
Research Paper

The Students' Ability in Japanese Free-Writing (*Sakubun*)

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ABSTRACT

Writing essays or stories is called *sakubun* in Japanese. When willing to convey an idea or ideas into essays, learners must master the language skills, such as Japanese characters (Hiragana, Katakana, Kanji), vocabulary, sentence patterns, auxiliary words (particles), and expressions. However, because of different structure between Indonesian and Japanese, Japanese non native learners face problems. The study tries to measure the ability of non-native learners to make essays in Japanese. There were nine respondents from the Japanese Literature Study Program at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Sumatra Utara (USU) and six respondents from the Japanese Language Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Riau (UNRI). The respondents were university students who passed the international examination in Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) at / N3 level. The purpose of this study is to analyze the types of errors that are mostly found in the translation from Indonesian essays into Japanese, as well as to describe the factors underlying the occurrence of errors. The research used qualitative and quantitative methods and the percentage of errors is measured. Errors among students were caused by word choice, auxiliary verbs, particle words, sentence structure, and translation abilities. Translation errors by students from USU and UNRI were reaching 4.12% and 1.34% respectively. All this means that they were weak in vocabularies. The dominant factor causing errors is the errors transfer, that is, habits from first language are applied to the learning of foreign language which has different language systems.

Keywords: Ability, free writing, sakubun, Japanese

INTRODUCTION

In Japanese learning, especially in translation, students find obstacles in the use of vocabulary because the sentence patterns between first and foreign languages are (very) different and also because students become bilinguals who should master their first language as well as the foreign ones, such as English, Japanese, among others. In Japanese, writing essays or stories is generally called *sakubun* (or composition course) which is often regarded as the most difficult course for students and instructors. Students are required to exert all their Japanese language skills when going to convey an idea or ideas in written form and they must be supported by mastery of *kanji*,

vocabulary, verse patterns, helping words (particles), and Japanese expressions.

According to Runtuwarouw (2018: 359), writing is one of the language skills that is important to be mastered by foreign language students, including Japanese language students. It can be classified into three types: writing letters (*kana* and *kanji*), writing sentences (*bunsaku*), writing stories / essays (*sakubun*). Failure to translate from Indonesian into Japanese can occur due to the errors in finding matching words or phrases in certain contexts. For new students, the errors are found because they are not aware of the difference between the two languages. In addition, there are still other causes that manifest distorted forms in

Japanese language learning. Thus, it is probable that in making essays (*sakubun*), the translation process has many problems that can cause translation errors. Therefore, students are required to have an in-depth knowledge of the rules in translating essays.

PROBLEMS

Cultural differences cause each language to be unique and different between one another. When translating an Indonesian sentence into Japanese is not easy because one form of word can have several meanings. In Japanese, words have a polemic, for example, the phrase meaning "to use something", has several words that have a polemic.

When translating text, students should be bound to the original text in the source language and must shift to the target language of every thought and meaning contained in the text. When reading sentences in Indonesian, for example, students who have background in Indonesian culture must also think of Japanese culture in order they are able to translate the sentence into Japanese. In other words, in translating Indonesian texts into Japanese, learners should think of the terms of reference in Japanese syntax, semantics, sociolinguistics, and cultural aspects.

The problems in the paper are: what forms of errors do students from the Japanese Literature Study Programs at Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Sumatera Utara and at Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Riau have when they produce Japanese essay and what factors cause the errors in the two institutions?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research uses a quantitative and descriptive qualitative approach. Descriptive qualitative is involved to analyze written text data which is translated from Indonesian into Japanese and quantitative data means the calculation of the average error. Data was collected from the students' essays that were translated into Japanese. Correcting the essays were based on four

criteria: the use of particles, the choice of words, the use of sentence structure, and the sentence translation. The research was carried out for 100 minutes. Nine respondents from the Japanese Literature Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, USU and six respondents from the Japanese Language Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, UNRI were chosen. They had already passed the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) at the N3 level. The research was conducted at USU held on March 20, 2019 and at UNRI on June 2, 2019.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Japanese particles (*Joshi*)

Japanese particles (*joshi*) function to show the relationship between one word with another in a sentence and to give a special meaning or nuance to a word. Particles are important because the meaning of sentences without the particles will be difficult to understand. Similarly, without appropriate use of particles, a sentence may cause misunderstanding. Japanese has particles *de*, *o*, *ga*, and *to*. Incorrect placement of particles in a sentence, the meaning can be inappropriate as shown in Japanese sentences in (1)-(4).

- (1) *Borupen de kaku.*
pen (particle) writing
'Writing using a pen'
- (2) **Borupen o kaku.*
pen (particle) writing
'Writing pen'
- (3) **Borupen ga kaku.*
pen (particle) writing
'Pen that writes'
- (4) *Borupen to kaku.*
pen (particle) writing
'Writing with pen'

Note: * is used to indicate ungrammaticality.

Japanese sentence structure

In terms of grammar, the structure of the Subject-Predicate-Object (SPO) pattern is accepted in Indonesian and the Subject-

Object-Predicate (SOP) pattern structure is agreed in Japanese as shown in (5)-(6).

