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AN ANALYSIS OF GOOGLE TRANSLATE ACCURACY IN TRANSLATING ENGLISH TO INDONESIAN

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji akurasi Google Translate dalam menerjemahkan bahasa Inggris ke bahasa Indonesia. Dengan semakin meningkatnya penggunaan alat terjemahan mesin dalam konteks akademik maupun sehari-hari, muncul kekhawatiran terkait keandalan dan akurasi kontekstualnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian perpustakaan, merujuk pada berbagai artikel ilmiah, dengan fokus analisis pada beberapa aspek kunci: akurasi semantik, struktur gramatikal, konteks, pilihan kata, sensitivitas budaya, dan keterbacaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Google Translate dapat menerjemahkan kalimat sederhana dengan efektif, alat ini seringkali gagal menangani ungkapan idiomatik, referensi budaya, dan struktur sintaksis yang kompleks. Terjemahan harfiah seringkali menghasilkan makna yang terdistorsi ketika pemahaman konteks tidak memadai. Selain itu, penggunaan kata yang tidak konsisten dan kesalahan tata bahasa dapat memengaruhi kejelasan dan kelancaran teks terjemahan. Meskipun demikian, Google Translate tetap berguna untuk pemahaman umum, meskipun intervensi manusia masih diperlukan untuk memastikan terjemahan yang akurat dan sesuai konteks, terutama dalam konteks akademik dan profesional.

Kata kunci: Google Translate, akurasi terjemahan, terjemahan Inggris-Indonesia, kesalahan terjemahan.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the accuracy of Google Translate in translating English into Indonesian. With the increasing use of machine translation tools in both academic and everyday contexts, concerns arise regarding their reliability and contextual accuracy. This research using library research method, referring to various scholarly articles, the analysis focuses on several key aspects: semantic accuracy, grammatical structure, context, word choice cultural sensitivity and readability. The findings show that while Google Translate can effectively translate simple sentences, it often fails to properly handle idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and complex syntactic structures. Literal translations frequently result in distorted meanings when contextual understanding is insufficient. Moreover, inconsistent diction and grammatical errors can affect the clarity and fluency of the translated text. Despite these limitations, Google Translate remains useful for general understanding, though human intervention is still needed to ensure accurate and context-appropriate translations, especially in academic and professional settings.

Keywords: Google Translate, translation accuracy, English-Indonesian translation, translation errors

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INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, the demand for cross-linguistic translation continues to grow, particularly in fields such as education, technology, and communication. One of the most widely used translation tools is Google Translate, a machine-based translation service developed by Google. Its accessibility and speed make it a popular choice among students, researchers, and the general public for translating language from English into Indonesian. as Pratama & Kuswardani (2021) Google Translate utilizes neural machine translation (NMT) technology, which allows for more accurate and natural translations by analyzing entire sentences rather than translating word by word.

However, the widespread use of Google Translate in academic and professional settings has raised concerns about the accuracy of its outputs. Accuracy in translation is crucial, as even minor errors can distort the original meaning of a source text. According to Nababan, Nuraeni, and Sumardiono (2012), translation quality is generally assessed through three key components, that is accuracy, acceptability, and readability. Pratama and Kuswardani (2021) note that, while Google Translate can provide a general understanding of a text, its lack of contextual sensitivity often leads to errors that distort the intended meaning.

In the case of machine translation, accuracy often becomes the primary concern, as machines lack contextual understanding. This is highlighted in a study by Ardi (2022), who found that although Google Translate performs relatively well in some aspects, lexical, syntactic, and semantic errors still frequently occur, especially when the sentence involves cultural nuance or humor. Meanwhile, research by Situmorang and Gani (2023) revealed that Google Translate often produces literal translations that do not align well with contextual meanings. Their study emphasized the need for deeper semantic analysis when evaluating machine translation outputs.

Considering these issues, this article aims to analyze the accuracy of Google Translate in translating English texts into Indonesian, using a library research approach. This analysis is necessary, especially as many students and academics still rely heavily on machine translation tools when learning or writing academic texts despite the fact that such tools may not always produce reliable or contextually appropriate results.

METHOD

This study employs a library research approach to analyze the accuracy of Google Translate in translating texts from English into Indonesian, based on theoretical perspectives and findings from previous research. This method was chosen because the topic is conceptual in nature and requires an in-depth understanding of translation theories, developments in machine translation technology, and evaluations presented in relevant academic sources.

According to George (2008), library research is a method that relies on written sources such as books, scholarly articles, journals, and other academic documents related to the topic under study. In this context, the researchers collected and examined various studies focusing on the accuracy of Google Translate, particularly in translating English into Indonesian. The sources used in this research were selected based on relevance, credibility, and recency (preferably within the last 10 years). The analysis process involved reading and categorizing findings from each study, followed by a comparison and synthesis of data related to the accuracy, contextual meaning, as well as the strengths and limitations of Google Translate as a translation tool.

Through this method, the researchers aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the extent to which Google Translate outputs can be considered reliable, both in academic contexts and in everyday use.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDING

This section discusses findings from various previous studies that evaluate the accuracy of Google Translate in translating texts from English into Indonesian. The discussion focuses on

three key components that significantly influence translation quality: *semantic accuracy, grammatical structure, and word choice.

