

Theme Shifts in the Translation of Student and Professional Translators

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Abstract—Any translation practices aim at producing a target text (TT) which is equivalent in meaning to the source text (ST) and corresponding to the style and lexicogrammar applicable in the target language (TL). One of the ways to arrive at such purpose is through shift. From the SFL point of view, shifts involve the elements of language metafunctions, one of which is shifts in textual metafunction element, i.e. theme. This study aims at analyzing the so-called theme shifts in the translation of student translators and professional translators. This study used a content analysis method taking student translators and professional translators as the participants who were asked to translate a text from English into *Bahasa Indonesia*. Based on the data analysis, it was found that most of theme shifts done by student translators were at the lexicogrammatical level, while professional translators did more theme shifts at the discourse level. This study concludes that student translators' theme shifts focus on the form, while professional translators focus on the meaning.

Keywords—professional translator; SFL; student translator; theme shift; translation

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation as the process of rewriting or reproducing the meanings of a text in another language requires a translator to have good linguistic competence [1]. Consequently, every translator should have good linguistic knowledge because translation is not only a matter of vocabulary, grammar as one of the objects of linguistics also plays a large and important role [2,3]. This idea suggests that, in addition to being bilingual or multilingual, a translator should have linguistic competencies on those languages. The need of linguistic competencies is particularly obvious while encountering structure-related problems. For this reason, Rosa argues that the involvement of linguistics theories in translation studies in the recent years that becomes more and more obvious since they can replace the intuition of the translator to solve their translation problem provides an opportunity to explore the best translation practice [4].

One of linguistics theories concerning with the meaning is systemic functional linguistics (SFL) which views grammar as a resource for making meaning [5]. In addition, Hatim argues that SFL can be considered a viable and valid contribution to a textual practice like that of translation, whose products are

“meaningful records of communicative events” [6]. Besides, SFL examines what people actually ‘do’ with language with reference to what they ‘could’ do, in terms of choices among systems through language metafunctions [7]: ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions.

Furthermore, as the translation product is a written text, a target text (TT) must be so well organized that it is easy to read and understand by the target language (TL) readers. In SFL, the type of language metafunction that concerns with the ideas organization in a text is textual metafunction, realized in theme and rheme [5]. Theme, most frequently characterized as the first element of a clause, plays the most important role in confirming a well-organized text or cohesiveness of a text, including a translated text.

The important role of theme in producing a well-organized TT can be seen in the translation of the source text (ST) in (1).

(1) ST : Communication is a process of transmitting a message. The message can be delivered through oral or written expression. People can communicate without limitation of distance and time through writing.

TT1 : *Komunikasi merupakan proses penyampaian pesan, baik melalui lisan maupun tulisan. Orang dapat berkomunikasi tanpa batasan jarak dan waktu melalui tulisan.*

TT2 : *Komunikasi merupakan proses penyampaian pesan, baik melalui lisan maupun tulisan. Melalui tulisan, orang dapat berkomunikasi tanpa batasan jarak dan waktu.*

Both TT1 and TT2 in (1) completely transfer the ST meaning into the TL. Besides, both use the same lexicogrammatical features. The only difference between TT1 and TT2 is the theme elements of their second clauses. The theme of the second clause in TT1 is composed of a participant, indicating an unmarked theme clause. Meanwhile, the theme of the second clause in TT2 is composed of a circumstance, indicating a marked theme clause. Such small difference significantly affects the cohesiveness of a text [8,9], since what comes first in a clause informs what the clause is going to be about [5]. Based on the information structure, the second clause in TT2 is more cohesive since its theme

(“*Melalui tulisan*”, equivalent in meaning with “through writing”) is constructed from the rheme of the previous clause. In contrast, the theme of the second clause in TT1 (“*Orang*”, equivalent in meaning with “People”) is composed of new information in the sense that it has not been mentioned anywhere in the previous clause. The choice of “*Melalui tulisan*” instead of “*Orang*” as the theme, known as theme shift [4], is motivated by the effort of keeping the text cohesiveness.

In addition to keep the text cohesiveness, a theme also plays its role as a “decision maker” of the lexical items probably used as its rheme elements. In other words, a theme limits the chance of other linguistics elements to co-occur in the same clause. For example, once the nominal group “the stone” is selected as the theme, such several lexical items as “pregnant”, “drinks”, and “walks” have no probability to co-occur because the clauses as in (2) are impossible to be constructed.

