



## COMPARING TRANSLATION PRODUCTS OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGES BIBLE: A NEW METHOD IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTIC

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**Abstract:** This article proposes new method in Bible interpretation by comparing translation products of Bible which are reflected in many different languages. This writing is also a result of a research which found that comprehending Bible does not demand only its original languages (Hebrew and Greek), however, national languages and local ones may also be used to explore the meaning carried in the Bible by comparing them. The content of this piece of writing provides two main techniques in the new method of Bible comprehension. They are grammatical comparison of languages and historical context as a confirmation. At first, texts of Bible in different languages (the writer uses English, Indonesian, and Kupang Malay text) are compared on each level of the language (word, clause, sentence, and figurative language) to portray the grand idea of the texts; and the next is confirming it to the historical context of the text. This new method contributes to the development of hermeneutics more specifically in Biblical exegesis. Furthermore, this new concept will raise local languages into the higher level, meaning that local languages will be widely used in Bible comprehension with national language of readers and original languages of Bible. This help keep the existence of local wisdom including languages.

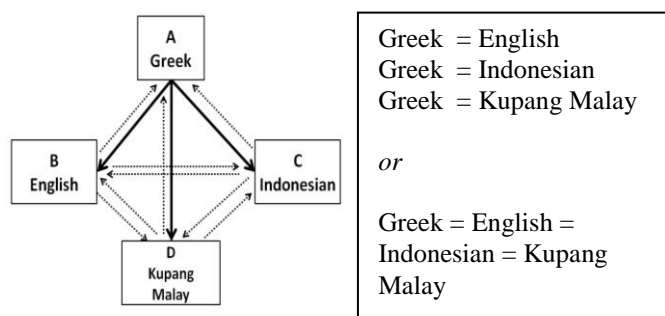
**Keywords:** *translation products, Bible interpretation, comparative method, grammatical construction, historical context, hermeneutics*

### INTRODUCTION

Comprehending Bible as a religious text demands extraordinary ability. First, it needs competence in recognizing and analyzing background of the text. Further, it is compulsory to elaborate what the writer means in grammatical construction of the text. This process takes extra time and thought to work. In fact of the difficult process of Bible interpretation, we need to answer a question regard to the reason of expressing Bible in many languages. The existence of Bible in many local languages proves that Bible is available in any language. However, the problem is that the Bible in local languages are not widely read or even used in comprehending it. This problem leads to another one. Bible interpretation only orients on a single language that not all readers understand it. To solve it, it needs to evaluate the position of local languages in terms of Bible as translation products.

Bible has been translated into so many languages in the world; national and local languages. In Indonesia, for instance, there are Alkitab, an Indonesia version in Terjemahan Baru (TB), Bahasa Indonesia Sehari-hari (BIS) which are written in national language, Janji Baru (Kupang Malay Version), and many others. These various languages of Bible indicate that local language has the same position with original languages of Bible in translation. In other word, reading a Kupang Malay version is the same to reading the English or Indonesian version of the Bible or even its genuine

languages Hebrew and Greek. The following figure (1) shows the level of languages in Bible translation.



**Figure 1.** Equivalence of Meaning in Translation Products (Lao, 2018: 186)

The above figure (1) confirms that languages of Bible translation have the same position and meaning equivalence. This means that the meaning contained in Indonesian version is also found in English, Indonesian, and Greek version.

Nowadays problem indicates that even though Bible has been translated into our local languages, it is still lack in use. In general worship in almost every church they only use Indonesian version or even English one. In fact, as Indonesians, we actually have bigger opportunity to interpret the Bible content because we can use more than one language in recognizing the meaning

carried in the Bible. This writing proposes new method in interpreting the Bible by comparing different languages of the Bible and most importantly the use of local languages.

