GOVERNANCE THROUGH TRANSLATION: POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

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ABSTRACT

The research investigated how translation functions as an object of governance in Brunei Darussalam, guided by the polysystem theory. Translation served as a critical component within the communication framework, affecting domains like education, economy, and information technology. Applying qualitative-descriptive methods, including experiential insights and observational data, the research explored how translation activities were regulated and integrated across government institutions to promote social cohesion, accessibility, and national development. In Brunei, translation was essential for ensuring effective communication in legal, health, and religious contexts. Key government entities, such as the Language and Literature Bureau and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, managed translation units to support these functions. The analysis underscored how translation aligned with the national objectives of Brunei Vision 2035, aiming at a high-quality education, improved quality of life, and a sustainable economy. Results reveal that effective translation practices foster social cohesion, equitable access to public services, and national development. Continuous assessment, technological advancements, and human resource development are crucial for maintaining and enhancing the effectiveness of translation as an object of governance. Brunei's case sheds light on the transformative potential of translation as a powerful tool for governance and holistic development, fostering cultural preservation and inclusivity. The research significantly contributes to the broader discourse on how effective translation governance can facilitate sustainable national progress and cross-cultural understanding.

Keywords: translation policy, goverment policy, translation practices, Brunei Darussalam

INTRODUCTION

The translation process serves as a linchpin in the intricate web of a vast communication network that spans various domains and fields (Pym, 2011). These domains encompass different aspects of the translation process, including translation function, product quality, strategies and conventions underlying the translation process, translation training, translation aids, and translation critique (Toury, 1995, 2021). Each network element is interconnected and evolves in the temporal and spatial change framework. While the fundamental functions, elements, and translation processes are universal, their dynamics in specific regions, like Brunei Darussalam, differ from those in other countries. These dynamics, molded by translators, editors, publishers or producers, and audiences, are inevitably navigated by the policies and regulations set by the government. Hence, a conducive translation ecosystem relies on good governance in managing various aspects of the translation process and network. Good governance also determines the functionality scale of translation practice, especially in terms of domains, types of translation activities, market, and infrastructure provision, including training, wages/rates, and accreditation.

Beyond serving as a means of imparting knowledge and facilitating community engagement,

translation and language-related activities are integral to the progress of nations. Translation activities can contribute to various aspects of national development, including education (Karjo & Metta, 2019; Sipayung, 2020; Winiharti, Syihabuddin, & Sudana, 2021), creative cultural economy (Agung, 2022; Romdhati, Nababan, & Santosa, 2018; Sembiring & Sitinjak, 2019), and information technology development (Pratiwi & Khatib, 2021; Sipayung, 2023) to name a few. In recent decades, translation activities have also emerged as a flourishing industry, as experienced in Taiwan with its massive translation projects for publications strategy (Hassan, 2011), Japan for its language-related software and video gaming translation industry (O'Hagan, 2016; Sakamoto, Yamada, & Burnicle, 2019; Sakamoto & Moriguchi, 1999), and Germany with its localization and language services (Qualitäts Sprachendienste Deutschlands e.V., 2021; Qualitätssprachendienste Deutschlands, 2020; Slator, 2021). In Brunei Darussalam, a petrostate with less than half a million population, translation activities are dominated by government institutions as objects of governance. Translation practice is vital in promoting social cohesion and ensuring equal access to public services. In line with the country's National Vision 2035, efficient translation practices in official and administrative matters facilitate and promote diversity, fairness, and effective communication within the fabric of governance. This research comments on how translation practice is utilized as an object of governance within Brunei's settings by showcasing how translation activities are integrated into various government institutions and contribute to the country's social, cultural, and economic landscape.

