

Analyzing the English translation of People-Pleasing Behaviors mentioned in Tom Lembong's Instagram Caption

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Abstract: Instagram allows users to include captions of up to 2,200 characters beneath posted visual content, including images and videos. These captions provide a space for users to offer explanations, contextual information, or personal viewpoints related to the accompanying visuals. This research analyzes the English translation of people-pleasing behaviors mentioned in Tom Lembong's Instagram caption. In the target language (English), there are two linguistic units: "reluctance to offend" and "fearing to offend." These two translation units prioritize the intended meaning over preserving the original terms, which may result in deviations from the source terminology, thereby reflecting the use of paraphrasing. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study will contribute to the field of translation, particularly to the translation of behavioral terms.

Keywords: Instagram, translation, people-pleasing behavior, paraphrasing

INTRODUCTION

Widely recognized as a platform for visual content, Instagram also offers a captioning feature. The platform allows users to include captions of up to 2,200 characters beneath posted visual content, including images and videos. These captions function as a space for users to provide explanations, contextual information, or personal viewpoints related to the accompanying visuals.

Although most Instagram users rely on a single language when composing captions, some employ a bilingual captioning practice by presenting parallel versions of the same message in two languages: the original text and its translation. A prominent example of this practice is Tom Lembong, who frequently posts captions in Indonesian along with their English equivalents. Tom Lembong, whose full name is Thomas Trikasih Lembong, is a former Indonesian Minister of Trade (August 2015–July 2016) and a public intellectual who focuses on political, economic, and socio-cultural issues.

With regard to his educational background, Tom Lembong has had a transnational educational experience. He studied in Germany (from elementary school until the age of ten), Indonesia (continuing elementary and junior high school), and the United States (senior high school and university). As a result, he adapted to the languages and cultures of the countries in which he lived.

One of Tom Lembong's Instagram posts in 2025 reached 2.6 million views and received 259,000 likes. The post featured a close-up video of him accompanied by bilingual captions in Indonesian and English. In the captions, people-pleasing behavior is discussed as a socio-cultural issue.

Observing this phenomenon, the researcher finds that Tom Lembong's captions serve as a magnet for viewers' interest. They present thoughtful insights into how people-pleasing behavior impacts decision-making. His original caption (consisting of 65

Indonesian words) and its English translation convey the idea in a concise and substantive manner.

Hanif et al. (2025) identified a case of sungkan behavior in a college student in Yogyakarta, accompanied by indications of another behavioral concept, namely people-pleasing. Their study revealed several themes, including the habitus of people-pleasing behavior, symbolic capital and power within the Javanese family, the individual's attitudes toward family dynamics, others' awareness of people-pleasing behavior, and its psychological and social impacts. Although the present study and Hanif et al.'s research address a similar behavioral topic, their research objectives differ. The present study focuses on analyzing an English translation.

In 2025, Sonya et al. analyzed translation strategies of psychological terms in the book Thinking, Fast and Slow. They identified 35 instances of literal translation, 2 instances of loan translation, 14 instances of calque, 4 instances of transposition, 10 instances of unit shift, 3 instances of emphasis change, 8 instances of paraphrase, and 24 instances of cultural filtering (adaptation). The similarity between their study and the present research lies in the discussion of translation related to behavioral concepts. However, while the present study focuses on English translation, Sonya et al. examined Indonesian translation.

Shen (2022) also discussed psychological terms, focusing on Chinese translation. Their findings suggest that psychological terminology can be translated through word-for-word translation, paraphrasing, borrowing, and transliteration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Translation

According to Eugene A. Nida, is the process of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.

Translation Method

A. Word-for-word translation

Word-by-word translation is an approach to language learning that emphasizes the use of the target language itself through conversation, discussion, and reading, without relying on translation or explicit grammatical instruction.

Many scientific terms can be translated sequentially from left to right. Some foreign linguists refer to this pattern as a “possessive modular structure.”

B. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing prioritizes conveying meaning over preserving original terms, which may cause deviations from the source terminology. However, it is often more accessible and acceptable to readers due to its localized approach.

C. Borrowing

Borrowing translation involves the direct adoption of foreign-language terms, symbols, and concepts. Saussure describes this process as the use of images or signifiers. This approach typically appears in the early stages of a field's development, when a large number of foreign terms are introduced and cannot all be translated within a short period of time.

D. Transliteration

Transliteration involves preserving the pronunciation of a word while setting aside its original meaning, using it primarily as a phonetic representation.

People-Pleasing Behavior

1. Hanif et al. (2025)

The subjects with people-pleasing behavior are in subtle social interactions. The subjects struggle to refuse requests for help from friends because the subject feels compelled to provide clear justifications when declining assistance.

2. Harriet Braiker

In *The Disease to Please*, Braiker describes people-pleasing as a learned pattern shaped by the need for approval, fear of others' anger, and fragile self-esteem.

3. Karen Horney

From a psychoanalytic view, Horney identified "moving toward people" as a coping style that develops in response to deep-seated anxiety.

4. Pete Walker

Within C-PTSD theory, Walker defines people-pleasing as the fawn response, a survival strategy focused on appeasing others to avoid harm.

5. Donald Winnicott

Winnicott's concept of the false self describes how individuals overly adapt to others in order to protect early relational bonds.

6. Melody Beattie

Beattie frames people-pleasing within codependency, emphasizing chronic self-neglect in favor of others' needs.

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

The researcher analyzes the English translation of people-pleasing behaviors mentioned in Tom Lembong's Instagram caption. Creswell (2012) emphasizes that descriptive research focuses on observing, recording, and interpreting data as it naturally occurs, rather than explaining cause-and-effect relationships. Similarly, Fraenkel and Wallen (1990) view descriptive research as a means to describe existing phenomena and examine their relationships without experimental manipulation. In accordance with these theoretical perspectives, this study adopts a descriptive research method.

