

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the research, including the background, research questions, objectives, significance, scope, and definition of key terms. It introduces the topic of humor translation through machine translation tools and explains the rationale for focusing on acceptability in translated humor. The chapter also outlines the research gap, highlighting why this study is important within the field of translation studies and English language education.

A. Background of the Study

Translation plays a crucial role in bridging communication between people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is not merely a process of substituting words from one language into another but an act of transferring meaning and intention. According to Newmark, translation is “rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text.”¹ Similarly, Larson defines translation as the process of transferring meaning from the source language (SL) into the receptor language (RL) by maintaining the original message as accurately and naturally as possible.² Over time, translation studies have shifted from a purely linguistic focus toward a more pragmatic and functional perspective. Nord emphasizes that translation

¹ Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1988), p. 5.

² Mildred L Larson, *Meaning-Based Translation : A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence* (Lanham, MD : University Press of America, 1984), p. 3.

should be viewed as a purposeful activity, one that considers the communicative intent, audience, and cultural context of the target text.³

In the digital era, the growing demand for fast and accessible translation has led to the rise of machine translation (MT). MT refers to the automatic translation of text by computational systems without human intervention.⁴ Its usage has expanded rapidly, especially in educational contexts. For instance, a study by Utimadini reports that MT is commonly used by students and researchers to translate academic texts such as articles and research papers.⁵ Among the most widely recognized MT systems are Google Translate, DeepL, and ChatGPT, each representing a different generation of translation technology. Google Translate, developed by Google Inc., has become a dominant global tool due to its accessibility and multilingual coverage, especially among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.⁶ DeepL, a neural MT developed in Germany, is often praised for producing more fluent and idiomatic translations that are contextually natural.⁷ Meanwhile, ChatGPT, as part of the newest generation of large language models (LLMs), produces translations that reflect nuanced understanding and stylistic adaptation,

³ Christiane Nord, *Text Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology, and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-Oriented Text Analysis* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), p. 45.

⁴ Federico Gaspari and W. John Hutchins, 'Online and Free! Ten Years of Online Machine Translation: Origins, Developments, Current Use and Future Prospects', *MT Summit XI*, 2007, 199–206.

⁵ Nindya Juwita Utimadini, 'Exploring Perceptions Of Machine Translation As A Tool For Efl Learning', *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa*, 12.2 (2023), 484–94.

⁶ Gaspari and Hutchins.

⁷ V Macketanz, A Burchardt, and H Uszkoreit, 'TQ-AUTOTEST: Novel Analytical Quality Measure Confirms That DeepL Is Better than Google Translate', *Nd*, 2021, 7.

simulating near-human understanding in interpreting meaning.⁸ Despite these advancements, previous studies show that MT systems still struggle to handle creative and culture-dependent texts such as humor, where meaning and effect rely heavily on context, culture, and pragmatic cues.

In translation studies, acceptability has emerged as one of the key indicators of translation quality. Nababan, Nuraeni, and Sumardiono define acceptability as the degree to which a translation adheres to the linguistic norms, cultural expectations, and naturalness of the target language.⁹ A translation is considered acceptable if it reads naturally and aligns with the conventions of the target culture. Low directly links humor translation to acceptability, stating that “If a joke is not translated as a joke, the translation is bad.”¹⁰ This statement highlights that even when a translation is accurate in meaning, it fails if the audience does not recognize the humorous intent. Therefore, in humor translation, acceptability becomes more significant than mere accuracy or readability.

Humor, as a linguistic phenomenon, is one of the most complex and culture-bound aspects to translate. According to Attardo and Raskin’s General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), humor often depends on script opposition, logical mechanisms, and shared cultural references that may not exist in another

⁸ Yousef Sahari, Abdu M. Talib Al-Kadi, and Jamal Kaid Mohammed Ali, ‘A Cross Sectional Study of ChatGPT in Translation: Magnitude of Use, Attitudes, and Uncertainties’, *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 52.6 (2023), 2937–54.