(5) Saya makan roti (Indonesian)

I eat bread

S P O

(6) *Watashi (wa) pan (o) taberu*

(Japanese)

I (particle) bread (particle) eat

S O P

The Indonesian sentence in (5) is generally translated by students into Japanese as 'Watashi (S) taberu (P) pan (O).' The translation is incorrect and the correct translation is shown in (6). In Indonesian, the (D-M) rule is used, whereas in Japanese the (M-D) should be applied, as shown in (7)-(8) used. Students prefer to translating the sentence in (7) as 'Jidousha (D) atarashii (M).' The D is the short form of *dijelaskan* 'being described' and the M to mean *menjelaskan* 'to describe.'

(7) Sepeda motor baru (Indonesian)

motorcycle new

D M

(8) *Atarashii jidousha* (Japanese)

New motorcycle

M D

Language learning

Language learning refers to the process of acquiring a second language (L2) after someone has obtained his first language (L1). Some experts mention the term language learning and other uses the term the acquisition of language (or language acquisition) second. Learning is a system, meaning that learning is a single unit consisting of various components and mutual support. Therefore, the success of learning will be determined by the components involved in the learning. These components are the teacher, students, learning objectives, learning materials, methods and techniques in learning, evaluation, and facilities needed.

According to Kridalaksana (2001: 159) language learning is the process of mastering one's own language or other languages by a human being. The language teaching is the field in applied linguistics

which includes educational theories and practices concerned with the teaching of one's own language and foreign languages, and which includes the methods and materials of language teaching.

Types and language mistakes

Indrowaty (2015: 36) divides the types of errors into 13, namely referential errors, register errors, social errors, textual errors, receptive errors, expressive errors, errors of individuals, errors of groups, errors of overgeneralization, transfer errors, teaching-induced, local error, and global error.

Causes of language error

Nababan (1992: 92) groups the causes of error as stated in the followings:

1. Interference errors, and errors are not caused by interference, but by the difficulties caused by learning itself.
2. Mistakes that are caused by difficulties, because of the incorrect elements in microlinguistics and errors, are caused by incorrect elements in its interpretation in macrolinguistics.
3. Fossilized errors are mistakes that are difficult to remove because they are ingrained the meat is nicknamed, petrified mistakes and errors that are difficult to eradicate.
4. Global errors are mistakes that cause the other person to not understand the intent or its purpose and errors do not cause misunderstanding (local errors).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Errors in the translations by USU students

The average rate of error when students translated their essays from Bahasa Indonesia into Japanese is noted in data in (A); the average of translation error is shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. Figure 1 shows that the average of translation errors made by USU students reaches 4.12% in which the error lies in the vocabulary selection.

- (A) 1. Word selection : $71/9 \times 100\% = 7.89\%$
 2. Helping words : $35/9 \times 100\% = 3.89\%$
 3. Sentence structure : $8/9 \times 100\% = 0.89\%$
 4. Translation results : $34/9 \times 100\% = 3.78\%$

Table 1. Results of average level of translation errors by USU students

| No | Types Mistake | USU Students |
|----|--------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Choice of words | 7,89 % |
| 2 | Auxiliary word | 3,89 % |
| 3 | Sentence structure | 0,89 % |
| 4 | Translate result | 3,78% |

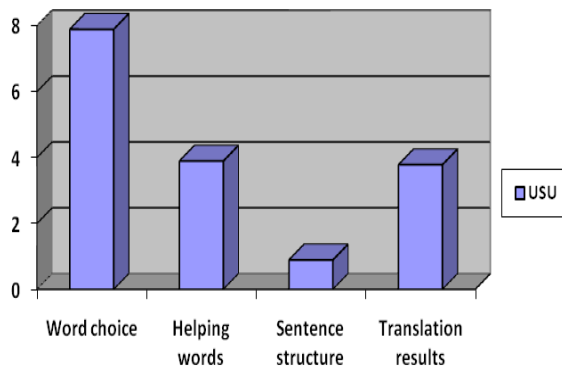


Figure 1. Average results of translation errors by USU Students

Errors in the translation by UNRI students

The average rate of errors which students make when they translate their essays from Bahasa Indonesia into Japanese can be learned in (B); the average of translation error is shown in Table 2 and Figure 2 which indicates that the average of translation errors made by UNRI students reaches 1.34%.