In understanding the dynamics at play within this translation ecosystem, Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory (Chang, 2001, 2010, 2011; Even-Zohar, 1979, 2005; Shuttleworth, 2019) provides a valuable lens in illuminating the sociocultural, economic, and political dimensions shaping the translation landscape. Polysystem theory, first developed in the late 20th century, offers a comprehensive approach to exploring the interplay between various systems of literature and culture in a given society. At its core, the polysystem theory posits that society comprises multiple systems with norms, values, and expectations concerning literature and culture. Even-Zohar categorizes these systems into literary polysystems, with literature as the central focus encompassing high literature, popular literature, and other forms of artistic expression. These systems interact dynamically, shaping and influencing each other. This theory further suggests that translations play a critical role in facilitating the exchange of ideas and cultural elements between these systems by introducing works from one system to another. It also serves specific functions within a given literary system such as literary prestige, filling gaps in the target system, and cultural enrichment. In his extended work, where these systems expand beyond translation, he presents a scheme for the constitutive factors involved in any socio-semiotic (cultural) event

(Even-Zohar, 1997) comprising producer, institution, repertoire, market, product, and consumer. When applied to translation governance, polysystem theory, especially through its institution and repertoire components, aids policymakers and institutions in recognizing the intricate relationships between these systems. The repertoire, for instance, which designates the rules and instruments needed in the production and consumption of translated materials can determine the status and utilities of these materials within a society.

In Chang's (2001, 2011) revisit of Evan Zohar's polysystems theory, he provides a comprehensive framework known as the 'macro-polysystem', in which he describes six polysystems governing translators' activities and products. These polysystems, namely political, ideological, economic, linguistic, literary, and translational, have their own norms and ways of functioning that affect how translations are public. Understanding these systems and how they operationalize is crucial for developing effective translation-related policies that respect cultural diversity while fostering cross-cultural communication. By having a language or education policy conducive to translation activities, for instance, the promotion of knowledge transfer via literary (and non-literary) materials will be more efficient, especially in terms of the provision of skilled human capacities and mechanisms dealing with quality control. Similarly, by acknowledging the existence of multiple literary systems and their influence on language norms, policymakers can dialectically craft language policies that reflect the cultural richness of a society. In short, polysystem theory provides a comprehensive framework beyond a simplistic view of translation as a mere linguistic transfer. The theory offers a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of translation within a cultural and societal context.

In Brunei's translation ecosystem, each element is not only interconnected but also embedded within a broader temporal and spatial context. The polysystem theory becomes particularly relevant in understanding how translation functions as an object of governance in a broader setting involving policies and regulations, distribution of human resources and capabilities, and markets or audiences. While this theory unravels the intricate relationships between translated texts and the socio-cultural and political systems governing their production and reception, it also aids in deciphering how policies and regulations set by the government act as guiding forces, influencing the functionality scale of translation practice in various domains. It sheds light on how translation, as a socio-cultural practice, is tightly interwoven with governance structures, impacting accessibility to public services and contributing to the broader discussion of sustainable development goals' journey. Hence, the research focuses more on the political component of this macro-polysystem and how it governs the activities and products of translators in the country.

METHODS

The research applies a qualitative-descriptive method follows the general procedures for any empirical research encompassing research conceptualization, systematic data collection, operationalization of research procedures, and interpretation based on findings. To begin with, the conceptualization of the research includes the selection of theoretical concepts and relations. For the research, the governance of translation in Brunei is perspective using the polysystem theory, specifically macro-polysystem, with norms originating from the political and ideological polysystems, which are made up of institutions of power and ideologies sponsored by different groups.

Secondly, a systematic collection of data is in the form of archival materials such as institutional websites, statutes, statistical reports, journalistic as well as academic articles. In the research, data are mainly derived from the Written Constitution of the State of Brunei 1959 (revised 2004) to highlight the magnitude of official languages in shaping the language policy and language use in the country, needed as the basic main tool for translating; official websites from the government offices to indicate the various in-house subsidiaries operating translation activities; official documents and press releases to showcase how translation activities are utilized in health communication, propagation of Islam, media and communication, higher education institutions, and info-communication technologies; as well as academic articles to compare notes how these practices are experienced worldwide.

