students during lecture sessions. A total of 20 selected Arabic sentences containing prepositions were translated by thirty-three (33) participants. The examples of Arabic sentences, their Malay translations, and their respective frequencies are presented as follows:

Table 1: List of Arabic prepositional phrases and Malay translations

No	Arabic phrases	Arabic Preposition	Malay Translation (1)	Malay Translation (2)	Malay Translation (3)	Malay Translation (4)
1	أعوذ بالله من الشيطان الرجيم	(1)الباء (2)من	Dengan (20) Kepada (8) Daripada	Daripada(21) Dari(12)	-	-
2	أستيقظ مبكرا عند الفجر لأصلي صلاة الصبح في المسجد	(1)اللام (2)في	Untuk (31)	Di (32) Dalam	-	-
3	المحاضر الجامعي شخصية مرموقة تحرص على صحة العلم والمعرفة	(1)على	Dalam(4) Ke atas(2) Di atas Dengan (4) Kepada(3) Tentang	-	-	-
4	عادت الطالبة التي سافرت للعمرة إلى بيتها للاستراحة من عناء السفر	(1)اللام (2)إلى (3)اللام (4)من	Untuk(25) Dari Demi Bagi	Ke(31) Kepada	Untuk (30)	Daripada(12) Dari(15)
5	إبراهيم يكلم أخاه الصغير باللطف	(1)الباء	Dengan(32)	-	-	-
6	هوية القراءة تبشر للمستقبل المنير	(1)اللام	Untuk(6) Bagi Ke Demi Kepada	-	-	-
7	محمد يمسك الصحيفة اليومية بيده	(1)الباء	Dengan(24) Di(8)	-	-	-
8	رأى محمد في سيارة أبيه كتابه	(1)في	Dalam(5) Di(11) Di dalam(17)	-	-	-
9	طارق ذهب إلى المدير في مكتبه	(1)إلى (2)في	Kepada(6) Ke(23) Dengan	Di(30) Di dalam Dalam	-	-
10	تسامح محمد وفاطمة في المشكلة	(1)في	Dalam(21) Di dalam(2) Terhadap Dengan(4)	-	-	-
11	الأمن أساس السعادة في الحياة	(1)في	Dalam(28) Di dalam(5)	-	-	-
12	في ذلك اليوم لم أشعر بالأطمئنان	(1)في (2)الباء	Pada(26)	-	-	-
13	إذا فقدت الأمن تعيش في ضيق	(1)في	Dalam(18) Dengan (2) Di dalam(2) Kepada	-	-	-

14	ساعدت الرجل المريض للجلوس	(1) اللام	Untuk(29)	-	-	-
15	كان الطلاب حاضرين في الميدان	(1) في	Di(27) Dalam(2) Ke(3)	-	-	-
16	هذه نعمة من الله لنا جميعا	(1) من (2) اللام	Daripada(16) Dari(16)	Untuk(28) Kepada(4)	-	-
17	رأيت الصديق ينحني من الكوارث	(1) من	Dari(14) Daripada(11)	-	-	-
18	مشكلة التعليم بغياب تتكرر المعلم	(1) الباء	Dengan(18) Kerana (2) Apabila (7)	-	-	-
19	التعليم في الماضي يختلف عن الحاضر بالوسائل والتسهيلات	(1) في (2) عن (3) الباء	Pada(20) Di (7) Dalam	Daripada(9) Dengan (16) Dari (7)	Dengan(16) Dari(13) Pada	-
20	ظل كثير من اللغات الإسلامية تكتب بالخط العربي	(1) من (2) الباء	Dari(11) Daripada(11)	Dengan(29) Dalam(3)	-	-

Analysis of Errors in Arabic–Malay Translation

Referring to sample no. 1 in the translation of the preposition *min*, the given translation was: “*Aku berindung dengan Allah dari syaitan yang direjam*”(Table 1). The participant made an error in the use of the word *dari*. This occurred because the function of *dari* is limited to denoting direction, place, or time. In the sentence above, if the noun following *min* refers to direction, place, or time, then it should indeed be translated as *dari*. However, if the noun following *min* indicates a source or origin (such as a person, animal, object, or abstract concept), or denotes difference and comparison, then it should be translated as *daripada*.

