The Translation of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning Materials for Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Website: Preliminary Problems and Challenges

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Abstract

A Strategic Action Research Project that focused the needs in teaching and learning of foreign languages and translation courses concluded that students at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) belong to a new generation who are more comfortable with using technology and the internet in their learning. The research findings showed that the demand for online learning is high among the respondents. The students taking these courses use language learning websites to enhance comprehension as well as performance tasks in their learning. This article discusses a pioneer research *UKM-PTS-043-2010 in preparing materials for foreign language teaching and learning on UKM website. These will be used to assist students in learning Arabic, Korea, French and Thai. The focus of the discussion is on the communicative translation approach and also on the preliminary challenges in synchronizing and preparing the materials for the website.

Keywords: Translation, Foreign languages; Teaching and Learning Website development;

1. Introduction

The learning of foreign languages via language websites receives undue attention among students particularly students at beginner level. This is due to the nature of web-based learning that provides motivation with active and dynamic strategies. With this consideration in mind, a follow up research is being carried out with the Action Research grant UKM-PTS-043-2010 to prepare teaching and learning materials which will be uploaded to a UKM website to be developed for use by students learning Arabic, Korea, French and Thai as foreign languages in UKM. The purpose of the study is to develop a standard course content for all the languages involved and eventually to upload them to the website.
2. Literature Review

Teaching and learning with technology and the internet using the computer is a hybrid approach including in language classrooms. The integration opens opportunities to students to diversify their learning strategies and utilise all materials from internet resources. Norwati dan Zaini (2007) discussed a descriptive analysis of a translation course with hybrid learning and proposed that hybrid approach in learning using the computer including through e-forum for class discussions enables student participation to achieve e-learning.

Students perception on computer and technology-based learning is another important factor in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Ashinida et. al. (2003) suggests that Arabic language students have very high readiness for Computer-based language learning. Recent trends show that a great challenge in the teaching of foreign teaching is to fulfill students’ demands in many aspects including the approaches and teaching methods to ensure accurate planning so students will be motivated towards foreign language learning. Efforts have been made toward effective and meaningful foreign language teaching and learning. Among them is using appropriate teaching and learning methods to further motivate the learners.

The development of information and communication technology has definitely brought new challenges in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. With today’s advance technology, initiatives for application of recent methods so individuals can learn in more creative, interesting and conducive learning environment.

The use of websites has been introduced more than a decade ago and has since been integrated into foreign language teaching and learning. It enables students’ understanding due to the fact that technology application encourages maximum learning. As a pioneering research to develop a learning website for UKM, this project uses Communicative Translation framework to prepare teaching and learning materials for students to use in learning foreign languages at basic level (this effort will be extended to intermediate and advance levels). Communicative Translation is a translation method that attempts to give similar effects to translated text audience as it does to source text audience. On the other hand, semantic translation tries to produce the best meaning and syntactic of target text in translation.

Newmark (1981) proposed that communicative and semantic transfer should be well considered during translation. This is also proposed by Nida (1964) through formal and dynamic equivalence concepts. Apart from Newmark and Nida, Koller in Chesterman (1989) describes equivalence analysis in translation through discussion on pragmatic equivalence which orientates towards target orientation. The equivalence concept proposed by Koller is similar to Dynamic equivalence as proposed by Nida. More to linguistic considerations through Dynamic Communicative, Firbas (1972) states that communicative translation depends on the translation aims, context and function.

With Communicative Translation framework, the materials prepared under this project will undergo an analysis before they are edited and uploaded onto the web.

3. Background of Unit of Foreign Language and Translation, UKM

The Unit of Foreign Languages and Translation has been through various dimension since the past fifteen years of its formation. The Unit has functioned under several names of units and departments but more importantly is it has achieved an extent of milestones especially in terms of more foreign languages introduced under the unit.

The unit is now offering eight foreign languages as option courses to serve the whole student population at the main campus. The courses offered are Arabic, French, Korea, Thai, German, Spanish, Mandarin, and Japanese. The courses now offer ditawarkan di UBT ini adalah Bahasa Arab, Perancis, Korea, Thai, Jerman, Jepun, Cina, dan Sepanyol. The teaching and learning of these courses have recently incorporated hybrid approach with the introduction of internet application, CD-ROM use in classrooms and other forms of technology application.

For the beginning, only four languages i.e. Arabic Thai, Korea and French are under study in this research. Arabic is offered as a foreign language and a part from option papers, Arabic is also offered as compulsory subject at Law Faculty with all three basic, intermediate and advance levels. Arabic language learning at basic level focus more on knowledge, comprehension, oral and basic grammar application with the four language areas i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing.
Thai as a foreign language is offered at four levels: Basic Thai Language I, Basic Thai Language II, Advance Thai Language II (Reading) and Thai Language for Tourism. Basic Thai Language concentrates on speech, and for this purpose, vocabulary and simple sentence structure are introduced. In addition, Thai alphabets are also taught.

French as a foreign language offers four levels of skills. The basic courses are offered to students with no background of the language. The objective of the course is to offer an introduction, knowledge, comprehension and ability of the language at introductory level so that the students are able to learn basic speaking, listening, reading and writing accordingly.

Korea language is offered with four basic skills. Basic I and Basic II are the introductory level and they aim to enable students to pronounce and write vowels and consonants as well as vocabulary learning. Students are also taught the skills to read and write short sentences. Besides these, they are also taught expressions and lexical items frequently used in everyday communication. Text books and basic communicative skills are applied in the courses. Also included are understanding of social aspects, culture and everyday practice of the society.

