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Investigating the Transcription and Translation's Issues for an Australian PhD Conducting Interviews in Bahasa Indonesia

Nurianna Thoha

School of Business and Management
Institut Teknologi Bandung

Abstract

This paper discusses the issue of interviewing in a language other than English for a PhD study in an Australian university. The particular case of interviewing in Bahasa Indonesia language is discussed. The research paradigm is interpretive and the methodology is qualitative. This leads to the key issue of interpreting interviewees' constructed meaning within one language and then through a process of translation providing an interpretation of meaning in a second language which remains 'true' to the original meaning offered by participants.

The data were collected from seven large Indonesian Companies by using semi-structured interview which gave respondents the opportunity to tell their stories based on their own experiences because this study follows the tradition of 'giving voice' to respondents. Eighty-eight interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and all were recorded. All eighty-eight interviews were personally transcribed by the researcher. This ensured confidentiality and allowed the researcher to get close to the data which facilitated sorting, coding, and analysis. The transcription process involved an interpretive translation process from Bahasa Indonesia to English requiring extensive local knowledge not easily available to Western researchers.

The focus of this paper is on the difficulties that emerged during the transcription process since it involved a translation from Bahasa Indonesia to English. Because of different language structure between Bahasa Indonesia and English, a conscious research decision was made to create the second language translations as what I have termed 'Bahasa English'. This hybrid language used English but with the nuances and language flow of Bahasa Indonesia. Other challenges were encountered during *the analysis stage, which include not all Bahasa Indonesia's words can be translated to English, and there are some terms that are used differently in Bahasa Indonesia and in English. The need to develop a sound basis with English-only speaking supervisors led to the development of some analysis strategies which will be reported in this paper.*

Key Words: transcription, translation, English, Bahasa Indonesia

1. Introduction

There are many International students undertaking Master by research and PhD programs in Australian Universities, particularly at Curtin University. They have to conduct a research for writing their thesis. Some of them apply quantitative approach, while others apply qualitative approach. Most of them collect the data in their home country. For them who conduct qualitative approach, interviews are normally used to collect the data. This means English is a second language for the interviewees; therefore, the local language is used because most of them cannot speak English. Even though some of them can speak English, usually they prefer to speak their local language. One of the reasons is they do not feel comfortable to speak in English. If this situation occurs, they will not able to express everything they want to say. This is consistent with Halliday and Hasan's (1976) statement, that naturally, language is used for framing of thoughts and for the conveyance of thoughts for some purpose in social interaction and "language serves for the expression of the speaker's experience of the real world, including the inner world of his own consciousness" (Darwish 2003, p.22).

The interviews are recorded and afterwards need to be transcribed. The transcriptions can be done in two methods. The first method is to write the transcripts in the local language. The alternative method is to translate and transcribe the interviews into written English.

Applying the first method which is writing the transcripts in the local language may be easier for the researcher. However, it may cause some potential problems. One of the problems is the Supervisor and Co-Supervisor will not necessarily understand the language, because most of them speak English or other languages which are different from the local language used in the transcripts. This will lead to a difficulty in the supervisory process of writing the thesis. Another potential problem is in managing the transcripts using text management system such as NvivoTM since the software is built or structured in English.

This paper discusses the second method of the transcription where the research context is the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and then translated and transcribed into English. The paper draws on the researcher's personal experience when she did the translation and transcription of the interview results.

There are three reasons to write the transcripts in English. First, the researcher wants to obtain an optimum supervision from the Supervisor and Co-Supervisor in writing the thesis. Secondly, the transcripts or interview data are managed by using NvivoTM software, which is in English. Thirdly, the thesis is written in English and the quotations are also presented in English.

2. The Study

2.1. Approach

The interviews were conducted to investigate the HRM (Human Resource management) practices in seven large Indonesian Companies. The ontology of this study is constructivist and it lies upon understanding that reality is socially constructed, thus the ontology is constructivist. The constructivist approach is designed to incorporate multiple realities/views of the human resource management practices. This is parallel with Denzin and Lincoln's statement as follow:

"*The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and subject create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedure. Findings are usually presented in term of the criteria of grounded theory*" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994, p.13-14).