⁹ Mangatur Nababan, Ardiana Nuraeni, and Sumardiono, ‘Pengembangan Model Penilaian Kualiatas Terjemahan’, *Kajian Linguistik Dan Sastra*, Vol. 24.1 (2012), 39–57.

¹⁰ Peter Alan Low, ‘Translating Jokes and Puns’, *Perspectives*, 19.1 (2011), 59–70.

language.¹¹ Chiaro adds that humor is inherently bound to social and cultural contexts, making it difficult to reproduce in another linguistic environment without loss of effect.¹² Within this framework, stand-up comedy serves as an authentic and dynamic form of humor because it integrates verbal creativity, timing, gestures, and audience interaction. Unlike written jokes that exist in isolation, stand-up comedy involves performance-based humor that is spontaneous, context-rich, and deeply tied to cultural experiences. Therefore, analyzing humor from stand-up comedy provides a realistic representation of how humor functions in everyday communication.

The translation of humor, whether by humans or machines, presents distinct challenges. Human translators often rely on creative strategies, such as adaptation or reformulation, to preserve both meaning and comic effect.¹³ Machine translation, on the other hand, tends to process language literally, often missing pragmatic cues, idiomatic subtleties, and cultural connotations that trigger humor. Recent studies reveal that while AI-based MT systems like ChatGPT can generate grammatically correct and coherent translations, they still struggle to maintain the humorous intent or evoke the same emotional response as the source text.¹⁴ This limitation makes humor translation a unique

¹¹ Willibald Ruch, Salvatore Attardo, and Victor Raskin, 'Toward an Empirical Verification of the General Theory of Verbal Humor', *Humor*, 6.2 (1993), 123–36.

¹² M. Dore, 'Delia Chiaro (Ed.): Translation, Humour and Literature, Volume I. Continuum, 2010.', *Applied Linguistics*, 33.4 (2012), 459–62.

¹³ Patrick Zabalbeascoa, 'Translating Jokes for Dubbed Television Situation Comedies', *Translator*, 2.2 (1996), 235–57.

¹⁴ Hussein Abu-Rayyash, 'AI Meets Comedy: Viewers' Reactions to GPT-4 Generated Humor Translation', *Ampersand*, 12 (2024), 100162.

testing ground for evaluating how “acceptable” AI-generated translations can be.

Several studies have examined humor translation in both human and AI-generated contexts. Prior research by Ardi et al. revealed that machine translations of humorous texts could convey meaning but often failed to achieve naturalness, indicating medium-level quality and the need for post-editing.¹⁵ Similarly, Rudenko and Semenova found that AI-translated jokes tended to sound literal and less humorous compared to human translations.¹⁶ In contrast, Calvo-Ferrer reported that audiences often could not distinguish between human and ChatGPT-generated subtitles, suggesting that AI systems have reached near-human fluency but still lack pragmatic sensitivity.¹⁷ However, only a few of these studies have addressed humor translation from the perspective of acceptability, especially in the Indonesian context and within authentic, spoken humor such as stand-up comedy.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on examining the acceptability of humor translation from English to Indonesian produced by Google Translate, DeepL, and ChatGPT. The data are drawn from Paul Snyder’s stand-up comedy video, which provides authentic and culturally diverse humor. By focusing on acceptability, this research aims to reveal how far MT systems

¹⁵ Havid Ardi and others, ‘Can Machine Translations Translate Humorous Texts?’, *Humanus*, 21.1 (2022), 99.

¹⁶ Elena S. Rudenko and Marina Yu. Semenova, ‘Artificial vs Human Intelligence: A Case Study of Translating Jokes Based on Wordplay’, *Research Result. Theoretical and Applied Linguistics*, 10.4 (2024), 53–93

¹⁷ José Ramón Calvo-Ferrer, ‘Can You Tell the Difference? A Study of Human vs Machine-Translated Subtitles’, *Perspectives*, 32.6 (2024), 1115–32.

are capable of producing natural and contextually appropriate translations that preserve humorous effect. Furthermore, the findings are expected to provide new insights into the performance of AI-based translation tools, particularly within the Indonesian EFL context, where understanding translation acceptability can support the teaching of language, culture, and pragmatics.

