



Difficulties Faced by Mining Engineering Students When Translating English Idioms (*Kesulitan yang Dihadapi Mahasiswa Teknik Pertambangan Dalam Menerjemahkan Idiom Bahasa Inggris*)

Indri Lesta Siwidiani¹, Yusna Bantulu²

^{1,2}UPN “Veteran” Yogyakarta

aldinardian@upnyk.ac.id¹, yusna.b@upnyk.ac.id²

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Abstract

Idioms are fixed combinations of words whose meanings cannot be interpreted literally, making them difficult to translate without prior familiarity. This study aims to analyze the translation difficulties faced by mining engineering students in translating idiomatic expressions from English to Indonesian. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method. Data were collected through observation and note-taking techniques. The findings reveal that students encounter several challenges in the translation process. These include difficulties in identifying idioms, conveying equivalent meanings, selecting appropriate translation strategies, finding idioms with equivalent meanings, and locating idioms with equivalent structures and meanings. Among these, the greatest difficulty lies in identifying idioms. Out of a total population of 221 students, 61 students (approximately 27.6%) reported challenges in recognizing idiomatic expressions. Despite this, when students are familiar with certain idioms, they tend to translate them accurately and are even confident in using them in daily conversations. This suggests that familiarity with idiomatic expressions significantly influences translation accuracy. Therefore, it is essential to expose students to idiomatic expressions through various contexts and practices to improve their comprehension and translation skills. The study concludes that enhancing students' exposure and understanding of idioms can reduce difficulties in translation and improve their overall translation competence.

Abstrak

Idiom adalah gabungan kata tetap yang maknanya tidak dapat diartikan secara harfiah, sehingga sulit diterjemahkan tanpa pemahaman sebelumnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesulitan yang dihadapi mahasiswa teknik pertambangan dalam menerjemahkan ungkapan idiomatik dari bahasa Inggris ke bahasa Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui metode observasi dan teknik pencatatan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mengalami berbagai kendala dalam proses penerjemahan. Kendala tersebut meliputi kesulitan dalam mengidentifikasi idiom, menyampaikan makna yang setara, menentukan strategi penerjemahan yang tepat, menemukan idiom yang memiliki makna yang sama, serta menemukan idiom yang memiliki struktur dan makna yang sama. Di antara kendala-kendala tersebut, kesulitan terbesar adalah dalam mengidentifikasi idiom. Dari total populasi sebanyak 221 mahasiswa, sebanyak 61 mahasiswa (sekitar 27,6%) mengalami kesulitan dalam mengenali idiom. Meskipun demikian, ketika mahasiswa sudah akrab dengan idiom tertentu, mereka mampu menerjemahkannya dengan tepat bahkan percaya diri menggunakannya dalam percakapan sehari-hari. Hal ini

menunjukkan bahwa tingkat familiaritas terhadap idiom sangat memengaruhi keakuratan penerjemahan. Oleh karena itu, penting bagi mahasiswa untuk lebih banyak terpapar pada idiom melalui berbagai konteks dan latihan guna meningkatkan pemahaman dan keterampilan penerjemahan mereka. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa peningkatan paparan dan pemahaman terhadap idiom dapat mengurangi kesulitan dalam penerjemahan dan meningkatkan kompetensi penerjemahan secara keseluruhan.

Corresponding Author:

Indri Lesta Siwidiani
Fakultas Teknik
UPN “Veteran” Yogyakarta
indrilesta@upnyk.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation remains an essential linguistic tool for Indonesian learners of English, particularly in academic and professional settings (Zein et al., 2020; Dewayanti & Margana, 2024; Roza et al., 2024). Many of these learners, including college students, frequently rely on direct word-for-word translation as a strategy to comprehend English texts (Ariyani et al., 2021; Thren, 2025). Despite being aware of various translation methods that could yield more natural and accurate results, they often default to literal translation due to its perceived simplicity (Mustafa et al., 2021). This tendency can hinder their ability to fully grasp context-sensitive language features, such as idiomatic expressions, which do not translate easily through literal approaches.