The multiple realities are found in different data sources which comprise of HR (Human Resource) Directors, HR General Managers, HR Managers, Line Managers, HR Supervisors, and HR staff.

The epistemology is interpretive since the knower (the researcher) and the subjects (the interviewees) create the understandings through the interaction between the knower and the subjects. Therefore, a qualitative methodology is the most suitable approach of the constructivist and interpretivist such this.

Moreover, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that the findings are usually presented in term of the criteria of grounded theory. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) grounded theory is a process that facilitates the generation of the theory from data that is systematically obtained from social research. Generating theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts come from the data and are systematically worked through during the course of the research. The main idea of grounded theory is that the discovery of meaning as constructed by social actors should be conducted by a researcher who does not have any preconceptions about the task carried out. But according to Whiteley (2004) there are some difficulties when applied to the business setting. She argues that since business research begins with defining a problem or issue, the term grounded research is used as an alternative to grounded theory. This study is using the generative aspects of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967) both purposive theoretical sampling and content analysis.

2.2. Research Design

"The purpose of the research design is the logical sequence that connects field data to a study's initial research questions and ultimately to its conclusions" (Whiteley 2002, p. 9, lecture note).

The research design had three tiers. The first tier was literature study followed by the formation of research questions. The preliminary fieldwork was then conducted and the results were analysed to confirm the research question. The second tier was data collection; both primary data (interviews) and secondary data (HR documents) were collected. The interview data were transcribed and analysed.

using content analysis (Holsti, 1969). Analysis was also conducted for the HR documents following Altheide (1996). These lead to the third tier, which were findings followed by discussion using theoretical sensitivity.

This paper will discuss the issues which came up when the researcher conduct the second tier of the research design, especially in translating and transcribing the interviews.

2.3. Data Collection Method

The study was conducted in seven large Indonesian Companies which are referred as Company A, B, C, and Sugar Group Companies which comprise of Companies D, E, F, and G. The interviews were conducted in these Companies, mostly at HR Departments. This study utilised a semi-structured interview since business research usually begins with a define problem or issue (Whiteley, 2004). The semi-structured interview is referred by King (1994) as a structured open-response interview. The semi-structured interview was chosen since it enables the researcher to ask open-ended specified questions which allow the researcher more freedom to explore and probe the issue as indicated by May (1997). Moreover, according to Patton (1990) it keeps the interaction within boundaries whilst leaving room to probe as suggested by Berg (1989). On the other hand, the interviewees have an opportunity to tell their stories based on their own experiences since this study follow the tradition of 'giving voice' to respondent (Charmaz, 2000).

Eighty-eight interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and all were recorded. According to Sack in Silverman (2000), the advantages of recording the interview are: first, by studying tapes of conversations the researcher is able to focus on the 'actual details' of one aspect of social life. Secondly, they can be replayed and transcriptions can be improved.

Eleven interviews were conducted in Company A, fourteen in Company B, twenty-four in Company C, and thirty-nine in Sugar Group Companies. The respondents comprise of HR Directors, HR General Managers, HR Managers, Line Managers, HR Supervisors, and HR staff. The length of the interviews varies greatly: from twenty to ninety minutes, depending on the importance of the job. The interviews with the HR Directors and HR Managers mostly took around sixty to ninety minutes. Meanwhile, the interviews with the HR staff took around twenty to thirty minutes.

2.4. Data Analysis

All eighty-eight interviews were personally transcribed by the researcher. This ensured confidentiality and allowed the researcher to get close to the data which facilitated sorting, coding, and analysis.

The text data generated from the eighty-eight interviews comprised of 600 pages typed in a single space. Since the length of the interviews varies greatly, the length of each transcript varies from four to thirty pages typed in a single space. These texts were managed using NvivoTM version 2.0 as the text-management system (Richards, 1999). The data then were analysed using content analysis as explained by Patton (1990, p.381) "Content analysis is the process of identifying, coding, and categorising the primary patterns in the data. This means analysing the content of interviews and observations". Content analysis following Grounded Theory protocols was used. The process is described in table 1.