- (2) *the stone is pregnant
- *the stone drinks
- *the stone walks

Considering the important role of themes in constructing a text has attracted a number of translation scholars to conduct studies on it. They focused their studies on thematic progression patterns in translation [10,11]; theme markedness in translation [12]; theme characteristics in translation [13]; application of thematic analysis to translation [14,15]; theme and rheme structure in translation [16], and theme choice [17]. The study of theme choice done by Lee is closely related to theme shift, the object studied in this paper, because the choice of theme in the TT might be different from the theme used in the ST [17]. However, theme choice must not be necessarily resulted from theme shift because it completely depends on the translator whether to keep or to shift the theme elements of the ST in the TT. Besides, the previous studies took the subject either student translators or professional translators as the research participants, but this present study involve both. This paper aims at finding out the theme shift done by student translators and professional translators.

II. METHOD

This study used a content analysis method taking four student translators and two professional translators as the participants who were asked to translate a text from English into bahasa Indonesia. The student translators were the eighth semester students of English Department of Universitas Negeri Padang who: (i) were familiar with major web search techniques for translation purposes; (ii) were fluent in English, indicated by holding a minimum PBT score of 500; (iii) were Indonesian native speakers; (iv) had never worked as professional translators; and (v) had taken translation subjects. Meanwhile, the professional translators were those who: (i) had completed an MA in translation and interpreting studies; (ii) had more than five years’ professional experience on translation; and (iii) were members of HPI (Association of Indonesian Translators). The data were the source text (ST) entitled “Early History of Yellowstone National Park” and its translation in Bahasa Indonesia. The ST was downloaded from <http://www.nezperce.com/yelpark9.html>. In order to confirm

its readability, the ST was measured with the help of SMOG readability formula. Based on the formula, the ST had the following scores: (i) Flesch Reading Ease score: 49.4; (ii) Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 10.9; (iii) The Coleman-Liau Index: 13; and (iv) The SMOG Index: 11.4. The Flesch Reading Ease score was used to measure the difficulty level of the text, and the score (49.4) indicated that the text was hard to read. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and The SMOG Index were used to grade the level of the readers. The scores (10.9 and 11.4) indicated that the text was suitable to be given to eleventh grade readers. Meanwhile, based on The Coleman-Liau Index (13), the text was suitable to be given at college level. The data were collected using Translog for easy and accurate data recording. The data were analyzed using a content analysis to find out different characteristics of student translators and professional translators in doing theme shifts.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis, it was found that the professional translators did theme shifts more frequently than did the student translators. The more frequent shifts done by the professional translators indicate their reluctance to follow or imitate the language style and structure of the ST. Besides, the frequent shifts can also serve as the indicator of their efforts to achieve naturalness of the TT; in other words, they try to make their TT as natural as possible. This finding supports Catford who argues that shifts in translation process show translator’s awareness in finding the necessity of deviating from the source language form [18]. This idea also suggests that a good translation should have its own style, showing its independence over the ST style [4].

Although the student translators also frequently do theme shifts in their translation, most of the theme shifts work at a clause level realized in shifts from simple theme to multiple theme, shifts from theme to rheme, and shifts from marked theme to unmarked theme, one of which can be seen in (3).

(3) ST:

It	was created upon a roll call vote with 115 ayes, 65 nays and 60 abstaining on March 1, 1872,
Topical	Rheme
Simple Unmarked Theme	

TT:

Undang-undang itu akhirnya terbentuk dari hasil pemungutan suara dengan 115 ya, 65 tidak dan 60 abstain pada 1 Maret 1872

Topical	Conjunctive
Multiple Unmarked Theme	Textual
Rheme	

The TT in (3) is written by one of the student translators. Excluding the conjunctive “*akhirnya*”, the TT is much influenced by the ST structure and style because the ST is translated literally. The ST theme is kept as the TT theme, and so is the rheme. Nevertheless, the student translator has tried not to be influenced by the ST style by adding the theme element, i.e. the conjunctive “*akhirnya*” (equivalent in English with “finally”), serving as the textual theme. Therefore, the ST simple theme “It” has been shifted into a multiple theme,

composed of a topical theme (*undang-undang itu*) and a textual theme (*akhirnya*). One of the good solutions shown by the student translators in their TT is writing “*undang-undang itu*” as the equivalent of ST theme “it”. Such kind of shift is known as a shift from simple unmarked theme (SUT) into multiple unmarked theme (MUT). Meanwhile, the translation of the ST in (3) produced by the professional translators can be seen in (4).