Thirdly, the data are analyzed qualitatively using insights from Even-Zohar's (1975; 2005) and Chang's (2001; 2011) revised version of polysystem theory. For better synthesis and a more practical approach, this analysis is interpreted and discussed along with the researchers' observations and experiential insights as in-house and freelance practitioners for both government and private institutions, as well as academic researchers in translation studies. To complement this final step, sets of recommendations are provided at the end of the discussion section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In examining the translation policy in Brunei Darussalam through the lens of polysystem theory, the research delves into several key areas that collectively shape the translation landscape. By collectively elaborating how various institutions, equipped with their own repertoire, functions, products, and consumers, operationalize following how the state governs them, this section will discusses the constitutional and legal aspects of language policy as the cornerstone of translation activities in Brunei, institutional frameworks to showcase the systematic implementation of translation activities in public services and proceedings, efforts and challenges in translators training and development as part of a sustainable workforce, and technological advancements that present both opportunities and challenges to the industry as a whole.

At the state level, translation activities in Brunei are governed by the constitutionalization of the Malay language as the official language, as stated in the Brunei State Constitution of 1959, Chapter 82 (1) on the Official Language [S 65/04] (*Dokumen-Dokumen Perlembagaan*/Constitutional Documents, 2008; Perlembagaan Negara Brunei Darussalam-Pindaan, 2004). Additionally, the function of English as an important language is implied in subsections 82 (2) and 82 (3) of the same chapter. This constitutional provision underscores the role of both languages in the country, albeit in different scales and domains of use. It also reflects the pragmatic approach to accommodating both the local audience while upholding the country's socio-cultural values and also to a wider audience of diverse backgrounds. In Estonia, for instance, such pragmatism is even trickled down to translation policies (van Doorslaer & Loogus, 2020), enforcing the relationship between governing instruments such as language policy and translation practice. In Brunei's context, this provision demonstrates not only the acknowledgment of linguistic flexibility in official documents and communication but also shapes communication policies and regulations in other sectors such as education, judiciary, religious affairs, health, trade, and info-communication. In this relation, governments use translation to safeguard transparency and accuracy in communication and information dissemination. For instance, effective translation of government documents, public announcements, and legislative texts enables more expansive access to information, ensuring that citizens can understand government actions and decisions regardless of language proficiency.

For several government institutions, such as the Language and Literature Bureau, the History Center, the Attorney General's Chambers, and the Judiciary Department, translation activities are housed exclusively under specific Translation Units. In the Attorney General's Office, this unit works with the Law Revision Unit under the Law Revision and Translation Division. This division generally provides the latest Brunei Darussalam legal review texts, including all types of Brunei Darussalam. While in the Judiciary Department, a similar unit operates under the jurisdiction of the Deputy Registrar along with the Interpreter and Court Recorder Unit, Registration, Library, and Corporate Affairs (State Judiciary Department, 2019). This unit supports inter-departmental translation for certification purposes and court cases conducted, including those from the Attorney General's Office, Shariah Courts, Narcotics Control Bureau, Immigration and National Registration Department, and others. In legal systems, ensuring language access is crucial to upholding the principles of justice. Translation services for court

proceedings, legal documents, and interactions with law enforcement are essential to ensure that individuals who do not speak the dominant or official language of the jurisdiction can participate fully in the legal process, thus ensuring inclusivity and equity among the public (Štefková & Tužinská, 2021).

Similarly, the Language and Literature Bureau's Translation Unit is responsible for building terminology, empowering, disseminating, and monitoring the use of the Malay language in Brunei Darussalam. As their core business, this unit is responsible for providing translation services to public and private organizations and undertaking the translation of books, especially in the general/creative field, as additional reading material for departmental publication. Whereas the History Centre's Translation Unit operates in tandem with the Author, Production, Marketing, Reviewer, and Editor Unit to carry out translation activities on printing materials such as correspondence, general texts, documents, manuscripts, articles, books on history and lineage and others, as well as materials or books related to the history of Brunei from abroad in various languages. Such efforts are crucial in documenting traditional knowledge, stories, and cultural practices and preserving and revitalizing indigenous languages and knowledge as an intangible cultural heritage.

