

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON AI TRANSLATION: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

In addition to the availability of machine translation technologies such as Google Translate, people now have the option of employing Generative AI to carry out the translation tasks. GenAI is capable of producing translations in any language in a quick and efficient manner. Students in English department who might be interested in pursuing careers as language translators in the future, should have mastered artificial intelligence technologies in order to thrive in the world that is always changing. The purpose of this study is to investigate the students' perceptions regarding the employment of artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT for translating texts. This study was presented with two research questions, which are as follows: To what extent do students position AI translation tools in relation to human translation? When it comes to the employment of artificial intelligence for translation, what benefits and concerns shapes students' attitude toward AI translation use? In order to collect the necessary information for this study, interviews were conducted with twenty-two students from English department at Binus University who were enrolled in Translation course. The interview transcripts were used as the data for this study, and they were analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). There are three fundamental steps involved in doing thematic analysis. Starting with initial open coding, which involves classifying data into codes. The second step is grouping the similar codes and finally, defining and naming the themes for each group. Results show that five themes appear in this analysis. These are: conditional acceptance of AI translation, perceived advantages of AI translation, concerns about overdependence, human superiority in meaning, and ethical and institutional boundaries. The findings suggest that even though artificial intelligence translation is effective, it is still a limited tool that must continue to be controlled by humans.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, perceptions, translation, thematic analysis

ABSTRAK

Selain ketersediaan teknologi penerjemahan mesin seperti Google Translate, orang sekarang memiliki pilihan untuk menggunakan AI Generatif untuk melakukan tugas penerjemahan. GenAI mampu menghasilkan terjemahan dalam bahasa apa pun dengan cepat dan efisien. Mahasiswa jurusan Bahasa Inggris yang mungkin tertarik untuk mengejar karir sebagai penerjemah bahasa di masa depan, harus menguasai teknologi kecerdasan buatan agar dapat berkembang di dunia yang selalu berubah. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menyelidiki persepsi mahasiswa mengenai penggunaan alat kecerdasan buatan seperti ChatGPT untuk menerjemahkan teks. Penelitian ini diajukan dengan dua pertanyaan penelitian, yaitu: Sejauh mana mahasiswa memposisikan alat penerjemahan AI dalam kaitannya dengan penerjemahan manusia? Ketika berbicara tentang penggunaan kecerdasan buatan untuk penerjemahan, manfaat dan kekhawatiran apa yang membentuk sikap mahasiswa terhadap penggunaan penerjemahan AI? Untuk mengumpulkan informasi yang diperlukan untuk penelitian ini, wawancara dilakukan dengan dua puluh dua mahasiswa dari jurusan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Binus yang terdaftar dalam mata kuliah Penerjemahan. Transkrip wawancara digunakan sebagai data untuk penelitian ini, dan dianalisis secara kualitatif menggunakan kerangka analisis tematik yang dikembangkan oleh Braun dan Clarke (2006). Ada tiga langkah mendasar yang terlibat dalam melakukan analisis tematik. Dimulai dengan pengkodean terbuka awal, yang melibatkan pengklasifikasian data ke dalam kode. Langkah kedua adalah mengelompokkan kode-kode yang serupa dan akhirnya, mendefinisikan dan menamai tema untuk setiap kelompok. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa lima tema muncul dalam analisis ini. Tema-tema tersebut adalah: penerimaan bersyarat terhadap terjemahan AI, keuntungan yang dirasakan dari terjemahan AI, kekhawatiran tentang ketergantungan yang berlebihan, superioritas manusia dalam hal makna, dan batasan etika dan kelembagaan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun terjemahan kecerdasan buatan efektif, ia masih merupakan alat yang terbatas yang harus terus dikendalikan oleh manusia.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) such as ChatGPT has become common tool for people to perform any kind of tasks, including translation tasks. Neural machine translation (NMT) as the basis of GenAI can translate large volumes of text in seconds. It is ideal for real-time or high-volume settings such as business, education, and simultaneous interpreting tasks (I. Bakhov et al., 2021; Jalgasbaeva, 2025; Li et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2025; Wang, 2023).

