

## ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF TRANSLATED MODULES IN AN ODL INSTITUTION: THE OUM EXPERIENCE

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### ABSTRACT

Open University Malaysia (OUM) is one of the pioneers of open and distance learning (ODL) in Malaysia. English is the main medium of instruction at OUM. However, the Malay language is the national language of the country and it is estimated that 55% of OUM adult learners are from the Malay speaking background, thus there is a necessity to produce bilingual modules to meet their needs and improve their access to education. The university has produced 82 bilingual modules as of May 2018. At OUM, the Centre for Instructional Design and Technology (CiDT) is responsible for developing learning materials in OUM, including Portable Document Format (PDF) modules and video lectures. A total of 2,431 modules and 288 video lectures, as of September 2018, have been produced. The overall purpose of this paper is to determine whether a relationship exists between the quality of translated modules and the translators' qualifications. This research finding is also concerned with creating a pool of competent translators to further enhance the quality of translated modules. The basic design of data for this research paper was gathered from a translation project for OUM's Cluster of Business and Management conducted in six phases from July 2013 to May 2015. This research will review selected modules against the translators' background and the quality ratings given by OUM academics. A total of 53 translated modules from English to Malay will be reviewed. It is hoped that the findings will help OUM gain new insights into ways of coming up with quality translated modules to meet the needs of learners.

**Keywords:** *Quality, Translation, Translators, Modules, Accessibility*

## INTRODUCTION

Open University Malaysia (OUM) is the first open and distance learning university in Malaysia with the noble goal of democratising education in the country. In order to widen access to quality education, the university leverages on innovation and flexible modes of learning to provide an enriching learning experience. The university also adopts a learner-centric approach because adjusting to the ways and methods of education to suit the characteristics of the learners is one of the conditions of democratising education effectively (Murati, 2015). One such characteristic of Malaysian learners in general is the lack of English literacy. This can be seen in the recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015, where Malaysia was ranked 49th out of about 70 countries for reading in the English language (The Star, 2017). Thus, OUM has been increasingly conscious of its learners' needs for bilingual facilities and among the ways were to allow learners to answer exam questions bilingually and to some extent produce bilingual modules for learners.

There was a need for bilingual modules as learners found OUM modules difficult due to the use of "high-level" English language; and this was shared by the tutors who believed that bilingual modules were preferred by the learners (Shawira Abu Bakar et al., 2014). This paper will discuss a translation project by the Cluster of Business and Management (CBM) embarked by the university and conducted by the Centre for Instructional Design and Technology (CiDT). The project was implemented in six phases from July 2013 to May 2015, comprising 53 translated modules as projected in Table 1. The aim of the project is to translate selected modules of Bachelor of -- in Business Administration (Honours) or BBA, Bachelor of Human Resource Management (BHRM) and Bachelor of Management (BIM) programmes from English to the Malay language. At OUM, CiDT is responsible for developing learning materials, including modules and video lectures.

Table 1: Total Number of Translated Modules for a Translation Project of CBM from July 2013 to May 2015

Phase	Development Time	Semester	Number of Modules by Cluster			Total
			CBM	CESS	CAS	
1	July – September 2013	September 2013	5	3	1	9
2	October – December 2013	January 2014	7	2	0	9
3	January – April 2014	May 2014	7	0	2	9
4	May – August 2014	September 2014	8	0	1	9
5	September – December 2014	January 2015	9	0	0	9
6	January – April 2015	May 2015	6	0	2	8
Total			42	5	6	53

Table 1 indicates that 42 modules are from CBM, 5 modules are from the Cluster for Education and Social Sciences (CESS) and 6 modules are from the Cluster for Applied Science (CAS). Although the 53 modules are for the translation project of CBM, some modules are from other Clusters whereby the same modules are being used as sharing modules for various programmes. However, the ownership belongs to certain Cluster. Out of these, 20 modules were selected for this research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As we are discussing on translated modules, this section will cover mostly the opinions or previous studies done by scholars of translation studies. According to House (2018:2), among the factors to be considered in translation are the structural features, the expressive potential and the limitations of the two languages concerned with translation; the linguistic-stylistic-aesthetic characteristics of the source text and the target lingua-cultural community; the target language norms used by the translator; and the intertextuality based on the text in the target culture. In other words, the translator should appreciate the differences in language between the source text and target text. Translation is not as simple as it seems such as using Google Translate. Extensive editing is required if machine translation is used due to the many limitations such as culture, idioms, jargons and metaphors.