Conversely, institutions such as the Ministry of Health, Department of Information, Radio Television Brunei, and Ministry of Religious Affairs incorporate translation activities under their Public Relations Division, Corporate Communication, and/ or Research and Development. In public health crises or healthcare settings, accurate translation of medical information and health advisories is vital. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, continuous strands of communication in both Malay and English are supported by a pool of professional and volunteering translators throughout the country to ensure that all segments of the population can understand crucial health-related information (such as on vaccines or social distancing) and take appropriate actions to protect themselves and others. This reinforces the importance of effective multilingual health communication in times of crisis, where accuracy and speed are essential (Gu, 2022). At the same time, the recent Ministry of Religious Affairs' effort in producing the English translation of the weekly Friday Sermons for e-posters and social media is another milestone in how translation activities are utilized in the local *da'wah* (propagation of Islam) scene. Akin to agenda-setting and to an extent, gatekeeping, to borrow communication studies' term, this effort helps to streamline the type of information provided to the public while creating awareness and enhancing learning outcomes among the public (Valdeón, 2021). Essentially, it also calibrates Brunei's Malay, Islamic, and Monarchy national philosophy that regards Islam as the foundation for living and governing.

Regarding economic opportunities, national broadcasting institutions such as Radio Television Brunei (RTB), via its Translation and Subtitles Unit,

hire translators on a contract and project basis. With translating rates ranging from BND 60 to 80 per script, translating activities are mainly of audiovisual types, such as 30-minute documentaries or drama scripts (Yusof & Azrein, 2023). Apart from hiring freelancers, RTB is one of the major clients in procuring scripts and audiovisual materials supplied by local (and international) media and production companies/agencies, as well as hiring a pool of in-house and/or freelance translators. Similarly, these production houses also cater to government projects encompassing corporate videos, publication pieces, media installations, and product descriptions, all of which require translating and editorial work. On the other, the provision of seminal training and workshops organized by the Language and Literature Bureau, Universiti Sultan Sharif Ali, and Universiti Brunei Darussalam via its Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Language Centre has helped to maintain the supply of translators in the country. Equipped with basic proficiency in at least Malay, English, and Arabic, these translators attain their general accreditation from the National General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) Ordinary and Advanced Levels Examination, *Sijil Pelajaran Ugama Brunei,* and *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Ugama Brunei.*

In addition to the human elements driving translation, technology plays a pivotal role in enhancing translation governance in Brunei. Integrating cutting-edge translation tools, such as machine translation and translation management systems, can significantly streamline the translation process, resulting in improved efficiency and linguistic accuracy. Brunei's forward-looking approach to technology adoption can be observed in initiatives that leverage these advancements to catalyze translation efforts across various government institutions. For instance, through the Department of Information, the Ministry of Information has embraced technology to facilitate swift and accurate translation of public information, especially during health emergency situations. The utilization of automated translation tools, combined with human oversight, enables the timely dissemination of crucial health advisories during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. This technology integration exemplifies the importance of efficient translation in safeguarding public health and highlights Brunei's commitment to employing contemporary tools to achieve its national objectives.

Whereas in the economic context, adopting AI-driven translation technologies has improved translation output in high-demand sectors such as media and entertainment. For example, Radio Television Brunei (RTB) and local production houses benefit from AI-assisted translation for subtitling, dubbing, and script translation, optimizing workflow and catering to the growing demand for localized content. This boosts the country's cultural creative industry (CCI) and contributes to Brunei's economic growth by expanding the export potential of culturally resonant media products, as exemplified by the collaboration

between Brunei's Authority for Info Communications Technology Industry of Brunei Darussalam (AITI) and Malaysian owned broadcasting company Astro Oasis (Bakar, 2018). However, it is essential to recognize that the synergy of human translators and AI-powered tools ensures the highest linguistic accuracy and cultural sensitivity. Government initiatives to provide specialized training for translators in effectively utilizing AI tools for translation tasks can bridge this collaboration, optimizing the benefits of both human intuition and AI precision. This is especially true as the current translation climate is undergoing a paradigm shift brought about by the rapid development of advanced language models packaged in user-friendly and market-ready technology. Thus, the roles of human translators and machines in the language services industry are being redefined (Dracsineanu, 2024; Weisz et al., 2021).