The progression of artificial intelligence technologies will profoundly influence the cultivation of essential competencies for future English-speaking translators (Wang, 2023), who are currently studying in university, particularly those majoring in English language and education. In such educational setting, the application of AI cannot be entirely prohibited even though its use is still limited at present. For

example, in translation class, some students utilize AI tools for their translation projects, while others adamantly avoid utilizing AI altogether.

Currently, students still have different opinions regarding the use of artificial intelligence tools for doing translation. There are still concerns regarding the accuracy of AI translation as well as the ethical issue that comes up when they are translating using AI. To have a deeper understanding of the students' perspective towards AI translation, this paper aims to discover the themes that explain the students' perceptions. To achieve this aim, this study applies a thematic analysis framework to analyse the data gathered from students' interview results.

Application of AI in translation

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies such as ChatGPT, Copilot or Perplexity to perform translation tasks has been exponentially risen across a variety of industries, including the business and education sectors. It is possible to considerably cut down on the amount of time and money spent on business translation by utilizing AI-based translation tools such as ChatGPT (Ye, 2025). This is the fundamental rationale for employing these products.

Artificial intelligence not only significantly improves the efficiency, accuracy and acceptability of the translation, but it also decreases the amount of time and money required to do it (Widyantari & Kresna Rahma Aji, 2025). When it comes to business sector, which is required to translate a large number of papers within a short period of time and with a restricted budget, artificial intelligence translators will be a more suitable option than hiring professional human translators. The use of artificial intelligence in translation will be transforming the translator profession in the future (Yablochnikova, 2025).

In the field of education, artificial intelligence technologies have been discovered to improve the outcomes of foreign language learning (Liu, 2023). With AI translation technologies, it is possible for learners to acquire any language. This is accomplished by requesting that the AI act as a conversation partner, provide feedback on pronunciation, or correct the sentences in the language the students are learning. However, (Liu, 2023) also reminds that AI technologies are still confronted with challenges and require further development in order to be used optimally in education.

The teaching of translation

With the advancement of AI, we begin wondering whether translation courses in the university are still necessary. (Wang, 2023) mentions that AI technologies can significantly impact the development of key competencies for future English-speaking translators. Translators do not seem to work very hard mastering two or more languages as AI will do most of the work for them.

Therefore, translation teaching in the university should adapt to artificial intelligence advancements by continuously updating teaching methods, incorporating machine translation, and establishing diverse evaluation systems (Hajdu & Farkas, 2025). These steps should be taken to cultivate the talents that are needed in the language service industry.

Translation services are still needed in years to come and human translators will still be in demand; thus, it is still necessary to provide translation courses at the university. AI in university English translation teaching offers efficiency, process and personalized assessment, but the technological development and teacher role transformation are needed to overcome challenges and avoid data bias (Jiang, 2025).

Concerns of AI translation

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence in translation field has caused some concerns. Many translators feel that their jobs will be fully replaced by AI. AI in translation is transforming the translator profession (Yablochnikova, 2025) and considered as a threat to the profession (Kirov & Malamin, 2022). However, (Yablochnikova, 2025) states that human translators can still be successful by maintaining their human creativity and cultural sensitivity. Additionally, (Kirov & Malamin, 2022) affirm that concerns about AI as a job threat are unjustified, as it will not lead to mass job destruction or a deterioration in work quality.

Aside from job loss concerns, some researchers still find limitations and challenges in AI translations. A lot of studies highlight human translators' superiority over AI translation. (Pagalilauan, 2025) stated that AI translation cannot replace human translators' richness, cultural awareness, and context knowledge. (Almasharqa & Qadha, 2025) found that Saudi translators face challenges in using AI for business translation, including terminology, cultural adaptation, and technical inconsistencies. Other studies also discover that AI struggles with polysemous words, idioms, figurative language, cultural

references, and emotional tone (Amini et al., 2024; I. Bakhov et al., 2021; Jalgasbaeva, 2025; Moneus & Sahari, 2024; Ozyumenko & Larina, 2025)

Therefore, some studies advocate human-AI partnership in translation to achieve better results and output high-quality translations (Wang, 2023). Bakhov et al.,(2024) stated that human expertise is needed to convey emotions, cultural subtleties, and linguistic nuances. In addition, (Almasharqa & Qadha, 2025; Tymchyk & Drabov, 2025) emphasize extensive human revision and post-editing for accurate and context-specific results.