What is quality translation? Mossop (2014:227) defines quality translation as “the set of characteristics that make it fit or unfit for its future readers and the use they will make of it.” This means the quality of translated modules is to best fit the needs of the learners of OUM for better understanding the content of modules.

Characteristics or assessment of quality of translation can be done by referring it to the errors found in the translation based on the parameters. Quality has different meanings, depending on the eye of the beholder. That is the reason why, in producing models of translation quality assessment, scholars of translation studies use different parameters to measure the quality of translation. For example, Mossop (2014:134) uses 12 parameters and, in editing, it was said the most comprehensive so far. These parameters are divided into four major categories, based on problems as the following:

- (a) Problems of content which comprises (i) logic and (ii) fact;
- (b) Problems of meaning transfer which comprises (iii) accuracy and (iv) completeness;
- (c) Problems of language and style which comprises (v) smoothness, (vi) tailoring, (vii) sub-language (viii) idiom and (xi) mechanics; and
- (d) Problems related to visual rather than verbal which comprises (x) typography, (xi) organisation and (xii) layout.

Meanwhile, Angelelli (2009) uses scoring rubrics to measure the quality of the translators' sub-competence based on four parameters. Firstly, linguistics, followed by textual. The third sub-competency is pragmatic. Finally, there is strategic competency. Each of these sub-competencies have its own weightage of scale from 1 to 5 whereby is the highest score given by rater.

How do we know whether a translated module has reached its targeted quality? In other words, is the translation good enough for the intended learners? According to Palumbo (2009:98):

The notion of quality concerns, in essence, how good or bad a translation is. As the evaluative judgement implied by this question can be applied to different aspects of a translation, quality is bound to be a relative notion. In other words, it depends on the specific needs, motivations and presuppositions of whoever is responsible for the assessment of a translated text.

House (2018:78) however believes that there are no clear guidelines of what is a good or bad translation:

One of the most intriguing questions asked in connection with translation concerns how to tell whether a translation is good or bad. This question cannot (and should not) be answered in any simple way, because any statement about the quality of a translation implies a conception of the nature and goals of translation, in other words it presupposes a theory of translation.

Newmark (1988:192) however defines that “a good translation fulfils its intention; in an informative text, it conveys the facts acceptably.” In a way, out of all the definition mentioned, a more practical approach is to apply Newmark’s opinion. In OUM, as a higher education provider we assess the translators’ competence by two parameters, namely grammar and accuracy of content. This, we believe will be easier for the raters, such as the academics, to rate the translation. Most importantly, the translation has been translated adequately so that it conveys the facts acceptably to the learners. By having these modules, in the long run, learners will have deeper knowledge as well as might have a better chance of answering exam questions. If modules are prepared only in English, maybe some learners will not gain and benefit from the translated version due to language barriers.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are to:

- (a) Determine whether a relationship exists between the quality of translated modules and the translators’ qualifications; and
- (b) Identify to what extent a qualification in translation is necessary to produce quality-translated modules.

The findings from this study would provide useful insights to strategies on the selection of translators for translated modules, thereby ensuring the learners will benefit from quality-translated modules. This in turn will help marginalised learners who are less proficient in English to have access to knowledge via modules accurately translated into the Malay language.

## METHODOLOGY

This study implies mixed of qualitative and quantitative methods. The data collected for this study include observation of ratings (score) of pre- and post-editing works and analysis of textual descriptive using MS Word and MS Excel software. Twenty out of fifty three samples were selected due to the following reasons: time constraint, limited complete documentation and current active programmes. It provides summaries about the sample and the measurement being used to form the basis of the quantitative analysis data, including mean and median. Regression analysis and correlation analysis were conducted but found to be unsuitable for this study due to the involvement of many variables in comparison to the small number of data.

