

Possibilities of coping with literalness with the literal method in translation

Ummi Rasyidah

ummirasyidah1987@gmail.com

Universitas Negeri Malang

Universitas Pasir Pengaraian Riau

Abstract

This article compares and contrasts the main features of literalness and literal method and possibilities of coping with literalness. The comparison is carried out along the following lines: (1) historical and empirical roots of both concepts, (2) premises underlying literalness and literal method, (3) evidence in support literalness and literal method, and (4) expectations associated the concepts. The main outcome of this comparison is a conclusion that both terms belong to one family of translation study. Because literalness has been around much practice in translation, it makes sense for the proponents of the literal method to consider both the accomplishments and frustrations that have accumulated in literalness.

Keywords: literal, literalness, overlap, translation

INTRODUCTION

In the history of thought, there are many examples of overlap the literal method with literalness translation. Sometimes these overlaps are concurrent; other times they are sequential. The purpose of this essay is to explore the degree of overlap between the practice of literalness and the literal method of translation.

The comparison is carried out to enter the debate on the possibilities of coping with literalness. The exploration of this overlaps centers on the theoretical contexts of both concepts. As Lewin (1952) marked, "there is nothing more practical than a good theory" has multiple meanings. A theory can be classified into good ones when it is able to introduce insights and construction to unexplained phenomena; brings an application for practice. Many theorists and practitioners have discussed about this thought and the similar message which indicated the theorist should endeavor to address real-life problems

while practitioners should endeavor the use of good theory to solve practical problems (Sarason, 1978; Lens 1987).

The notion of relatedness of literalness and the literal method of translation is not new to the literature. It implies an appreciation of a certain degree of affiliated between the two terms. Yet, there have been no attempt to collate these concepts methodical. I will review the famed points of comparison and notice on the boundary or limitation of the literal method in producing literal translation. I enclose by summarizing my thoughts on literalness and the literal method of translation and the possible their corresponding underlying device.

L2 Learning Problems in Translation

When we talk about translation we tend to think about the translation methods and the translation quality of TL. In translation, translator needs to have a good knowledge about source and target text (Newmark as cited in Fuadi, 2016). To share and understand the translation, one of the translation methods, namely literal method is introduced. Literal translation is an activity of transferring SL grammatical construction without responding to the context to the closest TL equivalents (Newmark, 1988). Without repeating what has been said, it is important to point out that literalness occurs when a translator follow the SL word per word results incorrect interpretation (ATA, 2017). This means literal methods are seen as pre-translation process which might cause and problems in translation. This is important for a teacher and students do not want to be disturbed by strange translation that can be easily occurred by applying this method.

These common stages can be summarized into two linguistics levels, then working on different continents:

1. Given the difference lexicon (Lexis) brought up dissimilar diction. Literal method might not adequately capture the level of word accuracy.
2. We should be interested not in where a particular lexical used, but how the combination of words sets (grammatical construction).

These ethics were formulated in general terms by Catford (1965) that a theory of translation must follow a general linguistic theory were further developed through the two dimensions of substances (medium and situation). The situation substance refers to the context of meaning which cannot be fully addressed through literal method. I elaborate on the example between lexical and grammatical literalness throughout this article.

It is also intriguing that literalness often occurs in the word level. Some examples below indicated literalness in translation:

	SL	TL
EFL Users	Salah sambung	Wrong connect
	Nikah kontrak	Premarital agreement
	Terpercaya	Believe in me
EFL Students	Butterfly	Keju terbang
	Traveler checks	Memeriksa turis
	Championship	Kapal pengangkut sang juara