RESEARCH METHOD

An interview with semi-structured questions was conducted to 20 English Department students to discuss their opinions and experiences with translations using Generative AI, such as ChatGPT. The interview questions were formulated as follow, “What do you think of translation using AI? What are the advantages and disadvantages of AI translation?” The interview was conducted digitally via google form. The responses were collected and transcribed.

Analysis of the data follows Braun and Clarke’s six phase thematic analysis method (Clarke & Braun, 2017) as seen in the following figure 1. The first step is familiarizing with the data, i.e. the respondents’ responses. The next step is coding. Coding here means tagging or naming each response with specific code, for example ‘ethical concern’. After all the responses are coded, similar codes are grouped together and a theme is assigned for the group of similar codes. Stem 4 and 5 involves reviewing themes and defining themes. In these steps, themes that are closely related will be merged into one theme. After all the themes are decided, the writing of the report can be done.

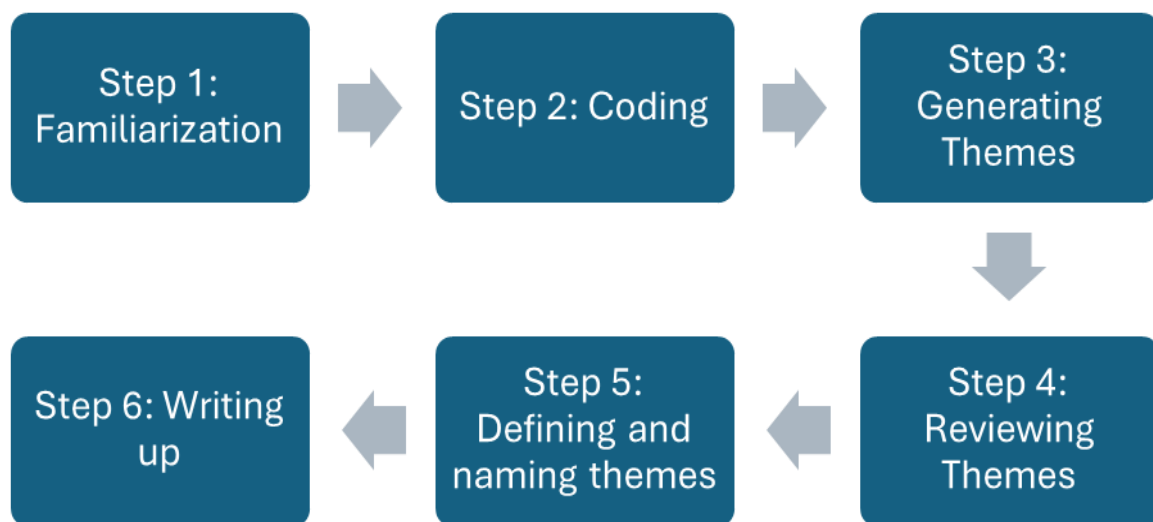


Figure 1. Coding process based on Braun and Clarke’ thematic analysis method

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the interview results produced five themes regarding AI translations. These themes are presented one by one below.

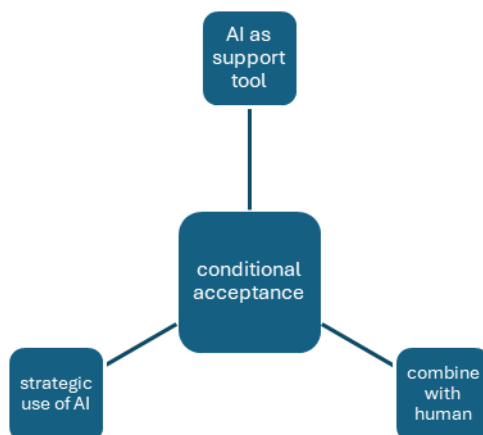


Figure 2. Theme 1 Conditional acceptance of AI

The first theme as shown in figure 2, conditional acceptance of AI translation meaning that the participants do not reject the use of AI outright when doing the translation. This theme is divided into three topics. The first one is using AI as support tool. In this case participants suggest using AI as supporting tools for translation task, for example when a student needs “a second opinion on sentence structure or to improve flow and intuition of the target language.” Therefore, the use of AI should be combined with human expertise, as stated by one participant, “I think that for the form of a good translation, human and AI can work together to achieve better.” However, the participants also suggest to use AI strategically rather than independently. One student concluded that while AI is very quick and easy and can help on a small scale, it cannot be used for translating high-stake documents such as legal documents. He argues that AI learns to translate by observing samples and models instead of any understanding of the language itself. Thus, AI can sometimes make false or imaginative translations.

