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

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Abstract

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

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1. Introduction

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

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2. Literature Review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For the beginning, only four languages i.e. Arabic Thai, Korea and French are under study in this research. Arabic is offered as a foreign language and a part from option papers, Arabic is also offered as compulsory subject at Law Faculty with all three basic, intermediate and advance levels. Arabic language learning at basic level focus more on knowledge, comprehension, oral and basic grammar application with the four language areas i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing.

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