4. Research Background

Based on a previous research (UKM-PTS-059-2009), it was concluded that there is a high demand of integration of website reference among foreign language students and the respondent proposed that a website is developed for foreign language learning under UKM to provide a platform for the students to learn the foreign languages based on the syllabus. This is especially so for students taking basic levels of the foreign languages as the students found that current websites do not serve the content that suits the syllabus for UKM foreign language courses.

With such consideration, the ongoing research is conducted to provide a platform for foreign language courses to share online course content so the students will be able to access it at any time to their convenience. Through the research under the code UKM-PTS-043 2010, the research team is preparing the course content as an initial effort to develop a website for foreign language learning under UKM flagship.

The main objective of the research is to develop course content for the foreign languages based on the syllabus as a template in the Malay language and henceforth to provide material for the teaching and learning of foreign languages and then translated into the foreign languages. The material will then be transferred into digital format for web application and uploaded to a website to be created for the purpose.

5. Methodology

This research uses qualitative approach and data is collected through library research by observing web development projects for foreign language teaching and learning. The course content of current syllabus of each language involved will be studied. To standardize the web content for all the foreign languages, the research team will then develop a course content in mala as a template which will focus only for basic level. The course content will be translated into the foreign languages, i.e. Arabic, French, Korea and Thai language.

6. Research findings

This article discusses a preliminary findings in developing the course content for basic level of foreign language courses. Dialogues composed in the Malay language are used as a template to standardize the web content for all the foreign languages under study in the research project. Early problems in developing and standardizing the course content for the website to be created pose challenges to the researchers. The challenges have been identified and categorized into eight sections:

1. Cultural Transplantation
2. Level of language formality
3. Lexical choice
4. Lexical generalisation
5. Use of language and gender influence
6. Use of fixed expressions
7. ‘Foreignisation’
Culture is an important issue to consider in translating from one language into another. The problem faced in transferring the dialogues also involved cultural elements to standardize the course content before the template in Malay is translated into the foreign languages. Relating to ‘restaurant’ scene, the word ‘nasi (rice) is used in the Malay template. It obviously reflects the Malay culture but the translation has to consider cultural aspects in the target dialogue. Thus this item is translated as ‘noodle’ (naeng-myeon) in Korea and ‘bread’ (le pain) in French. Such consideration is also applied for types of drinks where hot or cold drinks are common but in Arabic coffee and tea are commonly hot drinks so asking the question is avoided in the translated dialogues. This interesting cultural difference provide cultural knowledge to language learners.

The level of language used in the preparation of the template in Malay is another significant factor that the research takes into account. To prepare a dialogue within a context is important in the sense that it influences the level of formality in the dialogue. For the dialogue at the supermarket, the language use is semi-formal compared to dialogues at the hotel therefore the research team has to consider the level of formality appropriately so that the dialogues are more natural.

Correct lexical choice in transferring the course content is a must to ensure that the translation caters to the grammatical or stylistic demands of the target languages. For instance, in Malay, ingin, mahu, and hendak may be used interchangeably while in Korea language the Malay version of ‘saya mahu kopi’ (I ‘want’ coffee) should be translated as ‘saya ingin kopi’ (I ‘would like’ coffee).

In developing teaching and learning materials in the form of dialogues from the Malay language, the researchers found that there needs to be consideration of general and specific lexical items. For instance, the different types of coffee such as expresso, black coffee are substituted with the general lexical item coffee; likewise LRT and commuter are replaced with the general term train.

The research also takes into account the part of the course content in terms of use of language related to gender influence. For example, in a dialogue with a scenario at the university, there was a question on the number of male and female lecturers. This type of question is inappropriate in French language and in fact can be a sensitive issue; while in Arabic and Thai such question is very relevant to the culture of the language speakers in terms of gender segregation. The decision made was to discard such content to avoid inappropriate content.

The use of fixed expressions is important in preparing the course content in terms of dialogues. In French and Arabic, fixed expressions are commonly used in everyday conversation. For example; bon voyage (farewell), ma’as salamah, Allah ma’ak (Allah be with you), bon journee (have a good rest). Although the use of such fixed expression is rather awkward and unnatural in the Malay language, the team decided to include such expressions in the template.

With due considerations, the research concluded that in preparing the dialogue template in Malay, there is a need to include foreign elements before they are translated into the foreign language. As the dialogues are prepared by the foreign language researchers, the template has some form of foreign language influence. However, editing will be done by Malay language experts to ensure that the template is of acceptable quality before it is translated into the target languages.

7. Conclusion

The problems and the challenges in developing the course content are important aspects to be considered for foreign language learning and teaching before the development of the website. The discussion above shows that foreign language learners face more than learning a language but also to understand about the language, the culture and all factors related to language. Appropriate and suitable learning materials as well as strategic teaching methods including web-based learning play an important role to ensure that students receive encouragement and motivation in foreign language learning. Thus, this study investigates preliminary problems and challenges in developing learning materials for foreign language students in UKM before they can be used on UKM website for online learning. Most importantly, the problems and challenges provide a basis for the development of good and quality teaching and learning materials for foreign language students, ultimately producing UKM graduates with foreign language skills to compete in the global market.
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References


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