Conditional acceptance of AI translation is supported by previous research that emphasizes that AI should be used strategically, and most importantly that AI translation still needs to be combined with human translators. Studies by (Mohamed et al., 2024; Moneus & Sahari, 2024; Wang, 2023) explore the need for both approaches (human and AI) in various scenarios.

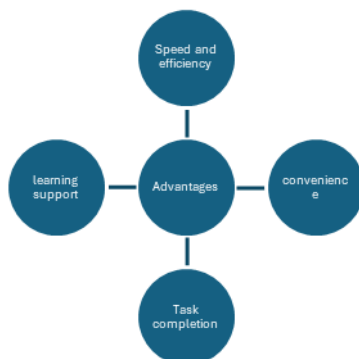


Figure 3 Theme 2: Perceived Advantages of AI Translation

Figure 3 shows the second theme, i.e. perceived advantages of AI translation, in which participants recognize instrumental benefits of translation using AI. This theme basically underscores AI translation in terms of cost and speed efficiency, convenience, and learning support. Using AI for translation can make things faster and cheaper. It is also convenient, as it saves a lot of time and reduce costs, especially for long and repetitive texts. AI can also function as potential learning support. One participant stated that,

“Using AI in translation is somewhat inevitable in the sense that if you want an on demand and quick translation of whatever text you want to read without having a knowledge of the language is desired by someone who doesn't have the time or resources to learn a new language.” This statement underscores that AI can be a convenient way to support learning or translation when one does not have the background knowledge of the translated materials.

This theme supported the previous research that said that AI in translation has revolutionized the field by improving accessibility, speed, and scalability (Shahmerdanova, 2025; Ye, 2025).

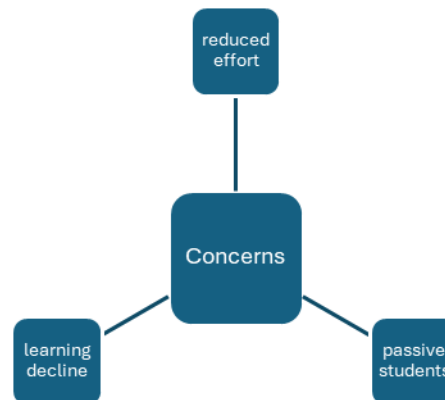


Figure 4. Theme 3: Concerns about Overdependence and Skill Erosion

However, participants also expressed their concerns on the use of AI for translation, particularly about overdependence and skill erosion among AI users. There are three main concerns stated by the participants. The first one, full reliance on AI will reduce human efforts. One participant eloquently expressed, “Completely relying on artificial intelligence is unjustifiable and ultimately harmful as it provides quick and easy answer over encouraging people to develop their skills.” Another participant stated, “This (AI) can greatly impact a person's capability to translate without the use of AI and eventually he can lose understanding of basic words that should be easy to translate from English to another language.” The use of AI can make students more passive and decline their learning capacity. One student said that translating a whole document entirely with AI can downgrade one's skill in translation naturally. In general, AI translation is framed as a threat to cognitive engagement.

These concerns were also voiced in previous studies. Nguyen (Nguyen et al., 2025) stated that even though AI translation tools in tertiary-level translation education provide some benefits such as enhanced efficiency and improved vocabulary, they also face challenges like overreliance, inaccuracy, and ethical concerns. The overreliance on these technologies makes students unable to develop their critical thinking skills, they directly use AI translation products without further editing. AI can be a powerful tool in English language teaching when used responsibly and critically, but its effectiveness depends on the learner's digital and linguistic literacy (Rybina, 2025).