Table 1. Analysis Process (Model Adopted from Whiteley (2004, p.38))

Utterance to codes to categories
Categories to concepts
Constant Comparison
Constant questioning

In this study the content analysis utilised the interviewees' perspective (words) that leads the development of codes and categories. The data were coded using open-coding process consistent with a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The coding was conducted with no predetermined codes and allowed the preliminary codes to emerge from the data (Glaser, 1992). The codes were then reconsidered so that the categories were compared and integrated in a way that reflects theoretical sensitivity in developing the concepts. Thus, the coding process goes through four steps: code, categorise, apply constant comparison and constant questioning, and conceptualise the idea.

3. The Transcription Process

All Company A's interviews were transcribed in Bahasa Indonesia first and then they were translated to English. Meanwhile, other Companies' interviews were transcribed directly in English. The reason to do that is when the first time the researcher did the transcription she found out that to transcribe an interview was not as easy as she expected. She found out that the interviewees spoke so fast and sometimes some parts of the interviews were hard to listen. She had to rewind the tape five to ten times to be able to make a verbatim transcript of one medium length sentence. This situation is in line with Silverman's (2001) argument which indicates that transcription is a multi-layered process which requires several hearings of the text. Therefore, she decided to transcribe the Company A's interviews in Bahasa Indonesia first because she was not confidence to do the transcription directly in English. She spent five days of seven hours working per day to transcribe the first interview which transcript comprises of thirty pages.

However, the researcher found out that her transcription's ability was getting better as she did more transcriptions. After she finished doing all of Company A's transcripts, she translated them to English. Having done these, she found out that it was very time consuming. She worried that she would not have enough time to finish her PhD program if she conducted the same transcription process for other Companies' interviews. Therefore, after consulting to her Co-Supervisor she decided to do the rest of the transcriptions directly in English.

The transcription process involved an interpretive translation process from Bahasa Indonesia to English requiring extensive local knowledge not easily available to Western researchers. This leads to the key issue of interpreting the interviewees' constructed meaning within one language and then through a process of translation providing an interpretation of meaning in a second language which remains 'true' to the original meaning offered by the interviewees.

The researcher was confidence to do the transcription and the translation at the same time because she is a bilingual. Other reason is after doing the transcriptions and translations of Company A's interviews she knows what she needs to do. However, there were some difficulties in doing that process and these will be described later in this paper.

4. The Translation Process: Theory and Practice

"Translation is a communication process that involves the transfer of a message from a source language to a target language" (Darwish 2003, p.21). Hartmann in Darwish (2003) indicates that the most important steps in translation theory are to go beyond the comparison of different textual versions and linguistic systems towards an understanding of how the translation operates in totality of all communicative interaction, how the communication can take place when different codes are involved, and what the mediating translator does to bring about the communication in the target language.

According to Darwish (2003), in the translation process, the translator possesses two set of parallel linguistic and cultural repertoires. Each repertoire has a subset of components and units with codes and flags embedded in each one of them. When the translation analysis begins, the two parallel repertoires move constantly to match and replace lexis, grammar, stylistic, phonology, cultural, and situational equivalents and to give universal concepts language properties (see figure 1).

Darwish (2003) suggests that the travel path is not always in one direction. It is in fact bi-directional even when translation occurs in one direction. The action-reflex mechanism works like a pendulum which shifting back and forth from one language set to the other, with the translator constantly referring back to the source text. Translation is a cumulative process, therefore the more experienced and better equipped a translator is, the faster the action-reflex movement will be. In practice, the researcher found that the more she transcribes the interviews the faster the transcription and translation process is, especially after she used a transcriber machine which help her to move backward and forward of the interviews' records.

Darwish (2003) argues that in the bilingual mind, one language always tries to dominate and displace the other. He further explains that at any one time, bilinguals (and translators) do not think of things in two languages simultaneously. For example, looking at a book, a bilingual person (or a translator) does not see the book as a "book" and "buku" (book in Bahasa Indonesia) at the same time, but either. For the switch between languages to happen, the bilingual (translator) has to become aware of the switch. For the translation to occur, the translator's mind has to be primed.

