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ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE FORMALITY IN INDONESIAN TO ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF UNIVERSITY MASTER'S THESIS ABSTRACTS

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Abstract: *Since English is the main lingua franca for global academic communication, translating thesis abstracts accurately is vital for sharing research with the international community (Crystal, 2003). However, moving academic texts from Indonesian to English is tough because the two languages have different rhetorical styles, especially when trying to meet the strict formality standards required by international journals (Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999). This study looks at the different ways language formality is handled in Indonesian to English translations of master's thesis abstracts and checks if these translations actually maintain a proper scholarly tone. Using a descriptive qualitative design, I analyzed 30 master's thesis abstracts chosen from a university repository. Through document analysis, I identified and categorized 148 linguistic units that showed different levels of academic formality. The results show that translators mostly rely on Lexical Elevation & Academic Terminology (31.08%) and Objective Syntax & Passive Voice (31.08%) to fit English academic norms. Other methods used include Nominalization & Syntactic Density (10.14%), Formal Cohesion & Structural Shifts (10.14%), and Explicitation (7.43%). While most translated abstracts do a great job of staying objective and dense, about 10.14% of the data showed lower formality due to informal slips, literal translations, or spelling errors like using thru instead of through. The study concludes that while writers generally get the objective syntax right, they still struggle with lexical elevation and structural cohesion, which might be made worse by relying too heavily on machine translation (O'Brien et al., 2014). I recommend that universities set up standardized translation guidelines and move toward teaching digital translation literacy to protect the global reputation of their research.*

Keywords: *Academic Translation, Language Formality, Thesis Abstracts, Register, Nominalization.*

Abstrak: Bahasa Inggris berfungsi sebagai *lingua franca* utama dalam komunikasi akademik global, menjadikan penerjemahan abstrak tesis yang akurat sangat penting untuk menyebarkan penelitian ke khalayak internasional (Crystal, 2003). Namun, menerjemahkan teks akademik bahasa Indonesia ke dalam bahasa Inggris menghadirkan tantangan besar karena karakteristik retoris yang berbeda, terutama dalam mencapai formalitas bahasa yang ketat yang disyaratkan oleh publikasi internasional (Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999). Penelitian ini menginvestigasi bentuk-bentuk formalitas bahasa yang digunakan dalam penerjemahan abstrak tesis magister dari bahasa Indonesia ke bahasa Inggris dan mengevaluasi sejauh mana terjemahan tersebut mempertahankan register ilmiah yang tepat. Menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis korpus yang dipilih secara purposif sebanyak 30 abstrak tesis magister dari repositori universitas. Analisis dokumen dilakukan untuk mengekstraksi dan mengkategorikan 148 unit linguistik yang merepresentasikan variasi dalam formalitas akademik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa penerjemah terutama menggunakan Peningkatan Leksikal & Terminologi Akademik (31,08%) serta Sintaksis Objektif & Kalimat Pasif (31,08%) agar selaras dengan konvensi bahasa Inggris. Strategi tambahan meliputi Nominalisasi & Kepadatan Sintaksis (10,14%), Kohesi Formal & Pergeseran Struktural (10,14%), serta Eksplisitasi (7,43%). Meskipun sebagian besar abstrak yang diterjemahkan berhasil

menerapkan strategi ini untuk mempertahankan nada ilmiah yang objektif dan padat, sekitar 10,14% data menunjukkan formalitas yang lebih rendah akibat deviasi informal, terjemahan harfiah, dan kesalahan ortografi (misalnya, penggunaan kata "thru"). Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun objektivitas sintaksis umumnya telah dikuasai, terdapat kendala signifikan dalam peningkatan leksikal dan kohesi struktural, yang kemungkinan diperburuk oleh ketergantungan yang tidak kritis pada penerjemahan mesin (O'Brien et al., 2014). Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penerapan pedoman penerjemahan institusional yang terstandarisasi serta pergeseran pedagogis menuju literasi penerjemahan digital guna menjaga kredibilitas global dari luaran penelitian universitas.

Kata Kunci: Penerjemahan Akademik, Formalitas Bahasa, Abstrak Tesis, Register, Nominalisasi

INTRODUCTION

English is clearly the go-to language for academic communication worldwide, allowing universities to share their work with a global audience (Crystal, 2003). In this setting, a thesis abstract is incredibly important; it acts as a condensed summary that covers a research project's methodology, findings, and overall significance (Swales, 1990). Because of this, getting these translations right is essential. The problem is that Indonesian and English have very different rhetorical styles and academic writing conventions. To bridge this gap, translators have to strictly follow language formality rules, which are a hallmark of international academic publishing (Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999).