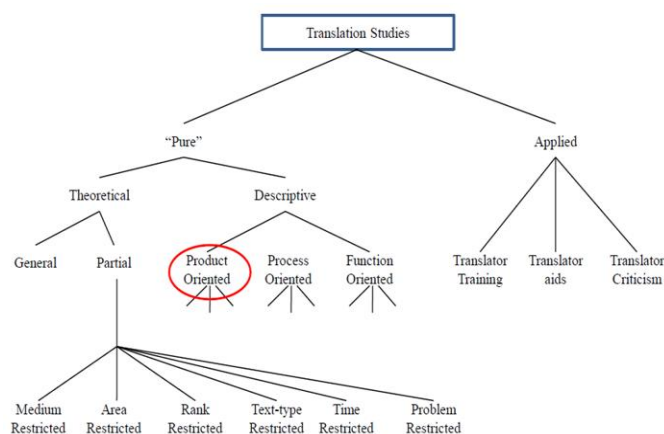
**BIBLE TEXTS AS TRANSLATION PRODUCTS**

Figure (1) in previous section illustrates the equivalent meaning of languages translated from a single source. The equivalence of meaning makes those languages alike in terms of meaning. One language meaning is identical to others. This is because those languages were translated from one source and the translation process requires equivalence in meaning in order that readers from many language backgrounds may catch the meaning of the Bible texts. In this step, translation process takes place as the most crucial phase.

Translation is actually a part of language or linguistics which appears in barely. This study is called applied linguistics since it covers both theoretical and practical use of language in terms of language transfer. Applied linguistics offers knowledge and competence to implement language in each area of use, meaning that translation orients on language use in terms of language transfer.

The analysis of the study may be said growing nowadays since it still has large numbers of phenomena to investigate one of them is Bible translation. Scientifically, translation can be studied and reasoned in order to develop knowledge and science. Thus, this writing has its fundamental reason to provide method in applied linguistics because it contributes to the development of translation and hermeneutics.

The complicated translation process ends with translation products as those above texts in figure (1). Therefore, Bible texts as translation product must be associated with linguistics branch called Translation Studies. The studies of translation are divided into two main sub studies. They are pure translation studies and applied translation studies. Holmes (1988 in Toury, 2012: 4) explains translation studies in a simple diagram as shown in figure (2) bellow.



**Figure 2.** Holmes’ Basic Map of Translation

The above figure was proposed by Holmes with the detail of areas of every sub study. The red circle shows the level of translation product as result of translation process in descriptive area which orients only on explanatory activities dominated in the study. It means that talking about translation product does not always mean consulting the process of translation since product of translation is in different area of the study. However, it sometimes needs to think how and why process and function of translation considered in the entire process of analysis.

The figure (2) also informs that Bible texts in different languages are covered in descriptive area of translation. This means that Bible text can be analyzed as independent sub study in terms of investigating linguistic, cultural, and social phenomena contained in the texts. This also emphasizes that the development of translation product investigation may contribute to the expansion of language study in general and language documentation in particular. Hence, the discussion and proposal of translation products comparison in Biblical interpretation have strong motivation to continue and develop.

**COMPARATIVE METHOD AS A PART OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS**

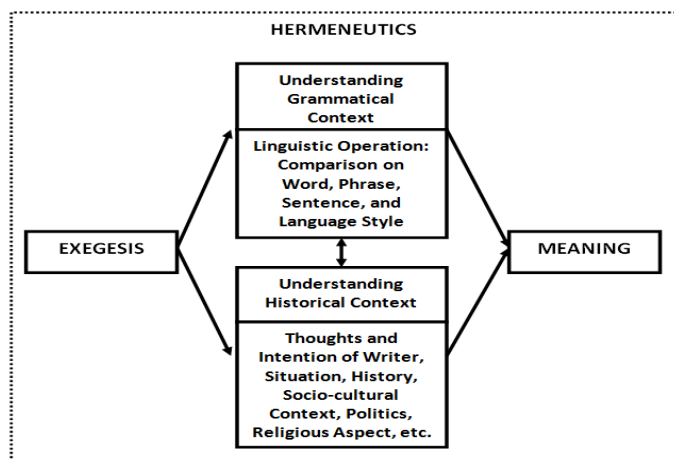
Hermeneutics has many definitions given by different experts and philosophers. However, to sum up, hermeneutics is actually a system of interpretation. In this term, hermeneutics applied in Biblical text is called Biblical Interpretation or Exegesis. Biblical interpretation is different to other texts interpretation. Since the production of Bible text, the investigation of it never stops. There is always novelty dimension of meaning, cultural, social, and even linguistic phenomena found in the Bible. Moreover, as religious text, Bible is believed to be true even though it was written more than 20 centuries ago.