(4) TT:

Pada akhirnya *dibentuk* *suatu undang-undang berdasarkan pemungutan suara (115 “ya”, 65 “tidak” dan 60 “abstain”) pada tanggal 1 Maret 1872*

Conjunctive	Topical	Rheme
Textual		
Multiple Marked Theme		

The TT in (4), produced by the professional translator, is quite different from the TT in (3). The ST theme “*undang-undang*” has been shifted into the rheme, and one of the ST rheme elements “*dibentuk*” has been shifted into the theme. Consequently, such shift causes different theme markedness. The ST theme is an unmarked theme because it is composed of nominal group “It”; meanwhile, the theme of the TT in (4) is a marked theme because it is composed of material process “*dibentuk*”. In addition, the TT in (4) also adds another theme element, i.e. conjunctive “*Pada akhirnya*”. The addition of this conjunctive improves the cohesiveness of the TT, showing the flow of ideas organization in the TT.

Unlike the student translators, the TT produced by the professional translators contains shifts that work not only at clause level but also at discourse level, such as shifts from theme to clause, or vice versa. One of the examples is provided in (5).

(5) ST:

and (they) lived in the area in peaceful tranquillity until the early 1800s- undisturbed by the presence of white men.

Conjunction	Topical	Rheme
Textual		
Multiple Unmarked Theme		

A. TT:

Selain itu, mereka juga mengklaim telah tinggal di wilayah tersebut dengan nyaman, tenang

Conjunctive	Topical	Rheme
Textual		
Multiple Unmarked Theme		

B. TT:

dan (mereka) tidak merasa terganggu dengan adanya keberadaan orang berkulit putih hingga awal tahun 1800-an.

Conjunction	Topical	Rheme
Textual		
Multiple Unmarked Theme		

The main shift in the TT in (5) is a shift from a simple clause simplex to a clause complex. This shift certainly causes other types of shifts in the TT. The first type shift is a shift from an ellipted topical theme to an explicit topical theme. Like the TT theme in (5a), the ST theme is a multiple unmarked

theme indicated by the use of textual and topical themes. However, the ST topical theme is an ellipsis referring to ‘they’ that has been mentioned in the previous ST clause. Meanwhile, the TT topical theme in (5a) ‘*mereka*’ is explicitly written. From the textual meaning point of view, the shift from an ellipted topical theme to an explicit topical theme is acceptable because the topical theme ‘*mereka*’ is generated from the topical theme of the previous ST clause ‘Native Americans’.

The second type of shift is a shift from part to whole, meaning that several elements of the ST rheme ‘lived in the area in peaceful tranquillity’ become the whole rheme of the TT clause in (5a). From the textual meaning point of view, the shift did not affect the clause organization because the TT rheme also contains the ST rheme elements. The only difference is a reduction in the TT elements; however, the equivalent of the eliminated ST rheme elements is provided in the other rheme of the TT clause as in (5b).

The third type of shift is creating another multiple unmarked theme. The TT theme in (5b) is composed of a textual theme and a topical theme; however, unlike the TT theme in (5a), the TT topical theme in (5b) ‘*mereka*’ is a theme ellipsis. From the textual meaning point of view, the shift in the form of creating the new multiple unmarked theme ‘*dan (mereka)*’ in the TT clause in (5b) is acceptable because the topical theme is the same topical theme as the ST theme in (5). Even though there is an addition of textual theme ‘*dan*’ in the TT theme in (5b), it is only to keep the cohesion of the two TT clauses.

The fourth type of shift is a shift from part to whole. Similar with the second type of rheme mentioned in the previous paragraph, several elements of the ST rheme ‘until the early 1800s- undisturbed by the presence of white men’ becomes the whole rheme of the TT clause in (5b). From the textual meaning point of view, the shift does not affect the way the TT is organized because the ST rheme is kept as the TT rheme.

Furthermore, while student translators follow the thematic structure of clauses in (6), professional translators join them into a single clause.

(6) ST:

Yellowstone	had been discovered
Topical	Rheme
Simple Unmarked Theme	

and interest in preserving its majestic beauty was growing.

Conjunction	Topical	Rheme
Textual		
Multiple Unmarked Theme		

TT:

<i>Penemuan Yellowstone dan kecenderungan untuk melestarikan keindahannya yang begitu menawan</i>	<i>terus berkembang.</i>
Topical	Rheme
Simple Unmarked Theme	

As the consequence of joining two ST clauses in (6), several types of shifts are found. The first type of shift is a shift

from whole to part. The first ST clause “Yellowstone had been discovered” is shifted as part of the theme of the TT “*Penemuan Yellowstone*”. This shift is caused by nominalization, frequently applied by professional translators. This finding supports Rosa who found that professional translators did more nominalization than denominalization in their translation. This means that they prefer to translate the ST clause as the phrase in the TT rather than to translate the ST phrase as the clause in the TT [4].

