

# Readability Analysis of the Imperative Verses Translation of the Holy Quran

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**Abstract:** Speeches that have certain pragmatic meanings often become obstacles in translation processes because of the absence of acceptable equivalence in target language. Based on the fact, translation does not merely exchange semantic aspects into target language. Translation also diverts pragmatic aspects that are meant in speeches. This study is descriptive and oriented on translation as a cognitive product with the design of embedded case study. The sample was chosen purposively i.e. the imperative verses that contain certain pragmatic meanings. The data used in this study consist of respondent's comprehension about the imperative verses translation measured by using cloze test. The analysis of this data is to show the degree of readability of the imperative translation verses. Other data cover the words, phrases, and clauses contained in 20 verses of the Quran's imperatives and their translations. The analysis of this data is to describe the application of translation techniques used in translating the imperative verses. The result shows that the translation of imperative verses has the acceptable degrees of readability. The translation readability presents because of the application of proper translation techniques.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The gap between language and cultural aspects of SL (source language) and TL (target language) leaves untranslatability problem. In the process, there are aspects of language and culture that are not transferred in TL. Therefore, according to Al-Shawi (2013), linguistic and cultural knowledge contained in SL and TL become a necessity in translation. For instance, according to Shanmugam (2010), the proverbs in Malay *pantuns* (a kind of traditional Malay's poem) can have a universal idea but they are often packaged in unique metaphors. With regard to the translation of the Quran, Al Farisi's research (2010) reveals that the translation by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia (*Al-Quran dan Terjemahnya*) contains literal techniques in handling the *iltifat* verses up to 60% of all *iltifat* verses translations. Al Farisi (2015) asserts that the literal tendency of *Al-Quran dan Terjemahnya* is inseparable from the ideology of foreignization underlying the translation of the verses. In addition, Garces (2008) argues that imaginary

phrases, feelings, and humors contained in Harry Potter books do not always be translated into TL. Seong's (2011) findings also explain that the meaning of a verb in Chinese is often difficult to find its equivalent in Malay.

The problem is, as Xiao-yan (2013) points out, translation errors can occur due to improper translator decisions in diverting certain cultural concepts within TL. Al Farisi's research (2013) reveals that 93.3% of the readers of *Al-Quran dan Terjemahnya* do not need a complex processing-effort to understand the translations of pragmatic meanings of *kinayah* verses about sexual intercourse. In the Quran, imperative speeches often present different pragmatic meanings from their formal forms. This study intends to reveal the readability of the translation of the Quran's imperative verses that have certain pragmatic meanings.

### 1.1 Translation Readability

Readability, according to Richards, Plat and Weber (2005, p.238), state that a text, including a translated text, is considered having a high degree

of readability when the information in it is easy to understand. Vice versa, it is called to have a low degree of readability when the information in it is difficult to understand. The readability of translation is influenced by sentence construction, including length of sentence. Usually the length of sentence in a translation text depends on the length of sentence in its source text. Sentences that are complex and too long tend to obstruct the readability of the translation. According to Flesch (2005), the average length of sentences consisting of seventeen words can present a discourse with standard readability. In addition, translation (un)readability may also be caused by factors of ambiguity, either in terms of lexical, grammatical, or stylistic. In the view of Al Farisi (2014), the degree of translation readability is related to linguistic aspects such as the use of syntactic categories, placement of syntactic functions, as well as the choice of diction, preposition, copulation, collocation, punctuation, and the like.

The degree of translation readability can be reviewed by measuring the mean length of sentences, sentence structure, and the amount of new vocabulary used. For those purposes, a translator can ask responses of a number of respondents who do not master the SL to take part in a comprehension test for translation. The comprehension test aims to know reader's understanding of translation. Therefore, as Larson (1998) points out, the comprehension test should be designed to elicit the extent to which a translated text communicates information according to the source text. Furthermore, the results of comprehension test can be used to decide the readability of the translation text.

## 1.2 Formal Imperative Form in Arabic

In Arabic, the concept of *kalam insya'iy* refers to the utterance that does not contain the possibility of right or wrong. The imperative "*Sit!*" is a *kalam insya'iy* because it does not present the possibility of right or wrong. The utterance *sit!* cannot be said compatible or incompatible with reality outside the language. As a matter of fact, the action of sitting has not been realized yet when the utterance is spoken. If the act of sitting is already realized, surely the speaker will not say *Sit!* Hence, imperative is included in the *kalam insya'iy*, which does not contain the possibility of right or wrong.