Hermeneutics for many people is very complicated. As religious men, we often think that hermeneutics is only done by those who stick to religious activity and ceremonies. However, it needs to see what hermeneutics actually is. Hermeneutics is basically divided into thinking and practical process. Hermeneutics is about to think something in one hand and to practice recognizing and transferring meaning of particular thing in other hand. This concept promotes hermeneutics in practical process where meaning is elaborated through grammatical text and the comparison to other texts.

This comparative method covers comparison of grammatical aspects of one text to another and historical context as the confirmation to the comparison. Every language has its grammatical structure. This method of comparison works on level of word, phrase, sentence, and figurative language. These all levels in grammatical structure are investigated in order to find semantic

meaning of the text. Thus, the comparative method is categorized as part of exegesis because it works on grammatical context and elaboration of language. In hermeneutics, this method may be operated as a way to comprehend and interpret Biblical text.

aspects proves that language has large area to investigate and contains potential meaning carried in the Bible. The following is example of Grammatical Comparison of the word *mountain* in English, Indonesian, and Kupang Malay text of the Bible taken from Mathew 5 verse 1.



**Figure 3.** Comparison of Grammatical Aspects in Hermeneutics

Figure (3) depicts the position of Comparative Method in Hermeneutics especially in Biblical exegesis. The Bible Interpretation process starts with grammatical context elaboration which investigates grammar of the text. The Comparative Method also investigates the text but in some versions in order to gain the universal meaning. Every meaning from each text is compared to strengthen the existence and equivalence of meaning. Hence, the comparative method is theoretically fit to the scientific process of Biblical hermeneutic.

The hermeneutical process is continued by confirming the result of comparison to the historical context of the text. The process of confirmation demands elaboration of historical background of the text, writer, situation, and other consideration needed. This process seems difficult. However, we have many references of Biblical exegesis about particular part of Bible text. The entire process of Comparative Method in Biblical Exegesis impacts to the enrichment of Biblical comprehension and local language maintenance.

**COMPARATIVE METHOD IN BIBLE INTERPRETATION**

As it is explained above, Comparative method in Bible Interpretation consists of two mayor steps. They are Grammatical Comparison of texts and Historical Confirmation to the result of comparison. This part provides example of grammatical comparison and confirmation from historical context.

**Grammatical Comparison of Texts**

Grammatical comparison works on word, phrase, sentence, and figurative language levels of language. The comparison on all level of linguistic

English	Indonesian	Kupang Malay
<sup>1</sup> And seeing the multitudes, He went up on <i>a mountain</i> , and when He was seated His disciples came to Him	<sup>1</sup> Ketika Yesus melihat banyak orang itu, naiklah Ia ke atas <i>bukit</i> dan setelah Ia duduk, datanglah murid-murid-Nya kepada-Nya.	<sup>1</sup> Waktu Yesus dapa lia orang bam-banya datang iko sang Dia, ju Dia nae pi di <i>satu gunung kici</i> , ko dudu di situ. Dia pung ana bua dong yang Dia su pili tu, datang deka-deka ko dengar sang Dia.

In example of data above, the English version of uses ‘a mountain’ with ‘a’ as indefinite article. It means that there is no clear explanation about which mountain referred in the Bible. In the Indonesian version, the word ‘bukit’ (hill) is used without any article. In Indonesian, if the place is mentioned without article it indicates that the place is familiar to the listener or reader. However, is the previous part of the text, it does not mention the name of the hill. To this part, we need more information about the ‘bukit’ mentioned in Indonesian version of the Bible. In Kupang Malay version, it uses ‘satu gunung kici’ (one of small mountains). The use of article ‘satu’ in Kupang Malay refers to a familiar location to the listeners and readers. However, this phrase leads the readers to investigate ‘mountains’ meant by Kupang Malay version. It says that ‘one of the mountains’ referring to the mountain known well by the listeners in the text. This proves that the English and Indonesian version do not provide concrete information in regard to the location of preaching. Only Kupang Malay version states the familiarity of the mountain to the listeners.

