

**SEMANTIC TRANSLATION ERRORS AS A RESULT OF  
GOOGLE TRANSLATE  
(A CASE OF ERRORS OF TRANSLATION ON HOMONYMOUS  
AND POLYSEMOUS WORDS IN BAHASA INDONESIA)**

**Nur Jamilah**

*University Of Pesantren Tinggi Darul Ulum Jombang*

*keplighting\_mila@yahoo.com*

**Abstrak**

Inti penerjemahan adalah mencari kesepadanan antara bahasa sumber (SL) dan bahasa sasaran (TL). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis terjemahan kata homonim dan polisemi dalam Bahasa Indonesia (SL) ke dalam bahasa Inggris (TL) melalui program *Google Translate*. Penelitian ini difokuskan pada pengamatan terhadap kesalahan semantik umum, khususnya kesalahan semantik yang disebabkan oleh program *Google Translate* ini. Ruang lingkup dalam penelitian ini adalah semantik, penerjemahan, homonimi dan polisemi, dan ambiguitas. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Program *Google Translate* cenderung secara harfiah daripada kontekstual. Hal ini menyebabkan ambiguitas. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, diharapkan penelitian selanjutnya akan menganalisis berbagai makna kalimat, seperti makna pragmatis, makna disengaja, makna konotatif, makna denotatif, makna sosial, makna deiktik, dsb. Selain itu, diharapkan bahwa riset ini berguna bagi programmer komputer untuk membuat program baru yang canggih untuk meminimalisir kesalahan dalam penerjemahan.

**Kata Kunci:** homonimi, polisemi, *Google Translate*

## INTRODUCTION

Communication is a really important part in human lives. People transfer their idea through languages. In understanding the different languages people need to transfer the source language into target language which they understand well. That is called translation.

“Translation” has been variously defined and, not infrequently, in dictionaries of linguistics, omitted entirely and the following definitions have been selected partly because they are, in some sense, typical and partly because they raise issues which we will be pursuing in detail later. Translation is the expression in another language (or target language) of what has been expressed in another, source language, preserving semantic equivalences. Roger T. Bell (1997: 5).

In the case of words and phrases, semantic theory covers meaning properties and meaning relations. Words have *meaning properties* (such as ambiguity, or having a

meaning). For example, words may be *homophonous*, that is they may have identical pronunciations but have distinct spellings in the written language, such as *Mary*, *marry* and *merry*. Two words with the same spelling (and pronunciation) are *homonymous* (i.e. they are *homonyms*). An often-cited example of homonymy is the word *bank* referring to the side of a river, versus the word *bank* referring to a financial institution. (Akmajian, 2001: 239)

Homonyms are different words that are pronounced the same, but may or may not be spelled the same. *To*, *too*, and *two* are homonyms despite their spelling differences.

When a word has multiple meanings that are related conceptually and historically, it is said to be polysemous. For example, *guard*, *music*, and *rot*. Each of these words is polysemous because each has several meaning.

One of technology improvement nowadays is *Google Translate*, this is one of machine translation. *Google Translate* is a service provided by Google Inc. to translate a section of text, or a webpage, into another language. *Google Translate* has its own translation software. The translations delivered are quite good indeed, though not perfect of course. (*Google Translate*. Google. <http://translate.google.com/>. Retrieved on 2009-01-24).

It also has its drawbacks, or limitations. While the outcome when translating the homonymous and polysemous words in *Bahasa Indonesia* constructed in sentences is truly good enough, it does not always deliver completely accurate translations, given that it does not apply grammatical rules. When translating homonymous and polysemous words in *Bahasa Indonesia*, *Google Translate* applies literal translation and this causes ambiguity.