In the long run, the integration of AI in translation governance may extend beyond text translation. Voice recognition and synthesis, powered by AI, facilitate accessibility in public services and information dissemination. These technologies enable the automatic translation of spoken language, making government announcements, public health information, and educational content accessible to individuals with hearing impairments or limited literacy, reinforcing Brunei's commitment to inclusivity. While the impact of AI in translation governance is undeniably transformative, it is important to tread cautiously as AI models can inadvertently carry biases in their training data, potentially affecting the accuracy and neutrality of translations (Sakamoto, 2019). Therefore, continuous oversight and regular auditing of AI-assisted translations are vital to ensure they align with Brunei's cultural and linguistic diversity values.

Despite the potential, the remaining challenges must be addressed exclusively by institutional stakeholders and the government. To ensure that essential documents and services are accessible to all citizens, a strategic and inclusive approach must be adopted to allocate translation resources efficiently. This involves recognizing the linguistic flexibility enshrined in the state constitution and devising policies that prioritize translation based on the needs and demographics of different language communities. In sectors engaging with more monolinguals, elderlies, or populations with special needs, translated texts should be well contextualized to the best of their understandings and experiences. Additionally, quality control mechanisms play a pivotal role in upholding the integrity of translated content, especially in legal, healthcare, and government documents. By investing in linguistic excellence mastered by editors, proofreaders or copyeditors, to name a few, Brunei can enhance the accuracy and reliability of translated materials. At present, the only requirement to become a translator or interpreter in any domain is a good level of language proficiency in their working languages. Where this requirement is ample for less technically or culturally sensitive documents, stringent quality assurance procedures are required in more nuanced texts and discourses. One way to address this challenge is by establishing a lifelong learning route to present/ potential translators, i.e., via an internal accreditation body that provides certification and training in translating and interpreting. In the long run, recognizing the importance of translation highlights the potentially significant economic consequences associated with any perceptions of it as a career (Moorkens & Lewis, 2019). Resolving the current copyright deadlock for translators also has the potential to make translation a more attractive career option. However, achieving this requires collaboration among translation and client companies, adjustments to standards, and active engagement from translators.

As technology plays an increasingly significant role in translation, investments in technological infrastructure such as translation management systems that deal with localization and corpora, comprehensive training programs for government staff and translators, and robust data security measures should also be considered. The fusion of human expertise with AI-powered tools can optimize translation processes but must be managed and regulated effectively. Ensuring inclusivity and accessibility of translation services, especially for individuals with disabilities or limited literacy, remains a priority in public services and information dissemination. The legal and regulatory framework governing translation should be comprehensive, covering copyright and intellectual property to safeguard the interests of all stakeholders.

So far, the research reflects the potential and versatility of translation practice as an effective governing tool, either by disseminating information to the multilingual public across domains, preserving cultural heritage via documentation and creative production, or providing economic opportunities and human capacity development. These efforts are also in line with the three-pronged objectives of Brunei Vision 2035, i.e., to have highly educated, skilled, and accomplished people to improve the quality of life and to have a dynamic and sustainable economy. Translators, once considered primarily language experts, now emerge as essential partners in implementing government policies and initiatives effectively. Their role as key facilitators of communication across various sectors expands beyond linguistic accuracy to becoming conduits for transmitting vital information, legal documents, health advisories, and cultural heritage to diverse audiences, as evidenced in the 'state translation program' during China's Yuan Dynasty (Gao & Moratto, 2022) and the Abbasids Golden Era. This shift necessitates a broader skill set encompassing domain-specific knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability to the evolving needs of different sectors. Such development also highlights the interdisciplinary nature of translation studies as portrayed in various studies (Liu et al., 2022; Naghmeh-Abbaspour, Mahadi, & Zulkali, 2021; Pathong, 2019; Pourgharib & Asl, 2022; Setiarini, Nababan, & Santosa, 2019), showcasing