It is not so different from SL and TL of Bahasa Indonesia and English and vice versa that literalness also appears in the above translation. We can see that SL consists of nouns and compound nouns. Meanwhile, in TL, SL is translated by raising compound noun. *Salah sambung* is a term usually found in communication via technology e.g: cell phone. In relation to the term, instead of translating *sambung* into connect, the more equivalent are "wrong number or wrong dial. Therefore, the translator immediately transfers the construct of SL to TL. The limited knowledge of lexical, the translator translates *Nikah kontrak* into pre-marital marriage, which common practice in a foreign country as a common legal step taken before marriage. In Indonesia, the term means differently as a contract between prospective husband and wife about the length, rights and obligations as regards the marriage. Even though these two examples are literally translated into the same construct of Bahasa Indonesia, they do not serve the meaning in the same context as produced by SL. The last example is committed by an EFL user brings the phrase "believe to me" as the indicator of the inability to use an English prefix. The translator does not able to recognize the word "trustworthy" for *terpercaya*. It can be understood because *believe* and *trust* are often mentioned in the same context, although these two words have different level of perceiving.

The above examples also show us the literalness committed by beginner EFL students. TL data indicated that the students were not aware of the fact that the lexicon is a complex task to be associated with a certain meaning of Bahasa Indonesia. One outstanding was highlighted that younger EFL students employed and utilized decoding and linking the background knowledge in translation. Regardless of the English language level, the noun is the first types of words that are shaped by the language learners being acquired. Generally speaking, from both EFL users and EFL students committed literalness, it was assumed that translation commit due to the translator (1) transfers L1 to L2

directly, (2) has limited proficiency of source language grammar, and (3) is unfamiliar with different forms of Lexis. From those phenomena, I think it is necessary to encounter such literalness with appropriate strategies of literal translation.

Like lexicon literalness, grammatical constructions capitalize on underachievement- the emphasis on the literal method indicates meaningless of TL.

Source Language	Target Language	Equivalent Translation
Seperti membuang garam ke laut	Like throwing salt into the ocean	Carry coals to New Castle
The sooner or later the weather will change	Lebih cepat atau lebih lambat cuaca akan berubah.	Cepat atau lambat cuacanya akan berubah
He made a fine showing in the meet	Dia membuat sebuah pertunjukan yang bagus dalam pertandingan itu.	Dia berhasil dengan baik dalam pertandingan lalu.
When I have time, I usually go for a walk or I just stay at home.	Ketika saya punya waktu, saya biasanya jalan-jalan atau saya diam saja di rumah.	Jika punya waktu luang, biasanya saya jalan-jalan atau diam dirumah saja.

English speakers will understand when the translator brings the contextual meaning as they have. To summarize, SL and TL are concerned with the notion of underachievement of meaning. However, ET is different. If this idiom is literally translated, we find that Newcastle indicates a place where already full of coals. It is a little different from the first example that denotative meaning appears in the second example. We can see that SL consists of the same constructs with TL. Yet, it does not appropriate in TL so that ET is needed. The third example deals with a simple sentence in the past form. Bahasa Indonesia is not sensitive to time, whereas English is very rigid about tenses. It is not strange when the translator does not point out the use of past tense indicated in SL. In translating compound-complex sentence, literal method immediately transfers the structure of SL into TL. From the above example, it is found that the repetition of subjects in TL voiced the Indonesian grammatical standard. However, the sentence indicated casual form which is better for the translator to omit the repetition of subject in translating it.

A cautionary note is necessary here. Literal method is able to seize the quality of translation, although the appropriateness is not achieved yet. That is why Newmark (1988) emphasizes that translation is not a product, but a process and the theory of translation method is hierarchal which can be divided

into three phases of translation: pre-translation, translation and post translation (Yamada, 2009). Commenting on the phases, literal translation is in the pre-translation stage. Newmark (1988) suggests using semantic and communicative translation method instead of literal ones. Subsequently, we may not omit the literal method because it exists in the beginning process of translation.

To understand and to overcome the relationship between the concepts of literalness and literal method, it is important to reexamine their different premises and evaluate the overlaps and explicitness. Yet, it was argued that there are several dimensions that describe the complexity of what lexicon means (Nagy and Scott, 2000). First, as a concept, lexical knowledge is incremental, which include many encounters with both spoken and written words in various contexts (Nagy, Anderson & Herman, 1989). Second, it is important to view the lexicon as multidimensional. Of note is that lexical knowledge related to multiple meanings of a word and served a different function in different context. Third, lexical knowledge promotes interrelated as the knowledge of how a particular word connects to other words. Dealing with literalness in the previous examples, it might be useful to master different kinds of knowledge in order to know a certain word for translation process as proposed by Nation (1990) as knowing (1) the meaning(s) of the word, (2) the grammatical behavior of the word, (3) the collocations of the word, (3) the register of the word, and (4) the associations of the word.