The calculation of rating was derived from the Module Inspection Report (Translation) or rating form divided into two subsections: grammar and accuracy of content. The grammar subsection looks into the quality of grammar in the Malay language that is free from mistake. The editor then evaluates the level of grammar based on the house style and also other references such as *Kamus Dewan* (2005), *Kamus Inggeris-Melayu Dewan* (2013), *Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu* (PRPM) and *Tatabahasa Dewan* (2008).

The next subsection is on accuracy of content, meaning to say the Malay translation does not have to be an exact word-for-word because the two languages have different idiomatic systems, but the translation must carry the closest possible meaning to the original. Examples of accurate translation mention in the form are as follows:

E.g. 1

- *Pendedahan kepada bahan kimia ini boleh membuat anda muntah.*
- Exposure to this chemical can make you sick.

E.g. 2

- *Dari segi teori, perbezaan yang ada boleh diabaikan.*
- Theoretically, the differences are insignificant.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

As a certain budget has been allocated to translators in providing translated Malay modules to cater to the needs of OUM learners, competent translators must be one of the main selection criteria. Poor translation quality could affect a business image or a learner capability to sufficiently understand the meaning and context as well as actual word and phrase being translated. In this study, 20 modules (see Table 2) have been selected as a pilot study to gauge the effectiveness of the system being used and to determine whether having translators with professional certificate or appropriate background could improve the current method. Criteria for the selected modules are based on the translators' qualifications, translation background and work experience.

Table 2: Codes and Module Titles of 20 Selected Translated Modules

Code and Module Title	
• BBNG3103 Perniagaan Antarabangsa	• BPCP4103 Perancangan dan Pembangunan Kerjaya
• BBGO4103 Gelagat Organisasi	• BBIH4103 Pengurusan Sumber Manusia Antarabangsa
• BBPW3203 Pengurusan Kewangan II	• BBAW2103 Perakaunan Kewangan
• BBRM4103 Pengurusan Runcit	• BBK1103 Prinsip Mikroekonomi 1
• BBSG4103 Pengurusan Pemasaran dan Strategi	• BBKI4103 Pengurusan Kewangan Islam
• BBPM2103 Pengurusan Pemasaran I	• BBBM4103 Pengurusan Bank
• BBMP1103 Pengurusan Matematik	• OUMM2103 Keusahawanan
• BBPR2103 Perancangan, Pengambilan dan Pemilihan Sumber Manusia	• SBST1303 Statistik Asas
• BBMR4103 Perhubungan Industri	• CBMS4303 Sistem Maklumat Pengurusan
• CBCT2203 Konsep Asas Teknologi Maklumat	
• BBIF4103 Kewangan Antarabangsa	

A good translation is where the translator understands the context of the message he or she is trying to get across as well as being well-versed in the cultural nuances of both languages and exposed to the industry in which it is related to, in addition to being loyal to the original text, thus following the functionalist approach recommended by Nord (2018). Learners of OUM sometimes compare the original text and the translated text when they could not understand some terms or important content.

Translation work also need to go through stringent checks to ensure modules produced are of good quality. As such, the university has selected qualified translators to translate the original work into other languages. Their translations were rated by academics from OUM to ensure quality is met before being published. Table 3 shows the ratings received by the appointed translators for the selected 20 modules. Bear in mind, that the name of the translators for the selected modules are not revealed in this paper for ethical purposes and to avoid making associations between the module and translator.

Table 3: A Sample of 20 Translators' Backgrounds and Their Ratings

<b>Translator</b>	<b>Highest Qualification and Translation Background</b>	<b>Work Experience</b>	<b>Rating (%)</b>
1	PhD in Organisational Behaviour	Academic	93
2	PhD in Organisational Behaviour	Academic	76
3	PhD in Accounting and Finance	Academic	93
4	Master of Arts (Translation Studies)	Industrial practitioner	67
5	Master of Business Administration	Academic	89
6	Master of Business Administration	Academic	100
7	Bachelor in Translation and Interpretation	Industrial practitioner	93
8	Bachelor in Business/Management	Industrial practitioner	80
9	Bachelor in Law, Shariah Law	Academic	86
10	Bachelor of Education (Teaching English as a Second Language) and Certificate in Translation (Institut Terjemahan Negara Malaysia)	Industrial practitioner	87
11	Master of Science in Corporate Communication	Industrial practitioner	80
12	Master of Human Science (International Relations)	Industrial practitioner	93
13	Master of Business Administration	Academic	93
14	PhD in Economics	Industrial practitioner	93
15	PhD in Islamic Banking	Academic	88
16	PhD in Accounting and Finance	Academic	92
17	Master of Education (English as a Second Language)	Industrial practitioner	77
18	PhD in Mathematics	Academic	93
19	Master of Information Technology	Academic	93
20	Master of Information Technology	Academic	93