In Indonesian language, there are several terms commonly used to refer to imperative. Keraf (1980) and Moeliono (1992) use the term *kalimat perintah* (order sentence) as an equivalent of imperative. Poedjawijatna and Zoetmulder (1964) and Ramlan (1987) call it *kalimat suruh* (command sentence). Verhaar (2008) and Rahardi (2010) use the term *kalimat imperatif* (imperative sentence), which is also used to refer to the form of verbs used in imperative sentences. Based on verb presents in a sentence, imperative formal form is differentiated into passive imperative and active imperative. Active imperative can be shaped from declarative speech by dissolving the subject in the form of second person (see Verhaar, 2008), maintaining the verb form used in declarative speech, and inserting particle *-lah* to make the speech more polite (Rahardi, 2010).

Imperative is an utterance that demands interlocutor to do action as the embodiment of the superiority of speaker (Al-Hasyimi, 2016; Al-Jarim and Amin, 2014). In this case, speaker may actually be in a higher power continuum or simply feel himself superior to interlocutor (Eggins, 2004). The power continuum represents an (in)equality of social relation between speaker and interlocutor. Almost similar, Ghalayaini (2015) considers imperative as a demand for the realization of an action that has not been realized when the demand is submitted.

In practice, the meaning of a speech is not always determined by the construction of the sentence. Imperative speech also does not always present imperative meaning of command or order. Sometimes, it is intended to present certain pragmatic meaning. The presence of pragmatic meaning in an imperative speech depends on the context underlying the aforementioned. The context of a speech event is very important because it relates to the understanding of interlocutor to the meaning of speech. Mey (2008, p.38) defines the context as "the surroundings, in the widest sense, that the linguistic expressions of their interaction intelligible." This is also reinforced by 'Utsaimin (1434 H) who asserts that the meaning of an imperative speech in Arabic may be shifted from its original meaning when there are certain indications, either in context or co-text underlying the speech. According to Al-Hasyimi (2016), the presence of pragmatic meaning in an imperative speech can be understood from word, gesture, message, pattern, and context.

Al-Hasyimi (2016) divided various pragmatic meanings of imperative: (1) prayer, (2) asking, (3) guiding, (4) threatening, (5) weakening, (6) allowing, (7) equating, (8) giving lesson, (9) conferring, (10) humiliating, (11) glorifying, (12) daydreaming, (13) aligning, (14) permitting, (15) making, (16) amazing, (17) educating, and (18) opting. Other than that, Al-Suyuthi (1386 H) added two more pragmatic meanings: warning and underestimating.

## 2 RESEARCH METHOD

This study is descriptive and oriented on translation as a cognitive product. The study employed a qualitative-evaluative approach with content analysis design. The study sample consists of 20 verses of the Quran's imperatives chosen purposively based on the criteria of imperative verses that have certain pragmatic meanings. Furthermore, the study focuses on translation of imperative verses contained in *Al-Quran dan Terjemahnya*. There are two categories of data used in this study. The first is respondent's comprehension measured by using cloze test with criteria of independent ( $\geq 50\%$  correct), instructional (between 30%-49% correct), or frustrated ( $< 30\%$  correct). The second covers words, phrases, and clauses contained in 20 verses of the Quran's imperatives and their translations. The analysis of this data is to show the application of translation techniques.

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Readability deals with how readers easily understand information contained in translation. A translation is said to be easy to understand when it has a high degree of readability. The readability aspects relate to the readability of the translation language, which includes elements present in it – such as plot, sentence construction, and other grammatical elements.

This study performed a cloze test on the translation of imperative verses. The use of a cloze test is to explain whether the translation readability is at independent, instructional, or frustration levels. The independent level indicates that readers can understand the translation independently. The instructional level indicates that readers can understand the translation with

the help of others. Lastly, the frustration level indicates that readers have difficulty in understanding the translation.