The example above also shows that there are three different texts of Bible which promote different terminologies to a single location. English version uses ‘mountain’, Indonesian puts ‘bukit’, and ‘satu gunung kici’ in Kupang Malay version. Mountain in English refers to a mass of very high rock. ‘Bukit’ in Indonesian is an area of land that higher than the land around it. In Kupang Malay, ‘satu gunung kici’ does not refer to both mountain and hill. It is true that Kupang Malay has no equivalent word to hill. However, the use of article ‘satu’ and the word ‘kici’ implicitly states that the location meant by the text is known well. Unfortunately, the writer did not directly mention the name of the mountain meant in the text. This is the end of grammatical-comparative method of the text on word and phrase levels.

**Historical Context as Confirmation to the Result of Grammatical Comparison of Text**

The analysis of the different use of mountain and hill in the above example will lead to further investigation of the definite location. The question arises after doing the comparison is 'why the writer did not mention the name of the mountain or hill?' This actually means that the name of the mountain or hill is not necessary or already recognized by the readers/listeners of the text. It is true that when something is not mentioned it is already understood or not necessary to be talked.

The use of 'mountain' word for Jews is very common. Mountain word for Jews is sacred and is found in many literatures of Judaism like Psalm. In the Psalm, it is found many names of mountains. However, the most important mountain to Jews is Mount Sinai. This mountain reflects their beginning of faith journey because on the Mount Sinai, God sent his Commandments to Jews by Moses, His servant. Hence, when we mention the word mountain, it actually refers to Mount Sinai for the Jews.

Talking about the mountain leads us to the relationship between the use of the word 'mountain' or 'bukit' in Mathew 5:1 and the content of Jesus' sermon (Mathew 5 contains Jesus' Sermon). The Mathew did not mention clearly the name of mountain because he wants the readers to relate the 'mountain' that is familiar to Jews (Sinai) with Jesus as the central figure of the text. Mount Sinai is the historical location of Jews where they accepted God's Commandments through Moses. At the time, Moses went and stood on the top of Mount Sinai and met God. The use of mountain in the part of Bible shows similarity between Moses and Jesus. This is the major point of Mathew chapter 5; to show and promote Jesus like Moses who received God's Commandments on Mount Sinai. This is the historical red line of the use of the word mountain in Mathew chapter 5. In conclusion, Kupang Malay version of Bible tends to explore 'satu gunung kici' as mountain that has been well recognized by the listeners and readers of the text. It covers intimate meaning to the real meaning intended to show by the writer of Mathew 5:1. Based on the confirmation of historical context, Kupang Malay version brings the closest meaning compared to both English and Indonesian version.

This is the process of confirming the accuracy of English, Indonesian and Kupang Malay text of Bible. This process is called Historical Context Confirmation to Comparison of Grammatical Context. The end of this process will determine and draw the conclusion of meaning found through Comparative Method of Grammatical Context.

## CONCLUSION

Comparative Method in Biblical Hermeneutic helps readers not only to comprehend meaning carried by the text but to interpret it as well. The first process is to compare texts of different languages of the Bible in

order to recognize the grammatical meaning of each text. Further, the meaning conveyed by each text is examined by the process of Historical Context as a confirmation. This process will show which text (of language) has the most appropriate and equivalent meaning to the genuine meaning. This method helps everybody to comprehend not only Bible but other religious texts and to interpret it by exploring local languages.

Comparative Method of Biblical Hermeneutic also helps develop and maintain existence of local languages and wisdoms. By using local languages in elaborating religious text, we bring faith closer to our identity in culture and language we use. In short, this Comparative Method of Bible Interpretation is very useful and helpfulness in the development of both theory and practice of language.

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