Here are some results of *Google Translate* in translating polysemous words in *Bahasa Indonesia* that are constructed in sentences:

#### 1. Bisa

- Saya sudah **bisa** menyetir mobil. (bisa berarti dapat dan bermakna denotasi)
- Tetanggaku terkena **bisa** ular yang mematikan.(artinya racun makna denotasi)
- I have **been able to** drive a car. (Can means can and meaningful denotation)
- My neighbor hit by a deadly snake **venom**. (Meaning poison meaning denotation)
- pada saat saya sedang jalan saya digigit oleh ular dan **bisa** ular itu terasa masuk kedalam tubuh saya, untung saja ayah saya **bisa** segera menolong saya dengan membawa saya ke rumah sakit.
- on my street when I was bitten by a snake and that snake **venom** into my body feels, it's lucky my father **could** soon help me by bringing me to the hospital.

## 2. Rapat

- Jarak keduanya semakin **rapat**
- Paman Charles menghadiri **rapat** rutin guru
- Distance of both the **meeting**
- Uncle Charles to attend regular **meetings** of teachers.

From the results of *Google Translate* above, the researcher could conclude that in some cases *Google Translate* translates the Indonesian polysemous words constructed in sentences literally (in a case in translating *rapat*) and contextually (in a case in translating *bisa*). When *Google Translate* translates it literally, this will create semantic error. That is ambiguity, namely lexical ambiguity. As translating *rapat* into English.

Despite the fact that ambiguity in language is an essential part of language, it is often an obstacle to be ignored or a problem to be solved for people to understand each other. This paper concerns with the result of Google translate towards homonymous and polysemous words in *Bahasa Indonesia*. The focus is on the semantic translation errors occur in translation process. That is lexical ambiguity. A lexical conception of polysemy was developed by Pateda (2010:214), in the form of lexical implication rules. These are rules that describe how words, in one lexical context, can then be used, in a different form, in a related context.

A word, phrase, or sentence is ambiguous if it has more than one meaning. Obviously this definition does not say what meanings are or what it is for an expression to have one (or more than one). (Pateda,2010: 202).

Although errors in translation, especially by machine translation, may create confusing languages. But many people still harness it. Because, it is efficient, practical, and economical way in translating. On the other hand, machine translation can not be hold as the only one media in translating. Because it can not show completely proper translation.

## Google Translate

[Web](#) [Gambar](#) [Maps](#) [Buku](#) [Terjemahan](#) [Blog](#) [Gmail](#) [selengkapnya ▼](#)

Google **terjemahan**

Coba peramban baru dengan terjemahan otomatis.  
[Unduh Google Chrome](#)


Dari: Bahasa Indonesia ▼ Ke: Inggris ▼ [Terjemahkan](#)


Ketikkan teks atau alamat situs web atau [terjemahkan dokumen](#).


**Menerjemahkan lebih dari 50 bahasa**

mijn vriend now Простите ηρωή Wie bitte? παραλία  
escargots hello مرحبا χρισμός hoje está ensolarado  
Vaer så snill miracoloso बन्दर सु तु ¿Cómo estás?  
La voiture Je parle un petit peu français. Comment allez-vous ?

**Lakukan banyak hal dengan Google Terjemahan**

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**Apa sih artinya?** Pasang [Google Toolbar](#) supaya Anda tidak perlu kesulitan lagi dengan kosakata bahasa asing.
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**Cari resep sushi terbaik di dunia, tentunya dalam bahasa Jepang!** Bebaskan kekuatan [Penelusuran yang Diterjemahkan](#) Google.
- 

**Bangun bisnis global Anda.** Iklankan ke berbagai bahasa menggunakan [Google Peluang Pasar Global](#).
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**Jangkau pengunjung internasional.** Tambahkan teks terjemahan ke [video YouTube](#) Anda.

*Google Translate* is a service provided by Google Inc. to translate a section of text, or a webpage, into another language. The service limits the number of paragraphs, or range of technical terms, that will be translated. It is also possible to enter searches in a source language that are first translated to a destination language allowing you to browse and interpret results from the selected destination language in the source language. For some languages, users are asked for alternate translations such as for technical terms, to be included for future updates to the translation process. Text in a foreign language can be typed, and if "Detect Language" is selected, it will not only detect the language, but it will translate into English by default. (*Google Translate*. Google. <http://translate.google.com/>. Retrieved on 2009-01-24).