Based on Table 3, the highest education level is a PhD holder whereas the minimum requirement is a degree holder. Their work experience are either academic or industrial practitioner. To get a better grip of the highest qualification of translators, refer to Figure 1. This figure shows that there are 30% (6) academics and 5% (1) industrial practitioner with PhD qualification. Meanwhile, 25% (5) of academics and 20% (4) of industrial practitioners possess Master's degree. The remaining 5% (1) is an academic and 15% (3) are translators with a Bachelor's degree.

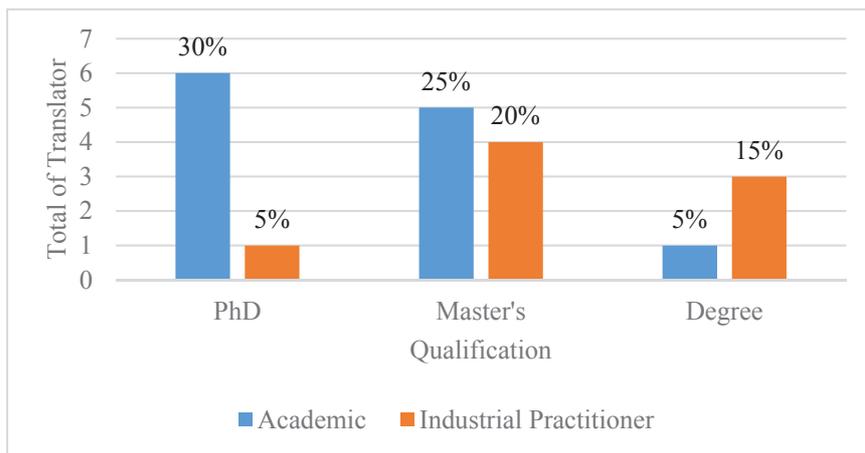


Figure 1: Highest Qualification of Translators

Each translator’s work background has been carefully scrutinised to suit the learners’ needs, thus 60% (12) of the translators are academics who have experience in educational industry and 40% (8) comes from the industrial background with expertise in their relevant field as illustrated in Figure 2.