Hedging and nominalization are two key features that separate formal academic writing from everyday text, and they pose unique challenges when translating between languages (Hyland, 1998; Károly, 2017). Hedging is basically the way writers use language to be cautious, soften their claims, or acknowledge uncertainty (Hyland, 1998). In academic English, writers rely heavily on epistemic modality, using words like might, suggest, or tend to, to sound objective and polite (Hyland, 2019). When translating from Indonesian, it can be hard to find the exact equivalent. Indonesian academic writing might use different levels of directness or different words to show tentativeness. If these hedges aren't translated correctly, the English abstract can end up sounding too aggressive, dogmatic, or like it lacks scholarly humility, which ruins the academic tone (Munday, 2016).

Nominalization is when you turn verbs or adjectives into noun phrases. This is a central part of what Halliday (1994) calls grammatical metaphor. It allows academic writers to pack complex ideas into single phrases, making the text denser and more objective. While Indonesian uses affixes like pe-an or ke-an for this, English academic abstracts require a very high frequency of these noun structures. Translators often fall into the trap of using literal, verb-heavy translations, which makes the English text feel less conceptually dense (Alcaraz Varó & Hughes, 2014). Learning how to shift from verbal to nominal phrasing is vital for keeping the formality and compactness expected in international journals (Tusting, 2020).

Translating thesis abstracts from Indonesian to English often brings up complex linguistic hurdles. Translators frequently struggle to keep the right academic register, which leads to a few common issues (Flowerdew, 2015). These include using informal words by mistake, picking the wrong vocabulary, or letting the structure of the original language interfere with the English. On top of that, capturing subtle academic nuances requires mastering specific conventions, like using precise academic vocabulary, using hedging to show scholarly caution (Hyland, 1998), using nominalization to increase text density, and keeping

terminology consistent (Venuti, 2017). Because these elements are often handled poorly, we need a deep analysis of language formality to see if these translations are actually suitable for academic contexts

To address these issues, this study looks at two main questions: (1) what forms of language formality appear in the Indonesian-English translations of master's thesis abstracts, and (2) how well do these translations maintain the level of formality needed for academic work? The goal is to systematically identify these forms and check if they meet the high standards of international academic discourse.

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research design to look closely at the linguistic shifts happening in these academic texts (Munday, 2016). A qualitative approach makes the most sense here because the focus is on analyzing non-numerical text, which allows for a deep dive into formality, style, and how appropriate the translations are within their specific context.

METHODOLOGY

Data and Data Source

The primary data consists of linguistic units like words, phrases, and sentences that show variations or errors in academic formality. The data comes from a purposively selected group of original Indonesian master's thesis abstracts and their English translations, taken from the university's repository. I chose the samples based on specific criteria, like recent publication years, to make sure the texts reflect modern academic writing.

Data Collection Technique

I collected the data through careful document analysis. Acting as the main instrument, I performed a close, parallel reading of the Indonesian source texts and the English target texts. While reading, I scanned the texts to find elements related to the study, such as informal words, poor vocabulary choices, structural interference, hedging, nominalization, and consistency. Once identified, these units were recorded in structured sheets for categorization.

Data Analysis Procedure

The qualitative data was analyzed using an interactive model of textual analysis. First, I used data condensation to filter and code the phrases based on the type of formality they represented. Second, I organized the data into comparative matrices, putting the source text next to the translation to show changes in grammar and density (Károly, 2017). Finally, I interpreted the findings to see if the formality levels were appropriate, comparing them against established international academic English standards.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

After analyzing the 30 datasets from the master's thesis abstracts, the final breakdown of language formality (RQ1) is shown in the table below. The 148 identified strategies and markers were grouped into six main categories.

Table 1 Research Findings

Formality Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Lexical Elevation & Academic Terminology	46	31.08%
Objective Syntax & Passive Voice	46	31.08%
Nominalization & Syntactic Density	15	10.14%

Formality Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Formal Cohesion & Structural Shifts	15	10.14%
Lower Formality / Informal Deviations	15	10.14%
Explicitation & Amplification	11	7.43%
Total	**148**	**100.00%**

Looking at the forms of formality used, the data shows that translators use a solid mix of lexical, syntactic, and structural strategies to meet international standards. Most of the work is dominated by two main approaches, which together make up over 60% of the markers.