## METHODOLOGY

The method of this research is descriptive qualitative. It attempts to shed light on phenomena by studying in depth a single case example of the phenomena. The case can be an individual person, an event, a group, or an institution. Creswell (2003:181), the data collected involve text (or word) data and images (or picture) data, and qualitative data is usually in forms of word rather than numbers. The main data is the result of translation of the homonymous and polysemous words constructed in sentences. The secondary data is validated by Lia Wahyu Andika, S.S., an alumnus of UNESA 2000. Faculty of *Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*. She was born on 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1979. Her address is on Mojokerto. The

first instrument is test of translation used as a parameter to analyze the errors. The test will include 100 selected homonymous and polysemous words in *Bahasa Indonesia* constructed in sentences. The second instrument is *Google Translate 2011* which is one of the newest versions of machine translation software. This program will be used to translate the test sentences into English. This program is also called the automatic translation which has important aim in translation process.

## ANALYSIS

There are two tables in this subchapter. The tables are the data which have been classified based on the class, homonymy and polysemy. They consist of the root word, the meaning, the sentences as the SL (Source Language) and the result of *Google Translate* translation as the TL (Target Language).

This subchapter consists of the description of the result of *Google Translate* translation as the TL (Target Language), and the classification of the errors. The contextual meaning structures based on the dictionaries (Oxford Dictionary, English-Indonesian dictionary, and Indonesian-English dictionary) and the interpretation of the cause of the errors by this program.

Table 1 describes the result of *Google Translate* translation on homonymous words constructed in sentences into English. There are a hundred of homonymous words chosen from *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*. Based on the findings, from a hundred of homonymous words in *Bahasa Indonesia*, *Google Translate* **does not succeed translating eighty eight homonyms** into English correctly. This because *Google Translate* only recognizes the dictionary meaning or literal meaning. It ignores the functional meaning of the word in the context of the sentences.

For some cases, *Google translate* is able to translate the homonym only for certain context but for another, it finds it difficult to transfer correctly. For example, the word “kapal” is only recognized by *Google Translate* as “ship”, whereas when the word “kapal” stands in sentence “Kulitnya banyak ditumbuhi kapal”, the program still translates it into “ship”, actually “kapal” in this context is defined as an area of hard thickened skin, especially on the feet or hands.

“Kapal” is translated into “ship” because *Google Translate* cannot define whether it is used in the same context as the definition of *ship* or not. When *Google Translate*

translates “kapal” as “ship” in all contexts, *Google Translate* applies Literal Translation that causes literal meaning.

*Google Translate* is able to translate a word in one context but not for the others. It also occurs when *Google Translate*

#### 4.2.1 The Causes of Errors of *Google Translate* Translation on Homonymous Words

No.	Causes of Errors		Homonymous Words
1.	Lexical factors	1. The use of the word in different context	Aji, abu, abuk, acap, adu, ampuh, bakir, cicil, comel, endap, etiket, gaung, hak, halaman, hemat, igau, incar, kaca, kantin, kapal, kasa, kornet, lampas, lamun, lantam, lapis, layang, malang, pastel, pasang.
		2. The word is used in different environment/field	Abang, acung, awan, abu-abu, badar, badik, bakik, bala, balas, cerucup, dengus, efek, gabak, gabus, gading, gaduh, ganggang, ganja, juara, kapuk, katak, lalang, lambung, lapang, manila, merak.
		3. Because of the word's metaphor	Demam, madu.
2.	The grammatical factors	1. The lexeme is given affix	Adat, badai, karang, kebut, lalang, lapah, larik.
		2. The difference between the word's part of speech	Awang, acara, aci, aci-aci, adat, badai, bagal, balas, comot, dedak, gabak, garing, indah, jujur, karang, koreng, lalai, lalang, lancang, lapang, latah, lebam, magang, majelis, malam, marah, mobil, padi.