- (B) 1. Word selection : $13/6 \times 100\% = 2.17\%$
 2. Helping words : $4/6 \times 100\% = 0.67\%$
 3. Sentence structure : $4/6 \times 100\% = 0.67\%$
 4. Translation results : $11/6 \times 100\% = 1.83\%$

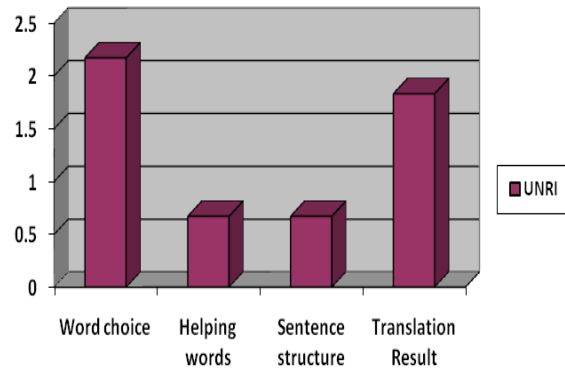


Figure 2. Results of the average level of translation errors by UNRI students

Table 2. Results of the average level of in translation by UNRI students

| No | Types Mistake | UNRI Students |
|----|--------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Choice of words | 2,17 % |
| 2 | Auxiliary word | 0,67 % |
| 3 | Sentence structure | 0,67 % |
| 4 | Translate result | 1,83 % |

Combined result of errors by USU and UNRI students

The combined percentage of errors in the translation of essays from Bahasa Indonesia into Japanese is shown in Table 3 which also displays the different abilities among them.

Table 3. Different result in translation by USU and UNRI students

| No | Types Mistake | USU Students | UNRI Students | Difference |
|----|--------------------|--------------|---------------|------------|
| 1 | Choice of words | 7,89 % | 2,17 % | 5,72 % |
| 2 | Auxiliary words | 3,89 % | 0,67 % | 3,22 % |
| 3 | Sentence structure | 0,89 % | 0,67 % | 0,22 % |
| 4 | Translate result | 3,78% | 1,83 % | 1,95 % |

Some samples of mistakes in the translation are illustrated in the following analysis as shown in (C) where students from both universities seem to have lack of experience. Word selection is the most difficult topic to do, followed by vocabulary selection and translation.

- (C) 1. The percentage of mistakes in the word selection section.

Errors by USU students : 7.89%

Errors by UNRI students : 2.17%

Level of difference : 5.72%

Two examples of errors in (a) and (b) are due to vocabulary selection (言葉使い)

a) 'I tried to take the JLPT test.'

JLPTも参加してみた。」

b) 'I'm happy because I passed the test.'
 「試験に合格して楽しいです。」

2. The difference in errors in the next rank is in the use of helping words section.

Errors by USU students : 3.89%
 Errors by UNRI Students : 0.67%
 Level of difference : 3.22%

Two examples of errors in the use of helping words (助詞) can be seen in (c) and (d).

c) 'Because I didn't really like playing outside with friends, I often read books at home.'

「昔は友達と外で遊ぶのはあまり好きじゃありませんから、よく家に本を読みます。」

d) 'My knowledge of Japan has also increased.'

「日本のことがもっと知った。」

3. The next errors can be found in the translation results.

Errors by USU students : 3.78%
 Errors by UNRI students : 1.83%
 Level of difference : 1.95%

The examples in (e) and (f) indicate mistakes that are unclear (include the translation of correct sentences, imperfect sentences due to lack of vocabulary, and several other errors.)

e) 'But I'm sure someday I will have the opportunity to visit the country.'

「いつか私はきっとその国へ行ったのチャンスがある。」

f) 'However, my parents did not have much money, so I rarely got new books.'

「でも、両親はお金持ちじゃありませんから、新しい本をもらうことがないと思います。」

4. The difference of least errors is related to sentence structure.

Errors by USU students : 0.89%
 Errors by UNRI students : 0.67%
 Level of difference : 0.22%

The examples in (g) and (h) indicate errors in sentence structures.

g) 'So that I can create motivational, easy-to-hear music that everyone likes.'

「私は動機づける音楽と、聞きやすい音楽を作るのはできるはずです、みんなの好きな音楽。」

h) 'I also want all Indonesians to have good manners like Japanese.'

「私もインドネシア人もすべて日本人のような良いマナーがあることが欲しいです。」

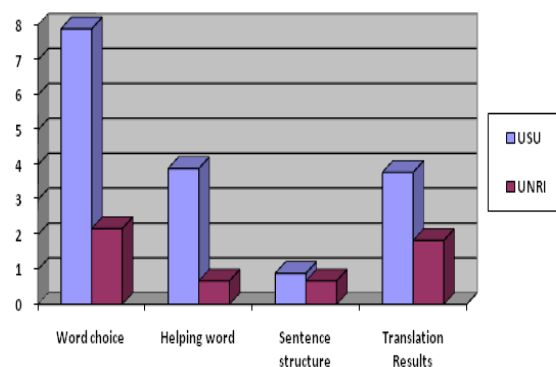


Figure 3. The average of translation errors by USU and UNRI students

Figure 3 indicates that the level of average ability in the translation from Indonesian into Japanese by students from Japanese Literature Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, USU is lower than those from Japanese Language Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, UNRI, especially in the vocabulary selection and use of helping words.

CONCLUSIONS

Errors in translations from Bahasa Indonesia into Japanese often occur in the mis-use of vocabulary, the use of words, the sentence structure, and helping words. Expressive errors, that is, mistakes that very often occur, are found because learners incorrectly express or convey their thought. Transfer errors are available because the students apply their first language patterns into foreign language. Global error is a mistake due to the impression of the meaning of the whole sentence. Textual

errors refer to errors in the interpretation of words and in the sentences that are read.

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