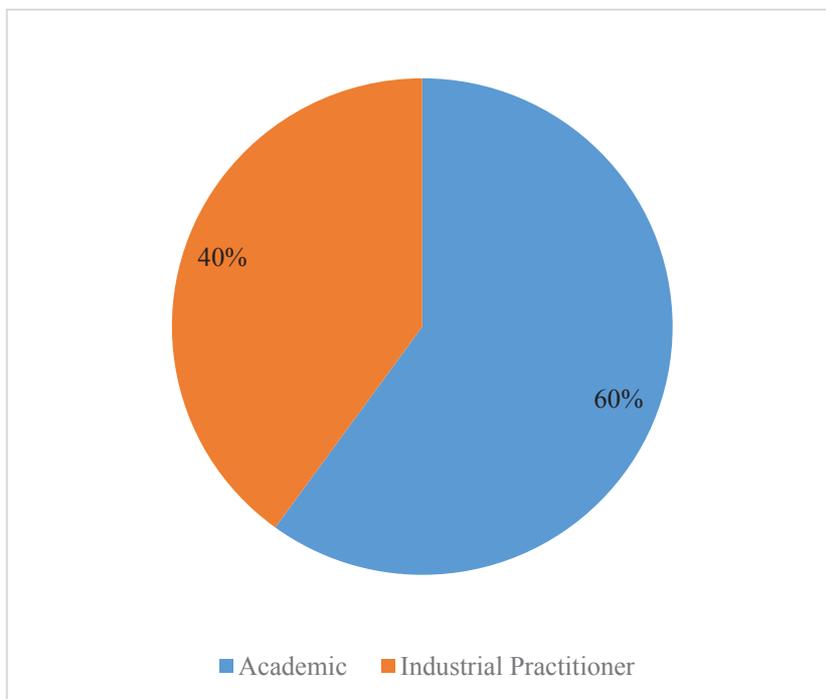


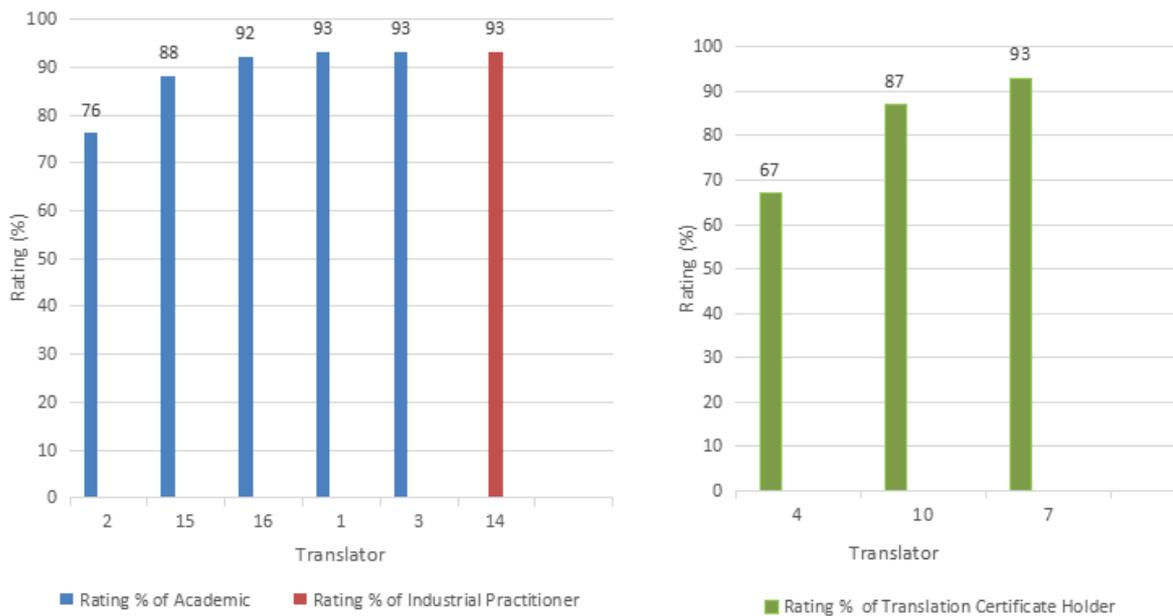
Figure 2: Work Experience of Translators

Meanwhile, Table 4 shows the breakdown in terms of translation background. From this table, it shows that none of the academics involved in the translation project had a certified qualification in translation. While some of those from the industry are certified translators. Out of eight industrial practitioners, only three are certified translators as well.

Table 4: Translators with translation background

Highest Qualification	Academic with Translation Background	Academic without Translation Background	Industrial Practitioner with Translation Background	Industrial Practitioner without Translation Background	Total
PhD	0	6	0	1	7
Master's	0	5	1	3	9
Degree	0	1	2	1	4
Total	0	12	3	5	20