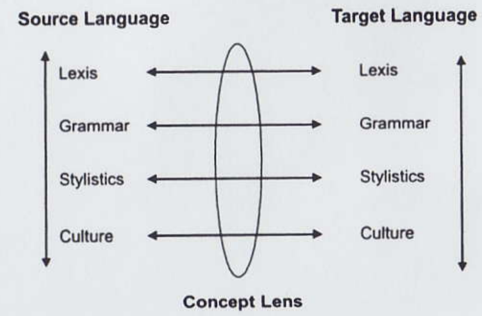

Figure 1. The Transfer Process (Source: Darwish (2003, p.24))

Translation can not begin unless the translator becomes aware of his or her intention to translate, which triggers of the translation process. The translator has to switch into what Darwish (2003) called the translation mode. He argues that prior to the switch the translator is locked into a monolingual mental frame of reference. The translator is neither aware nor capable of translating naturally between two languages unless he or she makes a conscious decision to switch into the translation mode and starts the translation process. This switch is basically a recognition-priming operation that triggers the two language systems in juxtaposition to one another in readiness for translation and brings the translator online (Darwish, 2003).

The researcher was grown up in Indonesia, therefore Bahasa Indonesia is dominant to her. However, when she did the transcription, she had been staying in Australia for two years and this influences her English's ability. Supporting Darwish's (2003) statement, every time she did a transcription she was fully conscious to switch her mind for the transcription and translation process to happen. This condition helped her a great deal in doing the transcription and translation process well.

On the other hand, Gerloff in Darwish (2003) indicates that translation does not get easier with experience. She continues her argument that while certain aspects of the translation process become easier as the translator gains experience since they become more automatic and more routine, other aspects become more complex and time consuming. This statement is in line with Johnson-Laird's (1995) statement which indicates that we have no difficulty in choosing words appropriate to our communication purposes or in grasping the meaning of words in other people's utterances. But if we were asked the meaning of a word, we would have to stop and think about the matter. Therefore, he cautions that "such oddities should not be lightly put aside" since "they provide important clues to the underlaying nature of human mentality" (Jonson-Laird 1995, p.205).

In practice, the researcher experienced the "caution" mentioned by Johnson-Laird (1995) as above. She tried to transcribe and translate the interviews verbatim, but most of the time when she considered the meaning of the words in the whole sentence, it did not make sense. Therefore, after consulting to the Co-Supervisor, she applied an interpretive translation to make sense of the translation without changing the meaning offered by the interviewees. This is supported by Darwish (2003) who discusses that translation is a dynamic, complex phenomenon. It engages a host of multidimensional interdependent and interconnected activities that operate at different levels and dimensions of the translation process. He argues that during the translation process, the translator might find it is necessary to intervene the original text in order to complement and make whole the meaning of the intended message and provide the adequate context. He further argues that such translatorial intervention is legitimate if a natural equivalent is not available in the target language. However, translatorial interference where the translator intentionally interferes with the text thus compromising the information integrity of the original text and distorting or obscuring its intentions is not acceptable at all since it forces the translation outside the parameters of the original texts.

5. The Difficulties in Doing the Transcription and Translation

There were many difficulties that emerged during the transcription which involve the translation process from Bahasa Indonesia to English due to the differences between the two languages. Some of them are:

a. The word and language's structures of Bahasa Indonesia and those of English are different. For example: "sport shoes" (in English), is translated in Bahasa Indonesia "sepatu olah raga" (= shoe sport); "right hand" (in English) is translated in Bahasa Indonesia "tangan kanan" (= hand right). Therefore, the researcher has to think very carefully about the word and language structure when she translated the interview from Bahasa Indonesia to English.

b. The grammar of Bahasa Indonesia is very simple compared to that of English. In Bahasa Indonesia there is only one kind of verb which is all verbs are stated in "present tense". To tell something in the past or in the future we only need to add one adverb that indicates the time. Meanwhile, English has: simple present, present continuous, perfect present, continuous perfect present, simple past, continuous past, perfect past, continuous perfect past, simple future, continuous future, perfect future, and continuos perfect future (Darwish, 2003). Therefore, in doing the transcription sometimes the researcher found difficulties in choosing the right grammar in English.