The challenge becomes even more pressing for students in specialized fields, such as mining engineering. As future professionals who may work in both domestic and international mining sectors or pursue postgraduate studies abroad, mining engineering students must develop strong bilingual communication skills (Querol-Julián & Díez Ramírez, 2021). Their exposure to idiomatic language in professional environments, such as meetings, academic discussions, or field instructions, requires them to understand and use idioms appropriately. However, idioms often appear illogical or confusing to non-native speakers, especially when their meanings cannot be deduced from the individual words (Ymeri & Vula, 2025). This creates a linguistic barrier that literal translation strategies fail to overcome.

Although research on translation strategies and idiomatic language is well-established, there is a noticeable lack of studies that focus specifically on how students from technical disciplines, particularly mining engineering, comprehend and translate English idioms into Bahasa Indonesia. This oversight is significant, given that mining engineering students are required to operate across both academic and professional domains where precision and clarity of communication are paramount (Murali et al., 2025). In such technical contexts, misinterpreting idiomatic expressions can lead not only to misunderstandings but also to errors in conveying critical information, which may have serious consequences in both academic performance and real-world applications.

The existing literature largely centers on language or literature students, whose training emphasizes linguistic nuance and cultural literacy. However, students in technical fields often receive limited exposure to idiomatic language, and their translation approaches may differ due to their more utilitarian engagement with English (Gaffas, 2019). This gap in research calls for a targeted investigation into the unique challenges faced by technical learners, who must bridge linguistic proficiency with domain-specific knowledge.

Therefore, the present study aims to explore in depth how Indonesian mining engineering students comprehend and translate English idioms into Bahasa Indonesia. The primary objectives are to identify the specific difficulties they encounter, assess the strategies they employ when confronted with idiomatic expressions, and determine how their technical background influences their translation performance. By examining their translation behavior and decision-making processes, this research offers insights that can be used to design more effective pedagogical strategies for English instruction in technical education. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of integrating idiomatic understanding into English language curricula, ensuring that future professionals are not only technically competent but also linguistically equipped to engage in clear and accurate communication in global settings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Translation and Its Role in Language Learning

Translation is more than just a mechanical transfer of words from one language into another; it is a complex process of conveying meaning, emotion, and cultural context across linguistic boundaries. Hatim (2004) outlines two major perspectives: one that focuses on the *process*—the translator’s role in producing equivalent meaning—and another on the *product*—the final translated output. Translation involves various stages, including comprehension, interpretation, and reproduction of meaning in the target language, making it a critical tool for second-language learners (Mohebbi, 2023).

In the context of Indonesian students learning English, translation serves not only as a bridge to understanding foreign texts but also as a cognitive strategy to internalize new linguistic structures. However, this tool is often misused. Many students, including those in higher education, rely heavily on literal, word-for-word translation (Fahruri, 2022; Putri, 2024). While this method may offer temporary comprehension, it often leads to misinterpretation, especially when dealing with culturally bound expressions such as idioms.

For mining engineering students preparing for global careers, mastering the art of translation, especially of idiomatic language, is increasingly urgent. These students are likely to encounter English texts containing idioms in technical manuals, international communications, or academic readings. Thus, understanding how translation theory applies to idiomatic expressions is essential for developing their cross-cultural communicative competence.

2.2 Understanding Idioms and Their Linguistic Nature

Idioms are fixed, multi-word expressions whose meanings are not deducible from the literal meanings of the individual words (Dictionary, 2008; Saeed, 2016). Common examples include expressions such as “under the weather” (meaning ill) or “kick the bucket” (meaning to die). These phrases often carry emotional or cultural connotations that add richness to the language but pose significant challenges for non-native speakers.

Unlike standard vocabulary, idioms are deeply embedded in the cultural and historical contexts of a language (Sadiqzade, 2025). Their meanings can be opaque or even nonsensical if interpreted literally. For example, “spill the beans” does not involve actual beans but refers to revealing a secret. As such, idioms defy the straightforward translation strategies typically used in technical or academic texts.

For Indonesian learners, this linguistic gap becomes particularly problematic. The cultural background necessary to interpret English idioms often differs significantly from their own, and without this contextual knowledge, idioms may be perceived as strange or meaningless. This explains why idioms are frequently misunderstood, mistranslated, or even omitted in student translations (Al Kayed, 2024).