The table shows the semantic causes of errors in *Google Translate* translation on a hundred of homonymous words in *Bahasa Indonesia* constructed in sentences into English. It is classified into two, the lexical factors and the grammatical factors. Based on the data above, the errors in *Google Translate* translation commonly relate to the lack of ability in translating the word based on the functional meaning.

The translation of *kaca*, for example, clearly proves that the program cannot translate correctly due to **the changes in the word's use that resulted in a new meaning**. Based on the findings, *kaca* in the sentence, *Sedari tadi ia bersolek di depan kaca* is translated *He'd been primp in the mirror*. Mirror here is contextually correct, mirror means *a piece of glass with a shiny metallic back which reflects light, producing an image of whatever is in front of it*, but when it is used to express *muka (halaman buku)*, as in the sentence, *Pak Guru meminta siswa untuk mempelajari kaca 15-20 sebagai materi yang akan diujikan besok*. The program translate it literally, *The teacher asks the students to*

learn the glass 15-20 as a material that will be tested tomorrow, glass means a hard transparent material which is used to make windows, bottles and other objects. The word kaca in that sentence contextually means page (of book, etc.) not “glass” which is completely cannot fulfill the meaning of the sentence.

The same thing also occurs when translating *malang*, the program translates *malang* in sentence *Batang dan dahan kayu yang malang itu mengganggu arus lalu lintas* (Stems and branches of wood that poor disrupt traffic flow) *malang* is translated as *poor*. Whereas “poor” means *having little money and/or few possessions*, this meaning does not agree with the sentence, so it is not contextually translated, *malang* in that sentence must mean *across* (from one side to the other of something with clear limits, such as an area of land, a road or river). Google Translate translates the word “malang” in that sentence with the same definition on the word “malang” in the sentence *Ia selalu ditimpa nasib yang malang* which is “unfortunate”, means “unlucky or having bad effects”. Therefore the translations of *kaca* and *malang* are definitely incorrect because it does not convey the functional meaning.

The next problem with the result of *Google Translate* is that this program cannot translate **the word that is used in different environment**. The word *ganggang* for example, in the sentence, *Ganggang adalah salah satu tumbuhan yang kaya akan serat alami*, “ganggang” is translated into *Algae*(very simple, usually small plants that grow in or near water and do not have ordinary leaves or roots) this is the correct form, whereas *ganggang* in the sentence *Ia mengintip dari ganggang pintu*(He peered from algae door), “ganggang” is incorrectly translated into “algae” in this sentence. “Ganggang” in this case is *space between two objects*. The word *ganggang* used in the first sentence has completely different function from that in second sentence. It proves that *Google Translate* is not able to determine the same word in different environment.

The program also incorrectly translates the word “bala” in the sentence “Semua sikap buruknya telah mendatangkan bala terhadap hidupnya” translated into “all the bad attitude reinforcements have been brought disaster on his life”. *Reinforcement* means *soldiers sent to join an army to make it stronger*, based on this meaning, taken from Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, it does not fit with the sentence. “Bala” in the sentence above should be translated into “misfortune” which means “bad luck, or an unlucky event”. Meanwhile the sentence *karena perang sudah memanas, ketua memutuskan untuk memanggil bala* is translated *because the war was heating up, the*

*chairman decided to summon reinforcement*, reinforcement in this context is correctly transferred. So, it can be concluded that *Google Translate* cannot transfer correctly the word “bala” which means “bad luck, or an unlucky event”.