how translation intersects with and influences other fields. In the intricate tapestry of Brunei's translation ecosystem, Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory has proven instrumental in unraveling the socio-cultural, economic, and political dimensions shaping the translation landscape. The theory provides a nuanced understanding of how translation operates as an object of governance, influenced by policies, regulations, and the dynamic interplay between translators, editors, publishers, producers, and audiences. The universality of translation processes is acknowledged, but polysystem theory allows a more granular exploration of the unique dynamics specific to Brunei Darussalam.

In retrospect, continuous assessments and feedback are indispensable to maintain and enhance translation efficacy as an object of governance. As good governance rests on ideally a holistic effect, such evaluations should encompass market research, technological advancements, and human resources development. Continuous reviews of translation practices necessitate its effectiveness as a governing tool, fostering greater knowledge sharing and dissemination whilst preventing mis and disinformation that may affect public confidence and trust. The government can strengthen linguistic accuracy and ensure consistency by investing in professional language resources, leveraging technology for improved efficiency, and empowering a skilled translator workforce. Moreover, fostering an inclusive approach to translation services by embracing diverse formats to reach all population segments, including those with disabilities or limited literacy, is pivotal for promoting accessibility and cohesion within society. At the same time, the integration of technology, especially AI, adds a layer of complexity and opportunity. While AI enhances efficiency, its potential biases necessitate careful consideration and oversight. The evolving nature of the translation landscape calls for continuous assessment and adaptation, aligning with Brunei's commitment to inclusivity, cultural diversity, and sustainable development. By embracing this potential, Brunei will be better equipped to meet its national objectives and create a thriving and inclusive society, propelling sustainable holistic development.

Additionally, researchers should scrutinize the role of translation in cross-cultural communication and diplomacy, evaluate the effectiveness of training programs in developing a skilled translator workforce, investigate public perceptions of translated content, and engage in comparative studies with other countries to identify best practices and lessons that could enhance translation governance in Brunei. Undertaking such comprehensive exploration can contribute to the continual refinement of translation governance, providing valuable insights for academia and practical application in a rapidly evolving global context. Investing in research that illuminates the challenges and opportunities in this field allows more effective policies and practices that facilitate communication and understanding across linguistic

and cultural divides.

CONCLUSIONS

The research underscores the significant role of translation in Brunei Darussalam's governance framework. It emphasizes the impact of translation on key sectors such as education, health, legal, and religious affairs within the country. Utilizing the polysystem theory, the research delves into the regulation and integration of translation across governmental institutions to enhance social cohesion, accessibility, and national development. The findings suggest that translation practices in Brunei are instrumental in achieving the national objectives outlined in Brunei Vision 2035, contributing to high-quality education, improved quality of life, and a sustainable economy. The Language and Literature Bureau and the Ministry of Religious Affairs are identified as key entities playing crucial roles in managing translation units to support these functions. The research emphasizes that continuous assessment and technological advancements are essential for maintaining the effectiveness of translation governance. Integration of AI and other cutting-edge translation tools is seen to enhance efficiency and accuracy, with the caveat that careful oversight is necessary to mitigate potential biases. Additionally, the research highlights the importance of human resource development through training and accreditation programs to ensure a supply of skilled translators capable of meeting the evolving needs of various sectors. By embracing continuous improvements in translation practices, Brunei can further its commitment to inclusivity, cultural diversity, and holistic development, ultimately fostering a more cohesive and thriving society.

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