The importance of the driving forces behind grammatical rules is prevention. The literal method is recommended and substantively contributed to the foundation of translation process, although it involves the literalness at the sentence level. In the next examples, literal method is able to cope with literalness:

SL	TL
Key word	Kata kunci
Raincoat	Jas hujan
Pasta gigi	Toothpaste
All that glitters is not gold.	Tidak semua yang berkilau itu emas.
Diana waited for the train, but the train was late	Diana menunggu kereta api, namun kereta api tersebut terlambat.
Unless the coffee is hot, I will not drink it, so please put on a pot.	Meskipun kopi ini panas, saya tidak akan meminumnya, jadi tolong simpan di dalam cerek

It is important to note that although the literal method shared literalness, it is also able to produce an appropriate and equivalent translation. Literalness

arose mostly in the connotative meaning, whereas it rarely occurred in denotative meaning. The basis of literal translation is the assumption that SL and TL serve similarities. The closest SL to TL, the more equivalent TL can be produced. This conceptualization of literalness is associated with the original/strict meaning of words. In other hand, literal method works with the distinguished meaning of words without context.

For a natural translation, there may be an authentic attempt to provide a realistic representation of meaning in the TL. As a teacher, we can accommodate in our literalness problem the four translation methods into practice. In the beginning, we may introduce the literal method. Due to the students' level/ability improvement, we might better teach other types of translation method as semantic and communicative translation. Probably, the most outstanding translation work can be produced by our students.

CONCLUSION

Having been around for a while, literal method of translation cannot be abandoned in teaching practice because sometimes it works within the same structure between SL and TL. Keep in mind that because one sentence can be translated literally between languages does not mean that all sentence constructions can be literally translated. This method is best used as the pre-translation process. In closing, I would like to draw two promises of coping with literalness. First, literalness and literal method derive from the same concept. Second, given the content and context can produce a more appropriate translation. Further research in the area needs much supportive evidence to enhance the epistemic value underlying literal method of translation.

REFERENCES

- American Translators Association. (2017). *Explanation of Error Categories*. Accessed from <https://www.atanet.org> on April, 04th 2017.
- Catford, J.C. (1965). *A Linguistics Theory of Translation*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Fuadi, C. (2016). Foreignization and domestication strategies in cultural term translation of tourism brochures. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 6(2), 171-188.
- Lens, W. (1987). Theoretical research should be useful and used. *International Journal of Psychology*, 22, 453-461.
- Lewin, K. (1952). *Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers by Kurt Lewin*. London: Tavistock.

- Nagy, W.E., and Scott, J.A. (2000). Vocabulary processes in M.L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, P.D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.). *Handbook of reading research*, 269-284, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Nagy, W.E., Anderson, R.C., Schommer, M., Scott, J.A., & Stallman, A. (1989). Morphological families in the internal lexicon. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 24, 262-282
- Nation, I.S.P. (1990). *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. Massachusetts: Heinle&Heinle Publishers.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *Textbook of Translation*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall.
- Sarason, S.B. (1978). The nature of problem solving in social action. *American Psychologist*, 33, 370-380.
- Yamada, M. (2009). *A Study on the translation process through translators' interim product*. JAITS, 9, 159-176

Author's Brief CV

Ummi Rasyidah was born in Indonesia. She received her M.Ed in English Language Education at Universitas Negeri Padang and now is a Ph.D candidate majoring ELT at Universitas Negeri Malang. She has been teaching English in Universitas Pasir Pengaraian since 2013. She has written several articles in EduResearch and JEE. She also actively participated in International Conferences such as ISLA, TEFLIN, ISELT, INCOTEPD, etc. Her expertises and interests are in ELT, PD and Assessment Development.