Besides the two problems above, another problem is the incorrectness in translating **the word that stands along with its metaphor**. The word *madu* in *Jane menjadi madu suami tetangganya sendiri* is translated into *Jane became husband and neighbors own honey*. “Honey (*n*)” means “a sweet sticky yellow substance made by bees and used as food”, whereas “madu” in that sentence means “co-wife”. If the word “madu” is used in the sentence “Madu sangat bermanfaat bagi kesehatan”, so this translation is correct, because “madu” in this sentence means “a sweet sticky yellow substance made by bees and used as food”. But if “madu” which mean “co-wife” is also translated into “honey”, they are completely different. Because, *madu* in the first sentence is idiomatic expression and it cannot be translated literally. This proves that *Google Translate* cannot recognize metaphorical meaning.

The program also does not succeed translating **the word that is given affix**. The word *adat* is attached by (*me-*), resulting in the word *mengadat*, structures in sentence *menurut adat disini, calon pengantin tidak boleh bertemu sebelum ijab*, and in the sentence *karena sudah tua, motor itu sering mengadat*, the word *adat* in the first sentence is translated into “custom” which means “a way of behaving or a belief which has been established for a long time”, this word can be recognized by *Google Translate* correctly. Whereas, when the word “adat” is attached by a prefix (*me-*) resulted in the word *mengadat* constructed in the second sentence above, the program is not able to recognize the word. are not recognized by the program. *Mengajaibkan* in the first sentence functionally means amazing or miraculous, and in the second context means to consider as an amazing thing.

When translating **the word structured in different part of speech**, the program also finds it difficult. The word *lahir* (*verb*) in sentence *Bayi mungil itu telah lahir ke dunia* is functionally translated by the program, *lahir* is translated as *born*. But when *lahir* (*noun*) in sentence *Semoga kalian diberi kebahagiaan lahir dan batin*, the program remains translating it as *born*, in fact it must be the different term, *outward* or *outer*.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the significant errors arisen is the lack of ability in translating the polysemous words contextually or functionally. It happens because this program applies *literal translation method*, in which the SL grammatical construction are



converted to their nearest TL equivalents, but the lexical words are again translated singly, **out of context**. That is why the translation results in *literal meaning* not *functional meaning*.

#### 4.2.2 The Causes of Errors of Google Translate Translation on Polysemous Words

No.	Causes of Errors		Polysemous Words in Bahasa Indonesia
1.	The lexical factors	1. The changes in the word's use (in different context)	Abu, acap, abang, agah, amin, bahasa, baik-baik, bakat, dating, dekat, dongeng, erat, gaet, habis, hampa, jambul, karut-marut, kadar, kacau, kabur, kosmopolitan, lagi, lakon, lancer, lalu lalang, langsung, lapang, langkah, makan, padu, parah, parut, payah, sesak, rapat, tarak.
		2. The word is used in different environment	Ajang, ampu, anak, bakal, datuk, debit, flamboyan, fraksi, gemuk, juru kunci, kotak, lagu, paham, partai.
		3. Because of the word's metaphor	Bak, darah, duduk, galak, hanyut, amplop, kecap, jungkir balik, kepala, kosong, kotor, koyak, kursi, lagu, lambung, main, mabuk, mata, pendam, rel.
2.	The grammatical factors	1. The lexeme is given affix	Amin, ajaib, badai, datang, datuk, duduk, kepala, langkah.
		2. The difference between the word's part of speech	Kali, lahir, paham

The table shows the semantic causes of errors in *Google Translate* translation on a hundred of polysemous words in *Bahasa Indonesia* constructed in sentences into English. It is classified into two, the lexical factors and the grammatical factors. Based on the data above, the errors in *Google Translate* translation commonly relate to the lack of ability in translating the word based on the context where it stands (Functional meaning).

The translation of *abu*, for example, clearly proves that the program cannot translate correctly due to **the changes in the word's use that resulted in a new meaning**. Based on the findings, *Abu* in the sentence, *setelah kebakaran besar, kini rumah megah itu tinggal abu*, means *ash*, but when it is used to point *debu*, as in the sentence, *Seragam kamu kotor oleh abu*. It is not *ash* anymore, but the contextual meaning must be *dirt*.