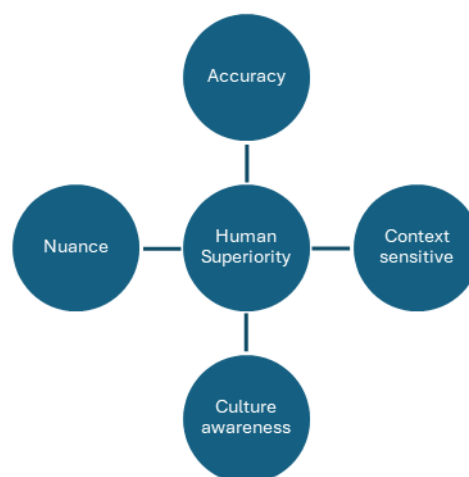


Figure 5. Theme 4: Human superiority in meaning, context, and depth

In line with the concerns of AI translation on students' learning decline, participants also highlighted human superiority over AI translation as represented in figure 5. Human translators, according to the participants, are superior in terms of accuracy, nuance, cultural awareness, and sensitivity to the context. AI translation is generally good in accuracy, but it still needs a human to check on the details, context, and tone. One participant said, "AI cannot fully understand context and the tone the way a human can." Another student added, "Human translation helps add the necessary depth, nuance, colloquialization, and improve the flow of the text." Still, other said, "While accuracy is improving, humans remain better at handling context, emotions, and cultural references." As a whole, this theme reflects a belief that human judgment is irreplaceable.

Human judgment superiority is also supported by several researchers such as (Almasharqa & Qadha, 2025; I. S. Bakhov et al., 2024; Shahmerdanova, 2025; Tymchyk & Drabov, 2025; Ye, 2025). These studies confirm that AI translation cannot replace human expertise in conveying emotions, cultural subtleties, idiomatic expressions, and cultural sensitivities.

Ethical and institutional boundaries

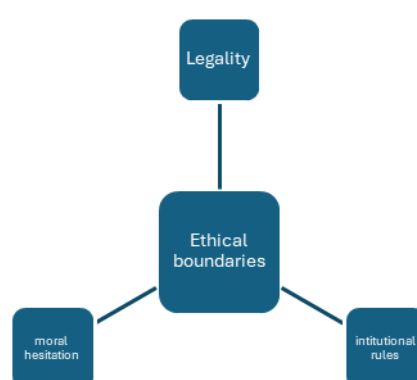


Figure 6. Theme 5: Ethical and institutional boundaries

Figure 6 displays the last theme about ethical and institutional boundaries. Ethical boundaries refer to the moral hesitation and legality of action when doing the translation using AI. For example, when AI makes mistakes, it cannot be held accountable for its mistakes. In contrast, a sworn translator should be responsible when he made wrong translation. One participant reminds us about the risk and the impact that the AI makes on the document, especially if the document is very important or carries legal consequences. Another one mentions that AI downgrade the integrity of the translation profession, because AI feels like a "cheat" to cut cost and save time. Thus, the use of AI in translation is not only practical but also regulated and morally situated.

Ethical implication of AI translation should be addressed (Amini et al., 2024; Naji Alyami & Ali Abbas Falah Alzubi, 2025) so that students can use AI without feeling guilty. In other words, AI should be used responsibly. In university, AI literacy should be incorporated into translator training courses while at the same time highlighting the importance of human linguistics, cultural, and contextual proficiency, to address common translation mistakes and adapt to different translation needs (Hajdu & Farkas, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study was set up to discover the students' perceptions on AI translation. Using a thematic analysis method, this study found five themes that are extracted from the participants' opinions. The first theme is conditional acceptance of AI translation, the second theme is perceived advantages of AI translation, the third theme concerns about overdependence and skill erosion, the fourth theme is human superiority in meaning, context, and depth, and the last theme is ethical and institutional boundaries.

In general, the themes found in this study reflect a dual attitude towards AI translation. In one hand, students who will be the future users of this AI tools admit that AI will be inevitable for translation as it is cost efficient and fast. On the other hand, they still think that AI performance is below human standard, particularly in conveying tone and nuance. Moreover, they are still bothered by their own 'guilty conscience' for using AI for translation.

AI will always be developing, and there might be much improvement in terms of translation. Thus, it is not impossible that AI translation can be equal or even surpass human translation. Thus, participants' opinions regarding AI translation might also change. Thus, this kind of study may be continued and developed further in the future.

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