DISCUSSION

Semantic Accuracy

One of the most essential elements in translation is the ability to preserve the original meaning of the source text in the target language. According to Situmorang and Gani (2023), Google Translate often produces literal translations that fail to consider the full context of the sentence. This is particularly evident when translating idiomatic expressions or culturally embedded phrases. For example, the English idiom “kick the bucket,” meaning “to die,” is sometimes translated literally into Indonesian as “menendang ember,” which makes no sense in context. Mawadda and Puspitasari (2020) reinforce this by stating, “when texts contain idioms or implicit meanings, Google Translate tends to translate them literally without considering the cultural context. Therefore, semantic accuracy remains a challenge for Google Translate, especially in translating narrative, literary, or context-sensitive content, highlighting the need for human post-editing in such cases. This demonstrates that Google Translate still struggles with conveying intended meaning in idiomatic usage.

Grammatical Structure

In terms of sentence structure, Google Translate performs relatively well when translating short and simple sentences. However, its performance declines when faced with complex constructions, such as passive voice or compound clauses. Amar (2013) noted that only 31% of its output was accurate, with 54% less accurate and 15% inaccurate. Afterwards a study by Farahsani, Asib, and Marmanto (2021), found that Google Translate achieves about 70% accuracy at the word level, but this drops to approximately 46% for phrases and more complex sentence forms.

For instance, the passive sentence “The report was written by the students” may be translated into Indonesian as “Laporan menulis oleh siswa,” which is grammatically incorrect. This error stems from the system’s limitations in recognizing passive structures and maintaining correct syntax. This shows that while the system handles individual words adequately, it still lacks the ability to reconstruct sentence-level grammar accurately in the target language. Pratama and Kuswardani (2021) also highlight that Google Translate often fails to maintain appropriate grammar and word order in long or complex sentences. Thus, human intervention is necessary to ensure syntactical clarity and correctness.

Word Choice

Choosing the right words in a specific context is a crucial aspect of quality translation. Poor word selection can lead to vague, awkward, or incorrect interpretations. Ardi (2022), observed that Google Translate often fails to select context-appropriate equivalents, especially in informal or humorous texts. For instance, the English slang “cool,” which in context might mean “great” or “stylish,” is sometimes translated literally as “dingin” (cold), which is inaccurate in such usage. These errors highlight Google Translate limitations in handling connotative or culturally influenced language. Situmorang and Gani (2023) argue that machine translation tends to prioritize lexical accuracy over pragmatic and semantic appropriateness.

The Role of Context in Translation

Context is vital in conveying accurate meaning, especially in narrative or extended discourse. However, machine translation tools like Google Translate are not yet capable of consistently interpreting contextual nuances. According to Mawadda and Puspitasari (2020), machine-generated translations often lack pragmatic appropriateness, resulting in inconsistencies and unclear expressions across sentences. For instance, translating “Break a leg” literally as “Patahkan kaki” ignores its actual use as a “good luck” wish in performance contexts. Nasution and Hasibuan (2023) also found that Google Translate fails to detect implied meanings or social

cues in extended texts, reducing the relevance of its translations in nuanced communication. This limitation becomes even more noticeable when translating longer paragraphs or texts that require cohesion and logical flow.

Pragmatic Accuracy

Pragmatic accuracy involves how well a translation reflects not just the words but the speaker's intention and social appropriateness of language. According to Syamsurizal and Kurniawan (2020), Google Translate often overlooks politeness markers, speech acts, and degrees of formality—all of which are important in many languages, including Indonesian. For example, “Could you please pass the salt?” might be translated too literally, stripping away the intended politeness and making it sound rude or overly direct. This kind of misinterpretation is particularly problematic in academic, professional, or intercultural communication where tone and formality matter greatly. Hence, while machine translation can be helpful in quick communication, it still falls short in expressing subtle interpersonal meanings.

Cultural Sensitivity

Language and culture are inseparably linked, and effective translation must account for this relationship. Nababan, Nuraeni, and Sumardiono (2012) explain that a good translation goes beyond linguistic accuracy to reflect the cultural context of the message. Google Translate, however, often renders culturally specific idioms or metaphors literally. For example, the phrase “He is the black sheep of the family” might be translated into a phrase that doesn't carry the intended social meaning — namely, someone who stands out negatively within their family. As a result, the reader in the target culture may not understand the intended implication. This limitation reinforces that cultural interpretation is an area where human translators have a clear advantage over machines.

Readability and Coherence

Readability refers to how easy a text is to understand, while coherence relates to how well ideas are logically connected. These aspects are crucial, particularly in academic and formal writing. Anggraini and Suarnajaya (2021) found that Google Translate often produces texts that are grammatically correct but feel disjointed or unnatural. For instance, when translating a paragraph from an academic paper, the machine might generate awkward sentence structures or omit linking words that help the ideas flow smoothly. Syahrial and Oktavianti (2022) confirm that the system struggles with ensuring logical progression and cohesiveness across multiple sentences or paragraphs. Consequently, although Google Translate can be a helpful starting point, its outputs should be carefully reviewed to ensure readability and logical flow.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion in this research, it can be concluded that while Google Translate performs reasonably well in translating simple sentences from English to Indonesian, it still faces significant limitations in terms of meaning accuracy, such as semantic accuracy, grammatical structure, word choice, context, pragmatic accuracy, cultural sensitivity, and readability. Google Translate lacks the ability to interpret social and cultural nuances, pragmatic tone, and discourse coherence, which are essential in professional and academic settings. These limitations affect not only the clarity and quality of the translation but also its appropriateness for formal use. Therefore, while the tool can be a helpful starting point, it should not be used as a standalone solution for high-stakes translation tasks. Nonetheless, Google Translate remains a helpful initial tool for grasping the general meaning of foreign texts. However, for academic or professional purposes, Human expertise remains crucial to ensure accuracy, appropriateness, and effective communication, especially in texts that demand precision and cultural awareness.

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