Overall, the sample of the imperative verses translation has 2,660 words. In this study, the implementation of the test involves 25 respondents. After studying the translation of the imperative verses, the respondents were asked to complete parts of the translated text that were systematically emptied. The results of the test show that 78.4% of the respondents can complete the translated portions properly. This percentage indicates that the translation of the imperative verses is at an independent level, since the number of correct answers is more than half. Thus, the respondents can understand the translation of imperative verses independently without the need for help from others. This finding confirms that the translation of imperative verses contained in *Al-Quran dan Terjemahnya* has a high degree of readability.

This finding is understandable since the translation of the Quranic imperative verses in *Al-Quran dan Terjemahnya* has short sentence constructions. The construction of average sentences is considered to help the readers in understanding messages contained in the verses. According to Flesch (2005), the average sentence length of 17 words can present a discourse with standard readability. For example, the translation of the imperative verse contained in Chapter al-Mursalat verses 45-46 consists only of nine words in the first sentence, and 15 words in the second sentence.

Readability translation is also inseparable from the handling of translation units on the micro level. In other words, the application of translation techniques has implication for the degree of translation readability. The research findings indicate that transposition is one of the translation techniques that can significantly improve the degree of translation readability. Transposition technique is used to change grammatical categories, such as verb to noun, pronoun to noun, etc (see Molina and Albir, 2002). Often, changes to the grammatical category must be made due to differences in language and cultural aspects of SL and TL, especially if they come from different language families.

These differences necessarily adjust translation, at either structure or category level. Based on the research findings, transposition occurs at structure and category levels. Transposition at structure level can be

understandable considering Arabic and Indonesian have different structures. At category level, transposition occurs mostly in the deixis of persons because Arabic has a variety of pronouns. In Arabic, there are 14 pronouns that are classified based on the aspects of gender (male-female) and numeral; every verb has a pronoun; and each pronoun has different syntactic functions. Therefore, a sentence in Arabic often has many pronouns. The existence of pronouns in Arabic that is anaphorical often confuses reader when they are translated literally into Indonesian.

Linguistic amplification technique is also considered able to make the translation of imperative verses clearer. In *Al-Quran dan Terjemahnya*, the verse *وَأَسْرُوا قَوْلَكُمْ أَوِ اجْهَرُوا بِهِ* (Chapter al-Mulk: 13) is translated into *Dan rahasiakanlah perkataanmu atau nyatakanlah* (And keep your talk secret or disclose it). This translation is even considered to present the meaning of choosing, since according to Al-Tunisi (1984), the pragmatic meaning desired by this verse is equating. Here the meaning of equating is reinforced by the next verse fragment *إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ* (*Sesungguhnya Dia Maha Mengetahui semua isi hati kalian* –Verily He is the all-Knower of what is in your hearts). This fragment confirms that Allah knows everything all sorts of words, both secret and open. Thus, everything, whether these words are secret or open, must be known by God. This opinion is also endorsed by Al-Zuhaili (1418 H) who quotes from Ibn ‘Abbas explaining that the context of revelation of this verse concerns the polytheists who like to discredit the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Then, Angel Gabriel informed him of the words of the polytheists. The polytheists then whispered to each other, “You must keep silent so your words will not be heard by Muhammad’s God.” In relation to this event, Chapter al-Mulk verse 13 was revealed. According to some respondents, the meaning of equating can actually be strengthened in the translation by adding lexical element *sama saja* (all the same) by using linguistic amplification technique. The realization of the translation can be *Sama saja, kamu merahasiakan atau menyatakan perkataanmu. Sesungguhnya Allah Maha Mengetahui semua isi hati kalian* (All the same, you keep your talk secret or disclose it. Verily Allah is the all-Knower of what is in your hearts).

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The imperative verses translation contained in *Al-Quran dan Terjemahnya* has the acceptable degrees of readability. The translation readability presents because of the application of proper translation techniques. Some translation techniques, especially transposition technique and linguistic amplification technique are considered able to make the translation more readable. The use of transposition technique causes a shift in translation to be inevitable. It is understandable since Arabic and Indonesian have many differences. In some cases, the existence of additional linguistic elements is seen to be able to make the translation clearer. The presence of additional linguistic elements in the translation is done by applying linguistic amplification technique.

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