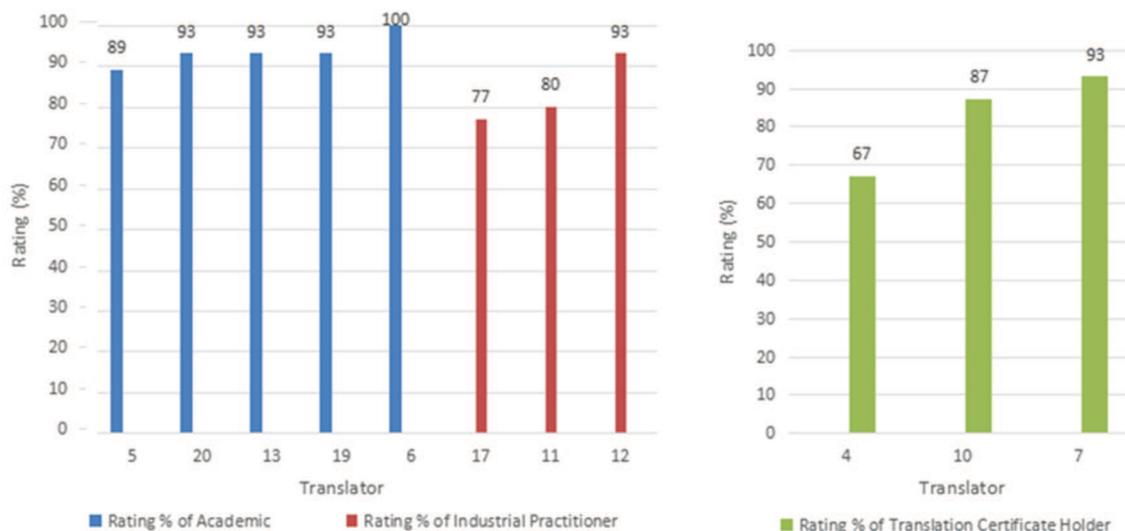
Figure 3 compares the ratings between translators with PhD and certified translators. The following are the findings. In terms of mean, the mean rating for PhD holders is 89, while those who are certified translators had a mean rating of 82. The median for PhD holders is 93 and the median for certified translators is 87. Hence, on average, the translators met the quality criteria required.



(a) Translators with PhD (b) Translators with Translation Qualification

Figure 3: Comparison of Ratings between Translators with PhD and Translators with Translation Qualification

In the meantime, Figure 4 depicts the comparison between translators with Master's degree and certified translators. The findings are as follows. In terms of mean, the mean rating for translators with Master's qualification is 90, while those who are certified translators had a mean rating of 82. The median for Master's degree holders is 93 and the median for certified translators is 87. Thus, translators with translation certificate are able to produce work almost of similar quality to those holding higher academic qualification. Both categories are able to produce grammatically correct and accurate content compared to the original text in English.



(a) Translators with Master's Degree (b) Translators with Translation Qualification

Figure 4: Comparison of Ratings between Translators with Master's Degree and Translators with Translation Qualification

In this study, we have extracted some samples examples of text to show the differences between a good translation work which received a high rating (refer to Example 1) and not so good translation work, which received a low rating (refer to Example 2).

**Example 1:**

**Original text:**

How does a final consumer make a decision? You can understand by looking at it as a process. In the process of decision making, there are five stages, as shown in Figure 7.3. You need to remember that these processes occur in the mind of the consumer.

**Translation version:**

*Bagaimanakah pengguna akhir membuat keputusan? Anda boleh memahami dengan melihat ia sebagai satu proses. Dalam proses membuat keputusan, terdapat lima peringkat, seperti yang ditunjukkan dalam Rajah 7.3. Anda perlu ingat bahawa proses ini berlaku dalam fikiran pengguna.*

**Final translated text:**

*Bagaimanakah pengguna akhir membuat keputusan? Anda boleh memahami dengan melihatnya sebagai satu proses. Dalam proses membuat keputusan, terdapat lima peringkat, seperti yang ditunjukkan dalam Rajah 7.3. Anda perlu ingat bahawa proses ini berlaku dalam fikiran pengguna.*

In Example 1, the term *looking at it* was translated into Malay language as *melihat ia* but the final translated text after editing process became *melihatnya*. This is to follow the norms and conventions of the targeted language.

**Example 2:**

**Original text:**

The number of independent retailers has increased because of ease of entry, but the ease of entry that leads to intense competition is a big factor for the high rate of failures among newer firms. This is because ease of entry is caused by low capital requirements, and no or relatively simple, licensing provisions and low investment per worker. Independent retailers have a variety of advantages and disadvantages as illustrated in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2.