The same thing also occurs when translating *acap*, the program translates *acap* in both sentences, 1. *Dia terjatuh dan kakinya acap di dalam lumpur*. 2. *Setelah diguyur hujan deras, desa itu pun acap*, with *often*, whereas *acap* in the first sentence, contextually means *be stuck in something* and *acap* in the second sentence means *be under water*. Therefore the translations of *abu* and *acap* are definitely incorrect because it does not convey the functional meaning.

The next problem with the result of *Google Translate* is that this program cannot translate **the word that is used in different environment**. The word *debit*, for example, in

the sentence, *nominal debit yang harus ia bayar sebesar lima juta*, means *debit (Financial term)*, whereas *debit* in the sentence *Setelah diguyur hujan deras semalaman, debit air di danau itu meningkat drastis* means *discharge (of water)*. *Debit* used in the first sentence has completely different function from that in the second sentence.

Besides the two problems above, the other problems are the incorrectness in translating **the word stands along with its metaphor**. The word *darah* in *Mulutnya terus-terusan berdarah* means *bleed (to lose blood)*, whereas in the sentence *Dia memang berdarah pengajar*, it means *talented*, in the third sentence *Anak itu berdarah bangsawan*, defined as *descent*, and also the improper translation on **the word that is used variously to save the use of the word**. In sentence *Anak kecil itu terus menangis karena ditinggal orang tuanya*, the program is able to recognize *anak* as *little boy*. But when the word *anak* is followed by *gedongan*, the program translates it literally, *son Gedongan*, whereas the functional meaning is *the offspring of the wealthy*. The same case occurs in the word *anak gelap*, the program translates it *the son of the dark*, functionally *anak gelap* is translated by *illegitimate son*.

The program also does not succeed translating **the word that is given affix**. The word *ajaib* is attached by (*me-kan*), resulting in the word *mengajaibkan*, structures in sentence *Kejadian itu sungguh mengajaibkan*, and in sentence *Kita tidak perlu mengajaibkan apa yang dilakukannya*, the word *mengajaibkan* in both sentences are not recognized by the program. *Mengajaibkan* in the first sentence functionally means *amazing or miraculous*, and in the second context means *to consider as an amazing thing*.

When translating **the word structured in different part of speech**, the program also finds it difficult. The word *lahir* (*verb*) in sentence *Bayi mungil itu telah lahir ke dunia* is functionally translated by the program, *lahir* is translated as *born*. But when *lahir* (*noun*) in sentence *Semoga kalian diberi kebahagiaan lahir dan batin*, the program remains translating it as *born*, in fact it must be the different term, *outward* or *outer*.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the significant errors arisen is the lack of ability in translating the polysemous words contextually or functionally. It happens because this program applies *literal translation method*, in which the SL grammatical construction are converted to their nearest TL equivalents, but the lexical words are again translated singly, **out of context**. That is why the translation results in *literal meaning* not *functional meaning*.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the errors analysis of homonymous and polysemous words structure in *Google Translate* Indonesian into English translation, the research has found that *Google Translate* program is not able yet to translate a hundred of homonymous and polysemous words that are created by the changes in the word's use, the word is used in different environment, the word's metaphor, one word has several meanings, is given affix to the lexeme, and the word in different part of speech. Because *Google Translate* can create lexical ambiguity, it is suggested to the language users not to rely only on *Google Translate* in translating any SL. For example when translating the word *indah* (verb) in sentence *tiada ia indah kepadaku*, it is literally translated by *Google Translate* program, *indah* (verb) is translated as *beautiful*, just as the same result when translating *indah* (adjective). Whereas *indah* as verb contextually must be defined as *pay attention* or *heed*. It clearly provrs that the best translation is human translation. It is also expected that the next research will analyze the various meaning in sentence, such as pragmatic meaning, intentional meaning, connotative meaning, denotative meaning, social meaning, deictic meaning, and so on. Since Semantics has a very broad study in meaning. Furthermore, it is expected that it will be useful for computer programmer to create new advanced programs in order to minimize errors.

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