In sample no. 13, the given translation was: “*Jika tidak ada keamanan, akan hidup di dalam kesempitan*” (Table 1). The participant made an error in using the phrase *di dalam*. The phrase *di dalam* is typically used to describe an environment that has space or dimension, whereas in this translation the word *dalam* alone is more suitable, as it refers to the abstract concept of *kesempitan*, which does not denote a physical environment with space or distance.

In the translation of the preposition *fi*, in sample no. 8 the translation given was: “*Muhammad melihat di kereta bapanya bukunya*” (Table 1). The participant translated the preposition using *di*. However, the preposition *di* in Malay is specifically used before nouns or noun phrases denoting place (e.g., *Ibunya bekerja di sekolah itu*). In this context, the use of “*di dalam kereta*” is more accurate, since *di dalam* is used to describe an environment with space or distance (Mohd Hilmi Abdullah, 2015).

Referring to sample no. 19 for the preposition *fi*, the given translation was: “*Pelajaran di masa lalu berbeza dari masa sekarang dengan cara-caranya dan kemudahannya*” (Table 1). The participant mistakenly used the preposition *di* for the Arabic preposition *fi*. The preposition *di* cannot be used before nouns or noun phrases that denote time or era. The correct usage is by using the Malay preposition *pada*, which is employed before nouns or noun phrases indicating time expressions, or denoting the setting of an action, or following the verb *ada* (Nik Safiah Karim, Farid M.Onn, Hashim Haji Musa, dan Abdul Hamid Mahmood ,2008).

In sample no. 4 for the translation of *min*, the given translation was: “*Pelajar yang telah berlayar untuk umrah telah pulang ke rumahnya untuk berehat dari keletihan belayar*” (Table 1). The participant made an error in using *dari*. That is because the word *dari* is only appropriate when referring to direction, place, or time. In the sentence above, the Malay preposition *daripada* is more suitable, as it denotes a source relating to humans, animals, objects, or abstract concepts, as well as differences and comparisons (Nik Safiah Karim, Farid M. Onn, Hashim Haji Musa, dan Abdul Hamid Mahmood, 2008)..

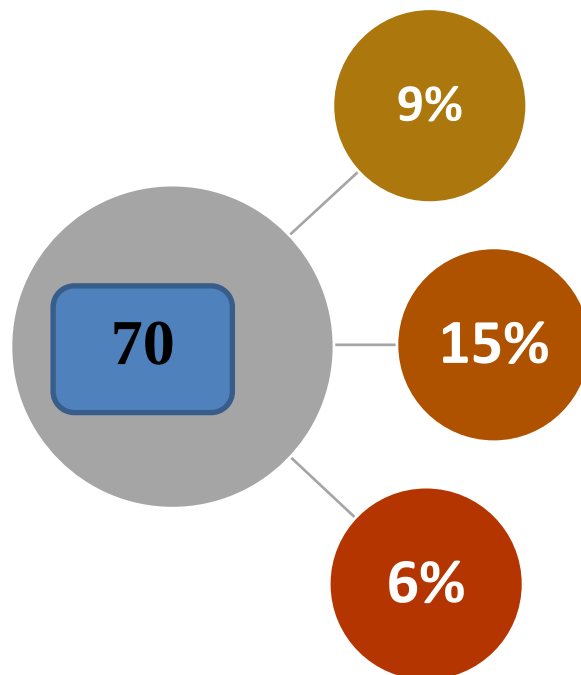
In another instance, referring again to sample no. 1, the translation provided was: “*Semoga Allah menjauhi saya dari syaitan yang direjam*” (Table 1). Here, the participant made a mistake not only in using *dari* but also in failing to translate the preposition *bi* into an appropriate Malay equivalent. The translation of preposition *bi* is essential in this sentence to complete the meaning and context of the original text. The preposition *bi* does not carry meaning on its own; rather, it functions to connect with the preceding and following words to create meaning. In this case, the preposition *kepada* would be more accurate, for example: “*Aku meminta perlindungan kepada Allah*”, thereby preserving the meaning and context of the source sentence.