**Translation version:**

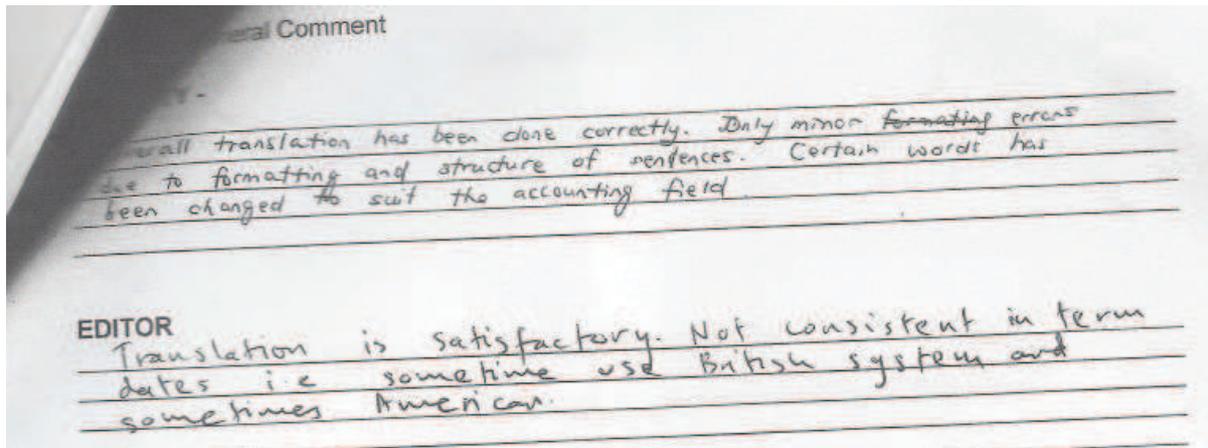
Bilangan peruncit bebas telah meningkat kerana mudah untuk masuk, tetapi memudahkan penyertaan yang membawa kepada persaingan sengit adalah satu faktor yang besar bagi kadar yang tinggi kegagalan di kalangan firma-firma yang lebih baru. Ini kerana memudahkan kemasukan adalah disebabkan oleh keperluan modal yang rendah, dan tidak ada atau agak mudah, peruntukan pelesenan dan pelaburan yang rendah bagi setiap pekerja. Peruncit bebas mempunyai pelbagai kebaikan dan keburukan seperti yang ditunjukkan dalam Jadual 3.1 dan Jadual 3.2.

**Final translated text:**

Bilangan peruncit bebas telah meningkat kerana mudah untuk masuk tetapi penyertaan yang mudah inilah yang mengakibatkan persaingan sengit; ini ialah faktor utama terdapatnya kadar kegagalan yang tinggi dalam kalangan firma yang lebih baharu. Terdapat banyak sebab bagi kemudahan kemasukan termasuklah keperluan modal yang rendah, dan dari segi lesen pula tiada lesen diperlukan atau syaratnya agak mudah mendapat lesen dan pelaburannya rendah bagi setiap pekerja. Peruncit bebas mempunyai pelbagai kebaikan dan keburukan seperti yang ditunjukkan dalam Jadual 3.1 dan Jadual 3.2 berikut.

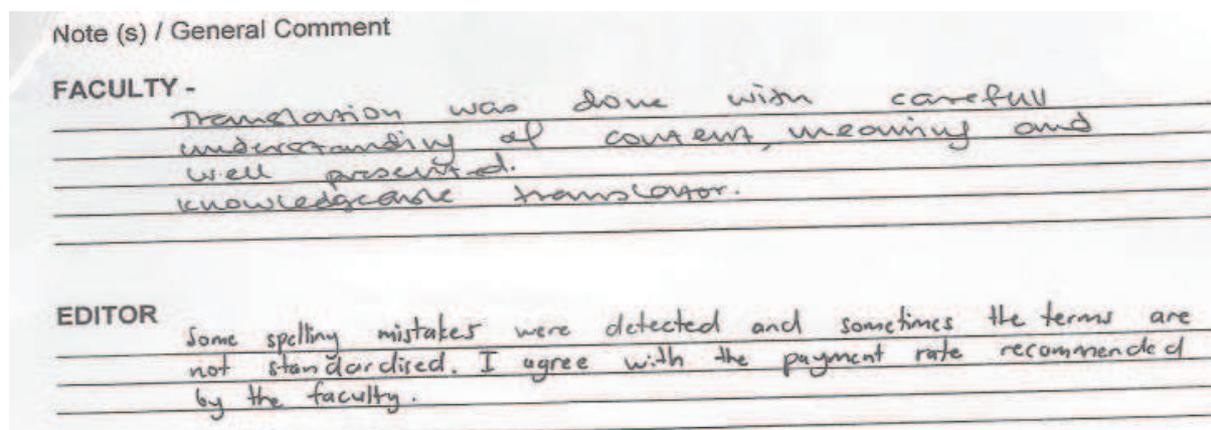
From Example 2, no or relatively simple, licensing provisions when translated to is more readability and easier to understand when translated to dari segi lesen pula tiada lesen diperlukan atau syaratnya agak mudah mendapat lesen (final translated text) than tidak ada atau agak mudah, peruntukan pelesenan (translation version). Thus, the final translated text shows a better sentence has been structured and makes more sense than the translated version.

