



Accuracy versus Readability: Reconciling the Two Extreme Poles of Bible Translation Versions



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Abstract

This study aims at providing scientific arguments against the phenomena that appear in the Bible translation especially the extreme poles of literal and free translation versions. These two contradictory poles can be reconciled so that the literal products are not only accurate but also readable and vice versa the products of free translation version are not only readable but has a high level of accuracy. Data is in the form of terms taken from a famous biblical text of English – Indonesian translation entitled “The Sermon on the Mount” from two different versions namely literal and free translations. This study reveals that the reconciliation process of the two extreme poles can be done through the selection of proper translation procedure and by applying the chosen procedure correctly. Based on the finding, the meeting point of literal and free translation versions lies on the literal procedure, whereas the method of choosing correct procedure in literal translation can be done by way of starting from literal procedure to the left and from literal procedure to the right for the free translation version.

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1. Introduction

It is generally known that Bible translation has been always drawn between two extremes. In one side, it is expected to be faithful to the original text believed as the sacred text or the Words of God, and on the other side, it should be communicative to the modern readers in the target language. A translation may seek to be more literal which will make it less familiar to the modern speakers or translation may seek to be more reader-friendly by using idiomatic contemporary language, in which case the translation will not follow the original language as closely. In view of this fact, some interesting phenomenon occurs regarding the two extreme poles in Bible translation. Since literal translation tends to focus attention on the message itself, in both form and content it is

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said to be higher in term of accuracy if it is compared with a free translation which is assumed as higher in term of readability.

Eventually, Bible readers are divided into two major groups, namely those who choose accuracy over readability or in contrary those who prefer readability over accuracy. According to a report by Lifeway Research on a survey of a total 2000 Bible readers as described by David Roach in the Baptist Press, “most American Bible readers....value accuracy over readability,” which is why they prefer word for word translation of the original Greek and Hebrew over the thought for thought translation. So, why do most Americans generally associate word for word translation with accuracy? Or conversely, why do some people prefer free translation compared to the literal one which is assumed to be better in term of quality? This study aims at providing some arguments to the above-mentioned phenomenon of Bible translation based on observations and research by comparing the translation products of both extremes namely literal and free versions of Bible translations.

2. Research Methods

2.1 The concepts and theoretical background

[Beekman and Callow \(1989:33\)](#) argue that a faithful translation is the one which transfers the meaning and the dynamics of the original text” and by transferring the meaning, they mean that the translation conveys the source text (ST) information to the target text (TT) reader. According to them, “only as the translator correctly understands the message, can he begin to be faithful”, and it is only then that “he can translate clearly and accurately”. [Richard et al \(1985:238\) in Nababan \(1999:62\)](#) states that readability is how easily written materials can be read and understood. About readability, [Scribs \(2011\)](#) explains that at the beginning readability is only related to the reading activity. Then the readability is also used in translation because translating is always related to reading. Basically, in translation context, the readability is not only related to the readability of the target text. This is appropriate with the reality of every translation process which always involves two languages at once.

In order to measure and compare the level of accuracy of both translation versions, the theory proposed by [Vinay and Dalbernet in Venuti \(2000:84\)](#) about seven procedures of translation is utilized to analyze the representative data at an early stage. Having learned whether the procedure used by each translation version appropriate or not, then the next step is performed by applying the theory of [Nida \(1964:165\)](#) on the principles of Formal Equivalence (F-E) and Dynamic Equivalence (D-E) to determine the level of accuracy of each translation by referring to the procedure chosen by translator. [Vinay and Dalbernet in Venuti \(2000:84\)](#) differentiated the seven procedures of translation namely borrowing, calque, literal, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation into two broad categories which can be clearly seen in the following table:

Table 1
Translation procedures according to Vinay and Dalbernet

Procedures of Translation	
Direct/Literal Translation	Oblique/Free Translation
Borrowing	Transposition
Calque	Modulation
Literal	Equivalence
	Adaptation

On the other hand, [Nida \(1964:159\)](#) proposes that there are fundamentally two types of equivalence namely F-E and D-E. F-E focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. In such a translation one is concerned with such correspondence as poetry to poetry, sentence to sentence and concept to concept. The message in the receptor language should match as closely as possible the different elements in the source language. In relation to the culture of both receptor and source language, the message in the receptor culture is constantly compared with the message in the source culture. Meanwhile, one way of defining a D-E translation is to describe it as closest natural equivalent as the source message. The translator has to be concerned with a dynamic relationship that the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message. The following is a comparison between F-E and D-E principles:

Table 2
The principles of equivalence according to Nida

Formal Equivalence (F-E) Principles	Dynamic Equivalence (D-E) Principles
Attempts to reproduce several formal elements including:	The closest natural equivalent to the source language message which contains three essential terms:
[1] Grammatical units:	[1] Equivalent, which points toward the source language message.
[a] Translating nouns by nouns, verbs by verb etc.	[2] Natural, which points toward the receptor language. It must fit:
[b] Keeping all phrases and sentences intact (i.e. not splitting up and readjusting the units) and	[a] The receptor language and culture
[c] Preserving all formal indicators e.g. marks of punctuation, paragraph breaks, and poetic indentation.	[b] The context of a particular message
[2] Consistency in word usage, and	[c] Receptor language audience
[3] Meanings terms of the source context.	[3] Closest, which binds the two orientations together based on the highest degree of approximation.

This present study is a descriptive qualitative one. The data is in the form of biblical terms which are taken from two biblical texts each of which representing the two basic orientations in translating namely literal and free translation version. The Good News Bible in Today's English Version which is translated into *Alkitab Kabar Baik dalam Bahasa Indonesia Masa Kini* is representing the free version and The Interlinear Bible Hebrew-Greek-English which is translated into *Kitab Suci Indonesian Literal Translation* is represented the literal version. The particular text used in this paper is "The Sermon on the Mount" which is in the Book of Matthew.

Based on the above, the data in this research consists of two parallel corpora of literature translations which are unidirectional. Those terms are collected from the data sources by utilizing note taking technique. The analysis activities of the data consisted three strands of activities that occur simultaneously, namely data reduction also known as data preparation or processing, data presentation, and conclusion/verification.

3. Results and Analysis

3.1 Data analysis

In order to discover the level of accuracy of each Bible translation version, a particular text had been chosen from the two Bible versions called The Sermon on the Mount consisted of 3 chapters and 111 verses. There were 26 biblical terms chosen from the text to be analyzed based on the theory of translation procedures proposed by Vinay and Darbner in Venuti (2000:84) and principles of formal and dynamic equivalences by Nida (1964). The following example shows the way how the translation products were analyzed:

Literal:	The mote	Selumbar
Free:	The speck	Secuil kayu

Table 3
The description of data sources

Target Language	Source Language		Target Language
	Literal	Free	
<i>Dan mengapa kamu melihat selumbar yang ada di mata saudaramu, tetapi tidak menyadari balok yang ada di matamu sendiri?</i>	And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?	Why, then do you look at the speck in your brother's eye and pay not attention to the log in your own eye?	<i>Mengapa kalian melihat secuil kayu dalam mata saudaramu, sedangkan balok dalam matamu sendiri tidak kalian perhatikan?</i>

Table 4
The result of the analysis in terms of procedures and principles of equivalence

Literal	Free
(SL) Mote	(SL) Speck
Modulation procedure	Modulation Procedure
(Inappropriate)	(Appropriate)
(TL) <i>Selumbar</i> (<i>Serpih kayu</i>)	(TL) <i>Secuil kayu</i>
F-E Principle	D-E Principle
Not in accordance	In accordance
(Meaning is not in SL context)	(Equivalent to SL, Natural
Less accurate	Accurate

Both “poles” of the translation versions utilize the same procedure namely modulation procedure as it is obtained by a change in the point of view which results in a grammatically correct utterance, but is considered unsuitable in the target language. Of the two types of the procedure, the translator chooses the optional one as the change occurs because of nonlinguistic reasons that are to stress the meaning or to make coherence with the context of the situation. The literal translation of the word *mote* in the literal translation version is *butir debu*. In this case the translator prefers to render the SL term *mote* or *speck* into *selumbar* in the literal translation version which is synonymous with the word *secuil kayu* in the free translation version defined by KBBI (2007) as *serpih kayu* (splinter of wood) and take the risk of changing in the point of view because he wants to make coherence with context of the particular message namely the word *beam* in the literal translation version and *log* in the free translation version.

This process of transfer in the literal translation version is totally not in accordance with F-E principles which should attempt to reproduce several formal elements in term of grammatical units, consistency in word usage and meaning in terms of the source context. In term of the grammatical unit, there is adjustment process with the omission of the definite article *the* to make it appropriate with the TL construction and there is also no consistency in word usage because the TL term *selumbar* is not the corresponding term of the SL term *mote* in the receptor document. Moreover, this “inappropriate” procedure taken by the translator does not really help the receptors to understand the word *selumbar* which is rarely used in daily conversation. On the other hand, the process of transfer in the free translation version is in accordance with the D-E principles as the rendering fulfills the three required essential terms namely equivalent, which points toward the source language context as the word *secuil* is still having equivalency with the word *speck* means a very small amount of something. The rendering is also natural as it fits the receptor culture and also the audience. The phrase *secuil kayu* should be more understandable compared with the word *selumbar*.