2.3 Strategies for Translating Idioms

To overcome the challenges of idiomatic translation, scholars such as Baker (1992) and Bell (1991) have proposed several strategies that can be applied depending on the context and target audience. Baker (1992) identifies four main strategies:

1. Using an idiom with a similar meaning and form in the target language
E.g., “buying a pig in a poke” → “*membeli kucing dalam karung*”
2. Using an idiom with a similar meaning but a different form
E.g., “feeling blue” → “*sedih*” or “*murung*”
3. Paraphrasing the idiomatic meaning, especially when no direct equivalent exists
E.g., “He’s skating on thin ice” → “*Dia berada dalam situasi yang sangat berisiko*”
4. Omitting the idiom, which may be appropriate when the idiom does not contribute significantly to the meaning or when no suitable equivalent can be found
E.g., “She was pulling my leg” → “*Dia hanya bercanda*”

These strategies highlight the translator’s need to go beyond lexical equivalence and consider cultural, contextual, and pragmatic factors. The use of idioms in English is often bound to specific discourse communities and contexts, which may not have parallel expressions in Indonesian.

2.4 Challenges and Difficulties in Translating Idioms

Translating idioms from English into Indonesian presents a unique set of difficulties. One major issue is recognition. Baker (1992) points out that recognizing an idiom is not always straightforward; many idioms appear deceptively literal. For instance, learners may translate “hit the sack” literally rather than understanding it means to go to bed.

A second major challenge lies in accurately conveying idiomatic meaning in the target language. Even when an idiom appears to have an equivalent in Indonesian, the connotations may differ. For example, while “cinta monyet” may align with “puppy love,” the social context in which the two are used may not be the same.

Other difficulties include:

- Misleading transparency – Idioms such as “break the ice” may sound literal and confusing.
- False equivalence – Phrases that appear similar in both languages may convey entirely different meanings.
- Dual usage – Some idioms may function both literally and figuratively, requiring a nuanced understanding.
- Cultural mismatches – Differences in idiomatic frequency and acceptability between English and Indonesian complicate direct translation.

In technical education contexts, such as in mining engineering, these challenges are further amplified by the academic and professional expectations placed on students. Yet, little empirical research has examined how students in specialized fields handle idiomatic translation or what strategies they favor. This presents a significant research gap.

This literature review establishes the theoretical foundation for examining how university-level mining engineering students understand and translate English idioms into Bahasa Indonesia. While translation theory offers various models and strategies for dealing with idiomatic language, there is limited research focusing specifically on how these are applied—or not applied—by learners in technical disciplines. Given the growing need for these students to communicate effectively in international contexts, it is critical to explore their translation practices, assess their awareness of idiomatic usage, and identify the difficulties they encounter.

By grounding this study in translation and idiomatic theory, this research aims to bridge the gap between abstract linguistic models and real-world learner experience, ultimately contributing to more effective English language instruction in technical education settings.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to explore the translation difficulties encountered by mining engineering students in translating idiomatic expressions from English into Indonesian. The descriptive qualitative method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth analysis of students' translation processes, focusing on the contextual and interpretative nature of language use rather than numerical data.

Data Collection was conducted using two primary techniques: observation and note-taking. The observation method involved closely monitoring how students approached idiomatic translation tasks during translation activities. The researcher paid attention to the students' responses, hesitations, and strategies in identifying and interpreting idioms in context. In addition, note-taking was used to systematically document the idioms that students struggled with, the errors they made in translation, and the explanations or justifications they provided for their choices. These methods enabled the researcher to capture natural language behavior and difficulties as they occurred in real translation settings.

The sample consisted of students from the Mining Engineering Department, with a total population of 221 individuals. From this population, the research particularly noted those who demonstrated difficulty in identifying idioms. A significant portion, specifically 61 students or approximately 27.6% of the total population, reported challenges in recognizing idiomatic expressions. These students were purposefully observed as they represented the group most affected by the difficulties under investigation. Their performance provided a rich source of data on the types of problems that arise in idiom translation.