Referring to sample no. 9 in the translation of Arabic preposition *ila* (إلى), the translation given is as follows: “*Thariq pergi ke pengetua di pejabatnya*” (Table 1). The participant had already made a mistake in translating the Arabic preposition *ila* (إلى) by giving the translation into Malay preposition *ke*. The use of preposition *ke* is used in front of a noun or noun phrase that indicates a place or direction to be taken, and is also used in front of a noun or noun phrase that indicates time or time. In the context of the sentence above, the use of the Malay preposition *kepada* is more accurate, and this is because the preposition is located in front of a noun or noun phrase to express the target that refers to humans, animals, abstract elements, expresses fractions and expresses changes in conditions (Nik Safiah Karim, Farid M. Onn, Hashim Haji Musa, and Abdul Hamid Mahmood, 2008).

In sample no. 17 for the translation of *min*, the given translation was: “*Saya telah melihat kejujuran*” (Table 1). The participant made a mistake in the translation of the preposition *min*, which is essential for preserving the meaning and context of the original sentence. The preposition *daripada* should be included, for example: “*Saya melihat kejujuran menyelamatkan saya daripada bencana*”, to complete the intended meaning of the Arabic expression.

Finally, referring to sample no. 4 for the translation of *ila*, the given translation was: “*Pelajar yang musafir untuk menunaikan umrah telah pulang kepada rumah mereka daripada keletihan perjalanan*” (Table 1). The participant incorrectly translated the Arabic preposition *ila* as into Malay preposition *kepada*. This preposition, however, is used before nouns or noun phrases referring to people, animals, abstract entities, parts, or states of change. The correct usage in this case would be *ke*, as it indicates the place or direction being reached.

Analysis of translation problems encountered



Based on the average percentage from 33 Islamic university students above:

1. Lack of Arabic–Malay vocabulary (*mufradat*): A total of 70% (23/33) of the students stated that they had a lack of Arabic–Malay vocabulary, which made translation difficult as they did not know the meaning of sentences word by word.
2. Lack of knowledge in word arrangement: A total of 9% (3/33) of the students reported having limited knowledge in word arrangement. When a person lacks knowledge in structuring words, the translation can become inaccurate or even lead to misunderstandings. Correctly understanding the meaning and context of each word, as well as having the ability to select the right terms to convey the same message in the target language, are essential skills in the field of translation.
3. Words that are difficult to translate and understand: A total of 15% (5/33) of the students reported encountering certain words that were difficult to translate, making the sentences hard to understand. In dealing with words that are challenging to translate and comprehend, translators need to rely on deep knowledge, context, and cultural sensitivity. They must strive to understand the original meaning of the word and find the most appropriate way to transfer that meaning into the target language without sacrificing the substance or nuances it carries.
4. Understanding Arabic but struggling to translate it into Malay: A total of 6% (2/33) of the students indicated that although they understood Arabic, they found it difficult to translate it into Malay. However, it is important to note that this difficulty does not mean that translating from Arabic into Malay is an impossible task. Although challenging, with sufficient knowledge of both languages, cultural context awareness, and the use of proper translation techniques, effective translation can be achieved.

CONCLUSIONS

Errors in translating Arabic prepositions into Malay are a phenomenon frequently found among Islamic university students. These errors are mainly related to grammar, word usage, meaning comprehension, and stylistic expression. In order to improve translation proficiency, it is important to emphasize these aspects in the teaching and learning of Arabic for students. With a solid understanding of grammar, accurate word choice, and correct comprehension of meaning, the process of translating from Arabic into Malay can be carried out more effectively, resulting in clearer and more accurate translations. The sharing of this study's findings is expected to contribute to efforts in correcting translation errors and enhancing translation skills among Islamic university students.

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