Lexical Elevation & Academic Terminology (31.08%)

Translators consistently upgrade common Indonesian verbs and phrases to their formal English academic equivalents to meet scholarly standards (Alcaraz Varó & Hughes, 2014).

Example: Changing the basic Indonesian verb menggunakan (uses) to the more formal employs.

Example: Replacing the literal menunjukan (shows) with stronger verbs like indicates or reveals.

Objective Syntax & Passive Voice (31.08%)

The translations rely heavily on passive structures and inanimate subjects to stay objective and remove personal bias, which is a standard in global research (Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999).

Example (Passive Voice): Translating Pengumpulan data dilakukan to the standard Data were collected, keeping the focus on the process.

Example (Inanimate Subject): Changing Penelitian ini bertujuan to This study aims, which creates distance between the author and the text.

Nominalization & Syntactic Density (10.14%)

Translators often turn complex actions into dense noun phrases to increase the informational weight of the abstract (Halliday, 1994).

Example: Turning the verbal phrase memahami secara mendalam into the formal noun phrase an in-depth understanding.

Formal Cohesion & Structural Shifts (10.14%)

To avoid long, rambling sentences and improve flow, translators adjust sentence structures and use formal connecting words (Tusting, 2020).

Example: Breaking up a conversational Indonesian sentence by using a formal transition like Therefore.

Explicitation & Amplification (7.43%)

Translators sometimes add extra context or expand on concepts to make sure global readers who might not know the local context can understand clearly (Venuti, 2017).

Example: Translating kebutuhan afeksi (affectionate needs) into the more precise sociological term emotional and biological needs.

Lower Formality / Informal Deviations (10.14%)

Even though formal strategies are the norm, some translations lose their academic tone due to errors or being too literal (Flowerdew, 2015).

Example: Using the casual abbreviation thru instead of the formal through, which breaks academic rules.

Example: Using conversational phrases like ...is what makes this study

special instead of using formal terms to describe why the research is new.

Discussion

Based on the data, the English translations of these master's thesis abstracts mostly maintain the level of formality expected in international academic circles, though it varies from one sample to another (Munday, 2016). Most translations successfully use linguistic strategies to move beyond literal translation into polished academic English. However, some do have serious lapses in tone.

High Extent of Appropriateness

Most abstracts show a high degree of formality by using strategies that distance the author, pack more information into fewer words, and use precise terms (Hyland, 2019).

Sustained Objective Stance: Translators often use the passive voice and inanimate subjects to keep the tone impersonal.Take Data 19, for instance. The active source text, Pendekatan penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif..., is turned into the formal passive, A qualitative approach with a case study method was employed in this research, which does a great job of establishing methodological objectivity. We see something similar in Data 14, where Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa... becomes The results of the study indicate that..., using an inanimate subject to create a sense of authority.

Elevated Academic Lexicon: Translators often upgrade common Indonesian verbs to their more formal English counterparts. In Data 1, the phrase kenyataan di lapangan menunjukkan is elevated to in reality, learning tends to remain conceptual, which avoids a literal or overly casual translation. In Data 22, the colloquial bukan sekadar is sophisticatedly rendered as transcends its function as, matching the deep tone of theological discussion.

Managing Syntactic Density (Nominalization): The translations frequently maintain or even improve the heavy information load needed for abstracts through grammatical metaphor (Halliday, 1994). For example, in Data 14, the verb phrase memahami secara mendalam is condensed into the much denser noun phrase an in-depth understanding.

Explicitation for Clarity: When dealing with concepts that are culturally specific, successful translations provide extra context without losing their formal tone (Venuti, 2017). In Data 12, kebutuhan afeksi is expanded to emotional and biological needs, offering precise sociological clarity for an international audience.

Low to Moderate Extent of Appropriateness

On the other hand, a small number of abstracts struggle to keep up the required academic tone because of literal translations, informal words, or drafting mistakes (Flowerdew, 2015).

Informal Spelling and Colloquialisms: The most obvious errors happen when translators use informal spelling. In Data 7, the formal preposition melalui is repeatedly translated as the slangy abbreviation thru (for example, Primary data were obtained thru field observations...), which breaks standard academic rules and lowers the scholarly quality.