Data analysis involved categorizing the students' difficulties into key thematic areas. The researcher analyzed the collected data by identifying patterns and recurring challenges, such as (1) difficulty in identifying idioms, (2) difficulty in conveying equivalent meaning, (3) difficulty in selecting the appropriate translation strategy, (4) difficulty in finding idiomatic equivalents with the same meaning, and (5) difficulty in finding idioms with both equivalent meaning and structure. Each category was examined to determine its frequency and how it impacted the quality of students' translations. Through this analysis, the researcher was able to highlight the most prominent difficulty—identifying idioms—which appeared to be the foundational issue influencing all other translation challenges.

The findings of this study were then interpreted in relation to the students' linguistic competence and familiarity with idiomatic expressions. The research also noted that students who were familiar with certain idioms could translate them more accurately and even confidently use them in daily conversations. This further emphasized the importance of exposure and idiomatic competence in overcoming translation difficulties.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze the challenges encountered by mining engineering students in translating idiomatic expressions within sentence contexts. The researcher functioned as the primary research instrument, responsible for collecting, examining, and interpreting the data. The process followed four stages:

(1) analyzing original and translated texts, (2) identifying idiomatic expressions and their translated equivalents, (3) categorizing translation difficulties, and (4) coding each data point systematically.

A total of 121 students participated in the translation task, translating approximately 20 sentences that contained idiomatic expressions. The findings were categorized into five major difficulties based on the students' responses and translation outcomes. The overall percentage and number of students who encountered each difficulty are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Types and Frequency of Idiom Translation Difficulties

| No | Type of Difficulty | Number of Students | Percentage (%) |
|----|---|--------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Difficulty in Identifying Idioms | 61 | 27.6% |
| 2 | Difficulty in Conveying Equivalent Meaning | 33 | 14.9% |
| 3 | Difficulty in Selecting the Appropriate Translation Strategy | 38 | 17.2% |
| 4 | Difficulty in Finding an Equivalent Idiom with the Same Meaning | 42 | 19.0% |
| 5 | Difficulty in Finding an Equivalent Idiom with the Same Words/Meaning | 47 | 21.3% |

4.1 Difficulty in Identifying Idioms

The most frequently reported challenge among participants was the inability to recognize idiomatic expressions within sentence contexts. Out of 221 respondents, 61 students (27.6%) admitted that they often failed to distinguish idioms from literal language. As a result, these students tended to interpret idioms literally, leading to inaccurate or awkward translations.

This difficulty indicates a lack of exposure to idiomatic language in both academic and everyday English environments. When students cannot recognize that a phrase is idiomatic, they are unable to apply appropriate translation strategies. As Baker (1992) emphasizes, identifying idioms is the first step in handling them effectively. The findings point to a need for systematic instruction and training in idiom recognition for students, particularly those outside language majors.

4.2 Difficulty in Conveying Equivalent Meaning

33 students (14.9%) encountered difficulty in preserving the original meaning of idioms in the target language. Despite recognizing the expression as idiomatic, they often translated it literally, resulting in semantic distortion or a loss of intended meaning.

This issue reflects a limited understanding of meaning-based translation, where the goal is to maintain the functional or communicative value of the source text rather than replicating its form. Without knowledge of this principle, students are more likely to produce translations that confuse or mislead the reader. The findings underscore the importance of enhancing students' awareness of semantic equivalence and the broader communicative functions of idioms in both source and target cultures.

4.3 Difficulty in Selecting Appropriate Translation Strategy

A total of 38 students (17.2%) reported uncertainty in choosing a suitable strategy for translating idioms. While some attempted direct translations, others were unsure whether to paraphrase, substitute culturally, or omit the idiom altogether.

This confusion points to a lack of familiarity with established idiom translation strategies, such as those proposed by Baker (1992): using idioms with similar meaning and form, using idioms with similar meaning but different form, paraphrasing, or omitting when necessary. Without adequate training in these approaches, students tend to make inconsistent or misguided translation decisions. The data suggest that explicit instruction in translation strategy selection would improve students' ability to handle idiomatic language more effectively.