c. Bahasa Indonesia does not differentiate man and woman (he and she) as a subject or an object but only use one word "dia" (means she/he depends on the conversation's context). It is a common mistake for Indonesian to refer "he" to all genders.

d. Bahasa Indonesia does not have plural form, it only has singular form. We only need to add a number to say something plural. Another common mistake for Indonesian is to say 10 apple as it is applied in Bahasa Indonesia instead of 10 apples as that of in English.

e. Most of the interviewees spoke using informal language, local languages and slang; therefore not all of the words they used can be translated to English. For example: lha, deh, kok, lho, kan, teh, and anu.

f. However, some of the slang can be translated, such as: he-eh (ya = yes), engga (tidak = no), nah = thus, gitu (begitu = like that), gini (begini = like this), kayak (seperti = looks like), tu (itu = that), ni (ini = this), kalo (kalau = if).

g. Interviewees used different terms that include such as shown in table 2.

Terms Used by the Interviewees	Terms in English
Incentives	Subsidies
Mutated	Transferred
Listener	Observer
Propose	Recommend
High school graduates	High school leavers
Unit	SBU
Decision Letter	Formal document of decision or outcome or the HRM activity of translating decisions into a written form.

Table 2. Different Terms Between Bahasa Indonesia and English which were Used By the Interviewees

h. Interviewees did not speak straight to the point, instead they used flowery language. For example: In Bahasa Indonesia is said "let him stand on his own two feet", instead of "let him stand on his feet" or "let him stand" (in English).

i. It is very common for Indonesian people to say "kita" or "kami" (= we) but actually what they mean is "I". Therefore, we have to know the context of the conversation.

j. Points a - i above lead to another difficulty which is to get the right meaning.

6. The Resolutions

Because the language structure is different between that of Bahasa Indonesia and that of English, a conscious research decision was made to create the second language translations which I called 'Bahasa English' or "Bahasa Australian" which means the hybrid language using English but with the nuances and language flow of Bahasa Indonesia. For example:

//.......for formal education, not yet. But we give them opportunity. Say, for instance, he asks for permission to go to study after 4:30. He can go and leave his job.// (A4, pr.84)

//yes as long as it is right, meaning the superior thinks of the same, it will be supported. In essence, the superior will decide it, and admit that you need this, meaning the initiative can come from employee, it is not impossible like that. For instance, an employee says that I don't understand taxation, how about if I want to joint the course? Then the superior will see it and agree, ok, you can go.// (A3, pr.177)

// the communication. There are many regulations and policies which got negative responses from the employees. They judged us and we tried to explain about that to them. If there is any problem, they have their perceptions and judgments, and we have to explain it again to them. That's an invisible problem, but we try to face that judgments and perceptions.// (B13, pr.104)

// first I was annoyed, but I learn a lot from that. So I try to think that they don't know, my job is not to be angry and annoyed. We try to think from their side, we explain it to them. After we tried our best but they still act like that I think I have to let it go. But from that I learn, next time I have to do better. Maybe I didn't explain it too well, the sentences in the decision letters maybe could be interpreted in different ways, maybe I was not well prepared, and so the results are not maximal. So we have to do self introspection.....// (B13, pr.108)

To avoid misinterpretation due to different terms between Bahasa Indonesia and English used by the interviewees, the researcher provides a table of different terms between Bahasa Indonesia and English (Table 2).

7. Conclusion

The challenge for all qualitative researchers in interviewing in either English or another language is to discern, to fully interpret, and to generate authentic participant meaning. Research process decisions must be made which contribute to meeting this challenge most effectively. Whilst other choices could be equally viable, this research selected the strategy which led to the generation of a 'study-specific' translated language which I have termed 'Bahasa English' or 'Bahasa Australian'. This constructed language best represents the construed and constructed meanings of the study participants.

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