3.2 Discussion

Of the 26 biblical terms taken from the Sermon on the Mount text, it is interesting to be reviewed that not all biblical terms that represent the literal version utilize direct translation procedure namely borrowing, calque, and literal. Also, not all data representing free translation version are translated by using oblique translation procedures namely transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. From the finding, there is 1 term in the literal version utilizes modulation procedure and 2 terms utilize transposition procedure, which both of them belong to the oblique category. On the other “pole” of the translation versions, there is 1 biblical term translated by using calque procedure and 9 terms by utilizing a literal procedure which both of them belong to the direct category. The following table shows the characteristics of the two “poles” based on the finding of the two utilized theories namely translation procedures and F-E and D-E principles:

Table 5
The description of analysis of biblical terms

Literal Translation	Procedure	Free Translation	
F-E Principles	Direct/Literal	Oblique/Free	D-E Principles
-	Borrowing	-	
Not in accordance	3	Calque	1
7 in accordance	20	Literal	9
13 not in accordance			
Not in accordance	2	Transposition	4
			2 in accordance 2 not in accordance
Not in accordance	1	Modulation	8
			5 in accordance 3 not in accordance
-	-	Equivalence	6
			3 in accordance 3 not in accordance
-	-	Adaptation	-

As the result of the “inappropriate” procedure of translation, the product of the literal translation version is not in accordance with the F-E principles in term of grammatical unit for the two terms which utilize transposition procedure and even for the term which utilizes modulation procedure the translation product is not in accordance with the whole F-E principles. Uniquely, most of the representative data in the free translation version which are translated directly by utilizing literal translation procedure are having good quality as they are in accordance with the D-E principles for they contain the three essential terms of dynamic translation namely: 1) equivalent, which points toward the source-language message, 2) natural, which points toward the receptor language, and 3) closest which bind the two orientations together on the basis of highest degree of approximation. Of the ten terms from the free version which are inappropriately translated by utilizing direct translation procedure, i.e. calque and literal, only one translation product which is not in accordance with D-E principles as it does not contain one of the three essential term namely natural for it is translated by using calque procedure that by which the translation product still has strong foreign flavor. But the other 9 translation products which are utilizing literal procedure, which is a direct transfer of a source language text grammatically and idiomatically appropriate in the target text, they contain the three essential terms of the D-E translation.

It is also interesting to know from the result of the analysis that of the 23 translation products in the literal translation version which are translated by utilizing appropriate procedures, 16 products are not in accordance with F-E principles in terms of reproduction of grammatical unit. The two applied procedures of the direct translation category namely calque and literal translation procedures which still let unit readjustment to take place in the translation process makes the translation products are not in accordance with F-E principles. But it should be noted that the whole products in the literal translation version which are translated directly by utilizing appropriate translation procedure re in accordance with the F-E principles in terms of consistency in word usage and reproduction of meaning that refers to the source context. However, on the other spectrum of translation type namely free translation, of the 18 representative data that utilize appropriate procedures namely transposition, modulation, and equivalence, it is revealed that 10 translation products are in accordance with the D-E principles and 8 products are not in accordance with each of the tree principles.

Another important fact to be reviewed from the finding is that there is a meeting point between the two extreme poles of the translation versions that lies on the translation products which utilize literal procedure. It means that the procedure can be utilized both in the literal as well as in free translation versions but still produce translation products which have good quality in term of accuracy. Literal translation procedure as defined by [Vinay and Dalbernet \(in Venuti, 2000\)](#) is a direct transfer of a source language (SL) text grammatically and idiomatically appropriate in the target language (TL) text. This procedure, which belongs to the type of a direct or literal translation is also applicable in the free translation version because there is an element of naturalness as the translation product must be idiomatically appropriate in the target language text.