B. Research Questions

1. How acceptable can machine translation translate humor from English into Indonesian?
2. Which machine translator can perform best overall in preserving the intended meaning and effect?

C. Research Objectives

1. To examine the acceptability of humor translation produced by machine translation from English into Indonesian.
2. To compare overall performance of machine translations in producing acceptable humor translations, and to identify which machine translator performs best.

D. The Significance of Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This research is expected to contribute to translation studies by offering insights into the acceptability of humor translation generated by different machine translation tools. It also highlights how AI systems such as Google Translate, DeepL, and ChatGPT handle culturally bound elements like

humor, thereby enriching academic discussions on translation quality assessment.

2. Significance for Students

This study exposes students to the concept of translation acceptability and the criteria used to evaluate it, which are important competencies in professional translation practice. Understanding why certain translations are judged as unnatural or inappropriate by native speakers helps students develop a deeper sensitivity to register, cultural context, and pragmatic meaning, skills that are essential not only for translation but for language learning and intercultural communication more broadly. It is hoped that this research can motivate translation students to engage critically with MT tools rather than relying on them uncritically, and to recognize the irreplaceable role of human judgment in producing high-quality translations.

3. Practical Significance for Teachers

The findings of this study may help prospective English teachers in choosing the most suitable MT tool to support classroom practices. With such knowledge, teachers can design test items, classroom activities, or teaching materials involving humor with greater confidence, knowing which tool can provide more acceptable outputs. Moreover, by incorporating translated stand-up comedy as authentic material, teachers can enhance students' understanding of pragmatics, intercultural communication, and critical language awareness.

4. Significance for Future Researchers

This research also provides a foundation for future studies, offering opportunities to explore other dimensions of translation quality such as accuracy and readability, or to investigate different genres of humor. It serves as a useful reference for those who wish to examine AI translation performance in Indonesian EFL contexts or in media beyond stand-up comedy.

E. Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focused on exploring the acceptability of humor translations produced by machine translation systems. The scope of machine translation tools is also limited to three widely used systems: Google Translate, DeepL, and ChatGPT. Furthermore, the study investigates translation from English into Indonesian, since the researcher is a native speaker of Indonesian and therefore able to more accurately assess the naturalness and cultural appropriateness of the translations. As for the data, this research focuses on humor taken from stand-up comedy performance by Paul Snyder, which provide authentic, spontaneous, and context-rich humorous language. These delimitations are intended to narrow the focus of the study while ensuring the feasibility and depth of the analysis.

F. The Definition of Key Terms

1. Acceptability

Acceptability in translation refers to the extent to which a translation sounds natural and conforms to the linguistic and cultural norms of the

target language. A translation is considered acceptable if it does not feel foreign to target readers.¹⁸

2. Translation

Translation in this study refers to the process of changing speech or writing from a source language into a target language. Newmark defines translation as rendering the meaning of a text in a way that fulfils the author's intention and conveys the message acceptably.¹⁹

3. Machine Translation (MT)

Machine Translation is the use of computer algorithms and artificial intelligence to automatically render text from one human language into another without direct human intervention.²⁰

4. Humor

Humor can be understood as the use of language, situations, or expressions that create a comic effect, often based on incongruity, exaggeration, or wordplay.²¹

5. Stand-Up Comedy

Stand-up comedy is a form of live comedic performance in which a comedian delivers a monologue before an audience, typically drawing on observational humor, cultural references, and wordplay.²²

¹⁸ Nababan, Nuraeni, and Sumardiono, 'Pengembangan Model Penilaian Kualiatas Terjemahan', *Kajian Linguistik Dan Sastra*, Vol. 24.1 (2012), 39–57.

¹⁹ Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1988), p. 5.

²⁰ Gaspari and Hutchins.

²¹ Ruch, Attardo, and Raskin.

²² Oliver Double, *Getting the Joke: The Inner Workings of Stand-up Comedy (2nd Ed.)* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014).