The other shift is the shift from multiple theme to simple theme. The theme of the second ST clause in (6) is composed of multiple theme, i.e. “and” (textual theme) and “interest in preserving its majestic beauty” (topical theme). However, such theme is shifted into a simple theme “*kecenderungan untuk melestarikan keindahannya yang begitu menawan*” in the TT. The multiple-simple theme shifts in (6) shows the translator’s good decision because the TT becomes simpler without eliminating the theme elements in the ST. In other words, the original meaning is conveyed accurately despite being expressed in a simple clause. This also indicates that the TT prefers using a long phrase as the theme to expressing such phrase in two clauses.

Despite their differences, both student translators and professional translators agree not to shift the marked theme composed of circumstance of place. One of the examples can be seen in (7).

(7) ST:

To the north ((of what is now Yellowstone Park))	flows one of its great rivers, the Yellowstone.
Topical	Rheme
Simple Marked Theme	

TT:

<i>Di sebelah utara taman Yellowstone,</i>	<i>terdapat sungai Yellowstone ((yang mengalir deras)).</i>
Topical	Rheme
Simple Marked Theme	

The ST theme in (7) belongs to a marked theme because it is composed of circumstance of place “To the north of what is now Yellowstone Park”. Such marked theme is kept in the TT since it is composed of the circumstance of place “*Di sebelah utara taman Yellowstone*”, which is equivalent in meaning with the ST theme element.

Based on the results of analysis, the general finding of this study is that, in doing theme shifts in the translation process, the student translators pay more attention to the form of the clause theme. In other words, while translating, they focus on how the clauses are rewritten in the form corresponding to the acceptable TT theme structure. Meanwhile, despite their attention to the acceptable form of TT theme structure, while shifting the theme elements, the professionals also share their attention to the meaning, i.e. how the meaning should be kept even though it is rewritten in the different way. Therefore, using the term proposed by Matthiessen [19] and Hill-Madsen [20], the theme shifts done by the student translators were categorized into instantiation shifts or intra-rank shifts where the theme elements shifted are at the same level rank or strata. Meanwhile, the theme shifts done by the professional translators are categorized into both instantiation and

realization shifts because the theme elements shifted also constitute a movement between ranks (inter-rank shifts). This finding indicates that the decision of student translators to focus on doing shifts at clause level is caused by their efforts to avoid meaning shifts, as Daems, Vandepitte, Hartsuiker and Macken confirm that the most common errors done by student translators are meaning shifts, showing incongruity in meaning between the ST and the TT [21].

Moreover, as the professional translators focus on meaning while shifting the theme elements in the translation process, their TT can be a reference of characteristics of certain texts in the target language. The text translated in this study, for example, belongs to a descriptive historical text, a kind of recount text. Based on the research findings, the prototype of typical characteristics of Indonesian descriptive historical text includes: (i) the frequent use of simple theme, (ii) the frequent use of unmarked theme, (iii) the theme composed of long phrase, and (iv) circumstance of place as the main constituent of marked theme.

As historical text is a part of recount text, this finding supports Yunita’s study, finding the frequent use of simple theme in recount texts [22]. However, this finding is in contrast with Sofyan and Tarigan’s study whose findings show that marked theme is the theme most frequently used in Indonesian news item texts [12]. The difference is caused by the nature of news item text that frequently highlights the time and the place of the reported events. In addition, the findings of this research are contradictory with the findings of the research on narrative texts done by Nurlela et al. [22]. They found that Indonesian narrative texts are characterized by the frequent use of marked themes and multiple themes. The frequent use of multiple theme is caused by the frequent use of textual themes, intended to clearly show how the events in the story are related one another. Such differences show that different text types have different theme characteristics.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings, it is concluded that both student translators and professional translators realize the important role of theme shifts in producing a good TT, reflected the frequent theme shifts in their TTs. However, the student translators still have limitation in doing theme shifts in their translation as they focus more on the form of thematic structure in their TT rather than the meaning generated from such theme shifts. Meanwhile, professional translators have shown their expertise in translation through the theme shifts in their TT. In doing theme shifts they focus more on meaning generated from such shifts. The findings of this study suggests further study on the typical theme characteristics of other text types as different text types might have different theme characteristics.

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