**Example 3: Translator 13**



Translator 13 in Example 3 is an academic with a Master’s degree who received 93% rating. Hence, the translator is familiar with the subject of the module, the translator seems to get the best words to replace the original text especially when it comes to jargon words in the specific field.

#### Example 4: Translator 14



In Example 4, Translator 14 is an industrial practitioner with a PhD but without a translation background and was rated 93% which is a high rating. Good comments received from both parties despite some errors were detected at the module which had been checked and corrected by the editor.

The final translated text involves many agents (Milton & Bandia, 2009:1). Agent is a term use to a person who is “in an intermediary position between a translator and an end user of a translation” (Sager, 1994:321 in Shuttleworth & Cowie, 2014:7). To name a few, agents in this research are translator, instructional designer, editor, graphic designer, desktop publisher, quality controller and academics which happens to be the subject matter expert from the respective Cluster. Thus, in all stages involved, all agents tried their best to play their role in producing good translated modules. This claim is shown based on Examples 1 and 2 which differentiate the translation version and comparing it with the final translated text. Although translators initiated the work, only through team work, a good module can be produced.

#### LIMITATION OF STUDY

This paper focused on 53 modules of a translation project of CBM and out of this, confined to a sample of 20 modules been selected. These translators were chosen from various backgrounds, either with translation or non-translation qualifications. Nevertheless, the minimum requirement is to possess a degree.

#### CONCLUSION

As OUM’s modules are in PDF format, they can be viewed and downloadable through online platform, thus they are more assessable and user friendly to learners of OUM. This research finding shows that a relationship does exist between the quality of translated modules and the translators’ academic qualifications. The higher the translators’ qualification is the better job they might produce. A total of 17 out of 20 translators scored higher than 80%. Based on this research, qualification in translation is necessary to produce quality-translated modules as they are more knowledgeable about translation. The methodology used in this study to identify the background and qualification of translator with the quality of translated module has achieve its target. Most of the translators appointed are competent based on the ratings received by academics. In line with that, translators which received good ratings can be listed in the pool of competent translators to further enhance the quality of translated modules. In order to get a better result of this study, it is suggested that the minimum highest qualification of a translator is a Master’s degree in his or her relevant field or at least a diploma or degree in translation. However, it is preferable for OUM translators to have at least a PhD qualification in the related field or with a PhD in

translation studies to be involved in translation. These translators are more familiar with research as the translators need to do research from time to time to get the best possible translation and have an in-depth knowledge in the subject being translated. Nevertheless, good editors also play a big role here in producing good translated modules.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Translators who have good ratings can be listed in the pool of competent translators. To measure the quality of the end product, which is the translated module, one of the model of translation quality assessment produced by scholars of translation studies could be implemented on the modules. For example, the model of translation quality assessment by House (2015) which differentiates between covert translation and overt translation. “A covert translation is a translation which enjoys the status of an original source text in the target culture” (House, 2018:89). An overt translation is a translation that reflects the original text culture. As the experiment only uses small sample, it is suggested that in the future to use corpus or bigger set of sample. Further research can also be done to study the perception of learners regarding the translated modules.

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