The data for this research are derived from Instagram, specifically from the post available at the following link:

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQMe107Dtvk/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==. The data consist of linguistic units extracted from the English translation presented in the caption.

Procedure of the Research

The research procedures consist of the following steps:

1. Compiling the English translation of People-Pleasing Behaviors mentioned in Tom Lembong's Instagram Caption
2. Analyzing and describing the English translations obtained
3. Drawing conclusions and offering suggestions based on the findings

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the source language (SL), three (3) linguistic units of people-pleasing behavior are found: two (2) units of *nggak enakan* and one (1) unit of *sungkan*. In the target language (TL), there are two (2) linguistic units: one (1) **reluctance to offend** and one (1) **fearing to offend**.

Table 1. Source Language and Target Language of Instagram Caption

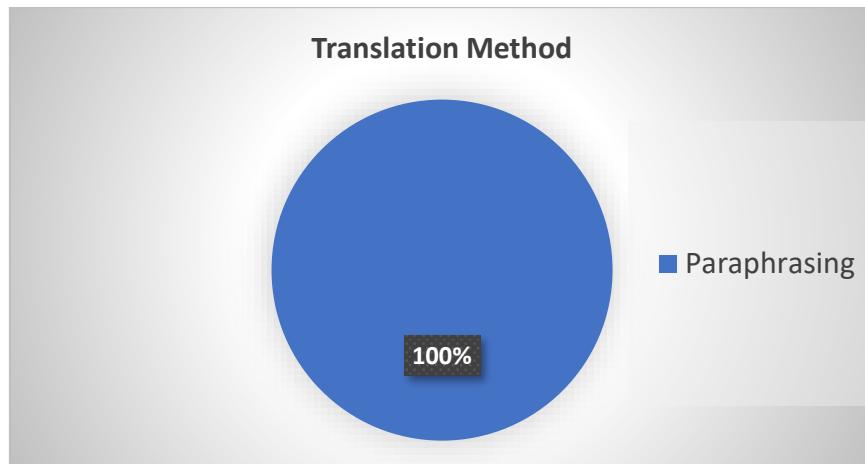
Source Language of Instagram Caption	Target Language of Instagram Caption
<i>Budaya “nggak enakan” itu tidak terlalu ada di Korea Selatan. Meskipun Korea merupakan masyarakat dengan sopan-santun yang luar biasa, mereka selalu berupaya menyampaikan “apa adanya”. Saya sering merasa budaya “nggak enakan” dan “sungkan” kita membuat kita sulit bicara blak-blakan – padahal kita tahu betapa pentingnya kita harus bisa gali kebenaran. Karena kita butuh fakta dan data yang akurat dan obyektif, supaya keputusan dan kebijakan kita realistik.</i>	This culture of “ reluctance to offend ” doesn’t exist too much in South Korea. Even though Korean society has a sophisticated etiquette, the culture is mostly one of conveying the unvarnished truth. I often feel that our own culture of “ fearing to offend ” holds us back from speaking out – even though we know the importance of getting to the truth of things. Because we need accurate and objective facts and data, to ensure our decisions and policies are realistic.



Graphic 1. English Translation found for People-Pleasing Behavior

Translation Method found English Translations for People-Pleasing Behavior

The two translation units—**reluctance to offend** and **fearing to offend**—prioritize the intended meaning over preserving the original terms, which may result in deviations from the source terminology and reflects the use of paraphrasing.



Graphic 2. Translation Method found for English Translations for People-Pleasing Behavior

1. SL: *Budaya “nggak enakan” itu tidak terlalu ada di Korea Selatan. Meskipun*
Korea merupakan masyarakat dengan sopan-santun yang luar biasa, mereka selalu berupaya menyampaikan “apa adanya”.
TL: This culture of “**reluctance to offend**” doesn’t exist too much in South

Korea. Even though Korean society has a sophisticated etiquette, the culture is mostly one of conveying the unvarnished truth.

The people-pleasing behavior “*nggak enakan*” is translated as “**reluctance to offend**.” This translation prioritize the intended meaning over preserving the original term “*nggak enakan*.” Its meaning contrasts with the way Korean society tends to express ideas directly and convey the unvarnished truth. Individuals exhibiting “*nggak enakan*” are reluctant to convey the unvarnished truth because they prioritize others’ condition over themselves. Therefore, this translation reflects the use of the paraphrasing method.

2. SL: *Saya sering merasa budaya “nggak enakan” dan “sungkan” kita membuat*
kita sulit bicara blak-blakan – padahal kita tahu betapa pentingnya kita harus bisa gali kebenaran. Karena kita butuh fakta dan data yang akurat dan obyektif, supaya keputusan dan kebijakan kita realistik.

TL: I often feel that our own culture of “**fearing to offend**” holds us back from

speaking out – even though we know the importance of getting to the truth of things. Because we need accurate and objective facts and data, to ensure our decisions and policies are realistic.

The people-pleasing behaviors “*nggak enakan*” and “*sungkan*” are translated as “**fearing to offend.**” This translation prioritizes the intended meaning over preserving the original terms “*nggak enakan*” and “*sungkan*.” Its meaning prevents individuals exhibiting these behaviors from speaking objectively, as they prioritize others’ conditions over the actual situation. Therefore, this translation reflects the use of the paraphrasing method.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

For every translation, including behavioral terms, the intended meaning should be accurately conveyed. A translator can refer to the definition and context initially, and then apply paraphrasing as needed. The researcher hopes that the results of this study can contribute to the translation process, particularly in translating behavioral terms.

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