Literal Lexical Choices and Awkward Phrasing: Some abstracts just don't elevate their vocabulary enough. In Data 30, Untuk membedah fenomena is translated too literally as To dissect this phenomenon, instead of using a standard academic term like examine. Also, this abstract translates merupakan jenis kualitatif awkwardly as is a qualitative type, which ruins the flow of the sentence.

Syntactic Fragmentation and

Repetition: Poor translations sometimes carry over mistakes from the original draft. In Data 29, the sentence fragment Dibedah dengan dua teori yakni... is mirrored directly as Analyzed with two theories, namely..., which isn't even a complete English sentence. Similarly, Data 30 repeats itself unnecessarily: The data analysis techniques used... use data analysis techniques.

The Epistemological Impact of Syntactic Choices

Choosing between active and passive voice is about more than just style; it actually changes how the research is perceived (Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999). The heavy use of the agentless passive voice (like Data were collected) and inanimate subjects (like The findings reveal) seen in the best abstracts does more than just sound formal; it builds a positivist, objective stance. By removing the researcher from the text, these English translations suggest that the data and methods exist independently of the person observing them (Hyland, 2019). When translators miss this shift, or if they stick to literal, active translations that focus on what the researcher did, they accidentally go against the expectations of professional academic English.

Navigating the Hegemony of Academic English and Local Nuance

The data regarding Explicitation for Clarity shows a real tension in translating Indonesian research: the struggle to keep local cultural nuances while following the strict, global standards of academic English (Venuti, 2017). When translators run into uniquely Balinese or Indonesian sociological or theological concepts, like kebutuhan afeksi or specific adat laws, they have to mediate between two different rhetorical worlds. Translating these terms means unpacking them into longer, explanatory English phrases so foreign scholars can understand them (Károly, 2017). This process isn't neutral; it essentially places local knowledge systems into the framework of Western academia.

The Paradox of Lexical Density: Authority vs. Readability

Using nominalization effectively, like turning verbal phrases into dense noun phrases like an in-depth understanding, is key to sounding authoritative (Halliday, 1994). However, this brings up questions about readability and how hard it is to process the text. While heavy nominalization makes things sound more formal, it also makes the writing more abstract and harder to read (Alcaraz Varó & Hughes, 2014). Translators of master's abstracts have to walk a fine line: if they don't use enough nominalization, the text sounds too conversational, but if they overdo it, the abstract becomes impossible to understand.

Interference of Draft-Stage Rhetoric

The presence of broken sentences, repetition, and awkward phrasing in the lower-quality abstracts suggests that the issue isn't just English proficiency, but rather interference from the source text (Flowerdew, 2015). In Indonesian academic writing, longer, looser sentences or direct repetitions are sometimes okay in early drafts. If translators aren't trained to aggressively edit and restructure the original text during translation, these drafting habits end up in the English version (O'Brien et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

Beyond just categorizing translation strategies, the data provides deeper insights into the systemic and teaching challenges of academic translation in higher education. Looking at these findings as a whole reveals patterns regarding students' digital literacy (O'Brien et al., 2014), the complexities of cultural mediation (Venuti, 2017), and the urgent need for institutional support.

1. **The Machine Translation or Digital Literacy Hypothesis**: The huge gap between highly sophisticated translations and severe

errors (like using thru) suggests that some students might be relying on unedited machine translation or casual digital tools (O'Brien et al., 2014). This shows we really need university-level training in digital translation literacy, teaching that technology should help, not replace, academic judgment.

2. **The Challenge of Cultural Translation vs. Linguistic Translation**: The data shows that the best translations happen when the translator acts as a cultural mediator (Venuti, 2017). When translators just do a word-for-word linguistic translation, the deep sociological meaning of the original research gets lost.
3. **Mastery of Syntax vs. Struggle with Lexicon**: Translators seem to pick up objective syntax fairly easily because Indonesian academic writing also uses a lot of passive constructions. However, the real struggle is with vocabulary and restructuring (Károly, 2017), which means curricula should focus more on advanced vocabulary and nominalization.
4. **The Need for Institutional Translation Guidelines**: The inconsistency in formality suggests a systemic problem. There is a need for standardized institutional guidelines and mandatory professional proofreading before theses are submitted to protect the university's global reputation.

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