Based on the above discussion, the two extreme poles of Bible translation version can be “reconciled” by utilizing literal translation procedure. The utilization of this procedure in both versions gives a positive impact on the quality of the translation product. The following is a figure, which illustrates the finding:

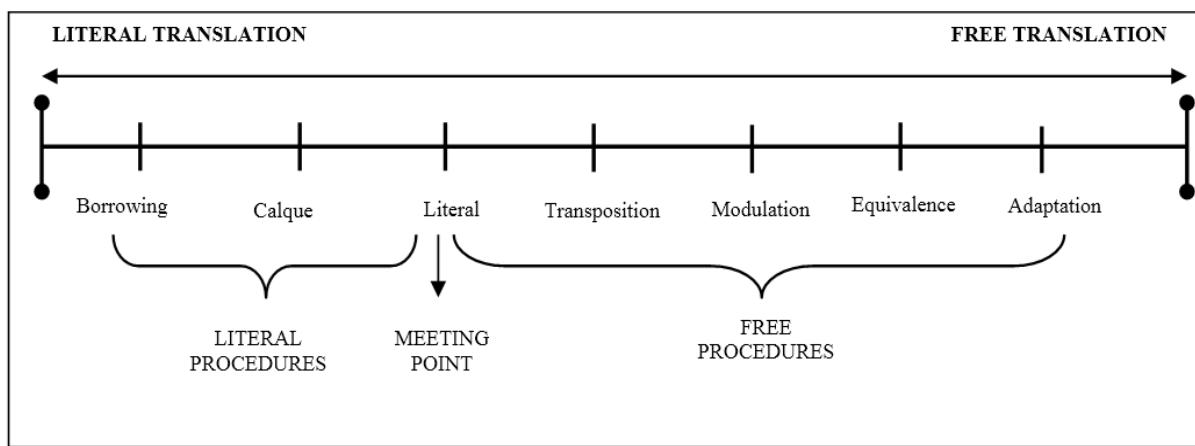


Figure 1. Finding Illustration

Here are some arguments to answer phenomenon that occur in the translation of the Bible especially the extreme poles of literal and free translation in terms of accuracy and readability:

a) A literal translation could also be readable if the translation products are generated from the appropriate translation procedures. For example, if there is still room for a translator to choose, it is recommended for him to start with the literal procedure. Consider the following example:

(SL) the Pharisees \longrightarrow (TL) Orang-orang Farisi (Calque Procedure)
 \longrightarrow (TL) Orang-orang munafik (Literal Procedure)

Similarly, a free translation could also produce an accurate product if a translator choosing a right procedure that is by starting from the literal procedure, which is the meeting point of the two translation versions. However, if the result is not natural yet, then the translator could switch to one of the free translation procedures starting from transposition to the right namely transposition, modulation, equivalence, and the last choice would be an adaptation. For example:

(SL) Those who are merciful to others → (TL) Orang-orang Farisi (Transposition Procedure)
Orang-orang yang mengasihani orang lain
→ (TL) Orang-orang yang murah hati (Literal Procedure)

b) To show good accuracy in the literal and free translation versions the translator should apply translation procedure correctly. A literal translation procedure would not produce an accurate product (according to F-E principles) if the translator does not implement procedure properly, e.g. there still readjustment unit in the translation process. The same argument can also be applied to free translation to produce a product which has a higher degree of accuracy. Consider the following example:

a higher degree of a
Literal Translation:

(SL) the hypocrites (TL) Orang-orang munafik (itu)
(SL) Barns (TL) Lumbung (lumbung)

(SE) Banks (TE) E
Free Translation:

(SL) The scribes (TL) Guru-guru agama
(SL) The scribes (TL) Ahli-ahli agama

4. Conclusion

Conclusion
The two versions of the Bible translation i.e literal and free which is described as two opposing “poles” can be reconciled or brought closer to each other in the sense that literal translation can also be readable i.e easy to understand and vice versa a free translation can also have a high-level of accuracy. The reconciliation process of the two extreme “poles” can be done through the selection of proper translation procedure and by applying the chosen procedure correctly.

Based on the finding of the meeting point of literal and free translation versions that lies on the literal procedure, the method of choosing correct procedure in literal translation can be done by way of starting from literal procedure to the left for literal translation version and from literal procedure to the right for the free translation version. This can be illustrated through the following figure:

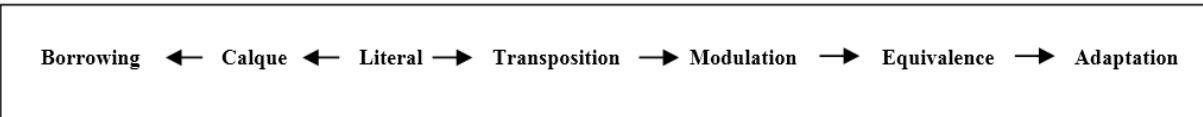


Figure 3. Finding Illustration

The two extreme poles can also be reconciled by applying the chosen procedure correctly so that the product of the literal translation is in accordance with F-E principles in terms of grammatical unit, consistency in word usage and meaning which refers to the source context. Also, the free translation is in accordance with D-E principles in terms of equivalency and naturalness.

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