4.4 Difficulty in Finding an Equivalent Idiom with the Same Meaning

42 students (19.0%) expressed difficulty in finding idiomatic expressions in the target language that conveyed the same intended meaning as those in the source language. While these students may have understood the meaning of the source idiom, they lacked the resources or linguistic intuition to locate a culturally appropriate counterpart.

This difficulty highlights the cultural specificity of idioms, as many do not have direct equivalents across languages. As such, translators must often make creative or strategic decisions, such as paraphrasing or selecting a functionally equivalent phrase. The data suggest the need to strengthen students' ability to navigate cross-cultural differences in idiomatic expression through targeted training and exposure.

4.5 Difficulty in Finding an Equivalent Idiom with the Same Words and Meaning

The final and most commonly reported problem was experienced by 47 students (21.3%), who struggled to find idioms in the target language that matched both the wording and meaning of the source

idiom. This reflects a misconception that idioms should or can be translated word-for-word while maintaining their idiomatic function.

Such an approach overlooks the fact that idioms are non-compositional, meaning that their figurative meaning cannot be derived from the individual meanings of their components. Attempting to match both form and content often results in translations that are either meaningless or culturally inappropriate. This difficulty emphasizes the need to teach students that form equivalence is less important than functional or pragmatic equivalence when translating idioms.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the data, it can be concluded that mining engineering students, as non-native speakers of English, face significant challenges in translating idiomatic expressions. This difficulty primarily stems from the symbolic and non-literal nature of idioms, which often cannot be understood through word-for-word translation. Furthermore, idioms are not commonly encountered in Indonesian daily conversations or academic texts, contributing to the students' unfamiliarity with their use and meaning. As a result, many students are unable to recognize idioms within sentence contexts, struggle to preserve the intended meaning, and find it difficult to select or apply appropriate translation strategies. However, when students encounter idioms they are already familiar with, they demonstrate a stronger ability to interpret and translate them accurately, and in some cases, they even use them confidently in communication.

The study's findings highlight five main areas of difficulty: (1) identifying idiomatic expressions, (2) conveying equivalent meaning, (3) selecting appropriate translation strategies, (4) finding target-language idioms with the same meaning, and (5) locating idioms with both equivalent form and meaning. These challenges suggest the urgent need for pedagogical improvements. Translation training for non-language majors should include a focus on idiom recognition, exposure to authentic language use, strategy development based on translation theory (e.g., Baker's strategies), and increased cultural awareness to handle cross-linguistic differences effectively. By equipping students with these tools, educators can help improve students' idiomatic competence and overall translation accuracy, particularly when working with figurative and culturally bound expressions.

5.2 Suggestions/Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it is crucial that English language instruction for mining engineering students places greater emphasis on idiom learning through targeted and contextualized approaches. Idioms, being non-literal expressions, require more than rote memorization—they demand comprehension of nuance, culture, and context. Therefore, English lecturers should incorporate idiomatic learning into the curriculum in a structured and purposeful manner. Practical methods such as the use of visual aids (e.g., infographics or comic strips), real-life dialogues, situational role-plays, and multimedia content can significantly enhance students' ability to identify and interpret idioms. These strategies not only make learning more engaging but also cater to different learning styles. Teaching materials should also include idioms used in both technical and casual settings to bridge the gap between formal academic English and everyday communication. By doing so, students will be better equipped to interpret idioms in varied contexts, including academic papers, technical manuals, workplace instructions, or social interactions.

In addition to curriculum development, students must also take an active role in their language learning journey. Encouraging mining engineering students to read a wide range of English materials—from textbooks and articles to novels and blogs—can increase their exposure to idiomatic expressions. Similarly, watching English-language documentaries, interviews, or even entertainment content can provide authentic examples of idiom use in natural speech. Regular practice through speaking clubs, peer conversations, or writing tasks that incorporate idioms will further reinforce their application. To address the specific challenges students face in translating technical idioms, developing a glossary of idioms relevant to mining or engineering contexts can be a valuable resource. This glossary could include definitions, usage examples, and Bahasa Indonesia equivalents, helping students better understand idiomatic meaning and usage. Ultimately, these combined efforts will support students in becoming more confident and competent users of English, both in academic and professional spheres.

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