

## **The Phenomenon of the Difficulties of the Students in Translating Unfamiliar Words by Using Context Clues Technique**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Finding the meaning of unfamiliar words in the dictionary is indeed a very effective alternative. However, there is a technique that may aid in translating unfamiliar words without the use of a dictionary. The name of the technique is the "context clues" technique. The purpose of this study was to comprehend the phenomenon of student difficulties and the students' responses to the use of the context clues technique, particularly in translating unfamiliar words. The writers carried out a descriptive-qualitative design. The data were collected in the eighth grade. In five meetings, the writers taught the context clue technique to twenty-three students. The student's difficulties were observed by the observation checklist during the teaching and learning process. The students' responses were collected by the interview section in the last meeting. The results of the data analysis showed that the students had several difficulties, such as difficulty understanding context clues, difficulty translating the meaning of words due to a lack of vocabulary mastery, and difficulty guessing word classes. The results of the students' responses were positive. It was demonstrated by their enthusiasm for the teaching and learning processes. They also suggested using the context clues technique in class.

**Keywords:** Context Clues, Translation, Unfamiliar Word

### **INTRODUCTION**

Learning a language certainly has many challenges. One of these languages is English. It is considered an unexpected pronunciation with confusing rules and so many words. Not only that but having English skills also requires dedication and perseverance. At least it takes a long time, especially when you want to translate, which requires good English skills. A lot of people in the world want to speak English fluently, but they also ignore that they should be able to master other skills of the language as well (Ronauli et al., 2021). One of them is the mastery of vocabulary. It uses them to translate unfamiliar words. Having the ability to translate becomes a primary necessity for students who learn a language, especially a foreign language, particularly in English (Sultan, 2018). The ability to translate is determined by how well they master their English vocabulary. Someone weak at mastering vocabulary can hinder their ability to translate unfamiliar words. A sentence's translation can be hampered if one word's meaning is unknown. Thus, we can know the word if we use a dictionary.

Students learn English formally in Junior High School for the first time. The current curriculum applies to the educational system in Indonesia. The students have to memorize a lot of vocabulary. But many students are too lazy to memorize a new word, so they need to use a dictionary. Some students may not be aware of the efficient ways of using a dictionary (Sarigul, n.d.). They usually know the absolute meaning of familiar words without trying to explore other possibilities or meanings in a dictionary.

Finding the meaning of unfamiliar words in the dictionary is indeed a very effective alternative. However, there is a technique that may aid in translating unfamiliar words without the use of a dictionary. The name of the technique is the "context clues" technique. This context-clues technique is used if there is an unfamiliar word in the sentence. It can guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context of the sentence. Word context refers to how a term is employed in a sentence, while hints are words or phrases used to define a particularly unfamiliar. This technique is used to figure out what a new word means based on how it fits in with the words around it and other clues from the context (Fitaloka et al., 2015). Learning through context has impact in teaching. Therefore, it provides an effective way to teach unfamiliar words in English. (Amri, 2018). It will be said to be effective if students can use it. Translating the unfamiliar by using context clues is considered a technique that must be used for now.

Mauliza et al. (2019) explained in their research that the context clues strategy helped students infer word meaning from context. This technique provided the strategy that trained and guided the students to find the clues provided in the text in the form of a definition, synonym, antonym, example, or inference that helped them guess the meaning of the word. Hence, they also suggested the teacher could apply it in the classroom to facilitate students' reading comprehension. In addition, Pratiwi & Sari (2020), in their study about using guessing meaning from context, spelled out that there was a significant difference in students' reading comprehension after being taught using the guessing meaning from context strategy. In this strategy, students learned to surround themselves with words, pictures, experiences, and imagination. Furthermore, Kurniawati et al. (2019), discovered that children who were taught vocabulary via the use of context cues had great success in vocabulary. The study revealed that the mean score on the pre-test was 51.96, whereas the mean score on the post-test was 70.8. It revealed that the students' performance improved after the treatment was administered.

The difference between this and the previous study was that this one investigated the phenomenon of students translating unfamiliar words. It referred to preliminary research, where the writers found that there were two problems with the students in eighth grade. They had low initiative to bring a dictionary, and they lacked the desire to memorize new words. Thus, in the study, it was decided to investigate the phenomenon of the students' difficulties and their responses in translating unfamiliar words by using the context clue technique. In this study, the writers hoped the students would be helped to translate an unfamiliar word through the context clues technique and the teachers could use this technique in teaching English.

## **Review of Literature**

### ***Translation***

#### ***Definition of translation***

The act of transferring meaning from the source language to the target language is translation (Widiyantari & Surakarta, 2012). Another definition by (Bassnet, 2002), He argued that translation is the process of delivering a text from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL) such that the surface meaning of the two texts is comparable and the structures of the SL are retained as nearly as feasible without severely distorting the TL structures. In line with it, Newmark, (1988) defined translation as conveying the meaning of a work into another language according to the author's intentions. Besides, Sudartini, (2009) stated that translation is the superior phrase for transforming the meaning of any source-language speech into the target language.

#### ***Function of translation***

According to Hatim & Munday (2004), translation serves as a medium "across linguistic and cultural barriers" in conveying messages written in a foreign language as a communication process. So it can be said that translation is the way to find the meaning of a source language in a target language. The purpose of translation is not only to transfer the structure of the foreign language to the target language or vice versa, but also to transfer the meaning of the foreign language into an understandable target language that can be understood without changing the structure of the language or the original context.

#### ***Process of translation***

Referring to Nida (1964) in Ordudari, (2007) the translating procedures consist of two main procedures. The first is technical procedure. Technical procedure is beginning to analyze of the source and target languages a thorough study of the source language text before making attempts

translate it and making judgments of the semantic and syntactic approximations. The second is Organizational procedures. After the first step is done, the attempt is constantly reevaluated by comparing it to other available translations of the same text by other translators and by finding out how well the text communicates by asking readers of the target language for feedback and analyzing their answers.

### ***Translation unfamiliar word***

In general, a word is a linguistic element whose composition consists of a collection of letters or meaning-bearing units that serve to build sentences, phrases, and clauses. It makes someone to have to comprehend through the use of language. Words often have more than one meaning, and the more frequently a word is in the language, the more meanings it is likely to have (Kamil et al., 2000). Unfamiliar words will be found in the text. Generally, when it finds a foreign word, it can find out its meaning if using a dictionary. An unfamiliar word is a word that does not know its meaning. Unfamiliar words can hinder the translation process.

### **Context Clues**

#### ***Definition of context clues***

A context clue is one of the most helpful ways of recognizing new words (Fudhla et al., 2020). A context clue is one of the techniques that can be used to present new words in teaching vocabulary (Nation, 2001). In other words, context clues are a reliable technique for finding unfamiliar words. In addition, it may help a reader determine the meaning of a word based on a textual clue. The frequency of occurrences of the unfamiliar term, the concreteness of the word, the usefulness of the surrounding context, and the significance of the unknown word for comprehending the surrounding context all impact context-based learning (Ayu & Wardani, 2016). Thus, it can also interpret and understood that a readers (translators) can do translation by looking at the words or sentence instructions between words or other sentences that can help in translating an information from the source language into the target language, of course by linking the words with conditions and textual at the time that.

#### ***Guessing meaning from context***

Guessing the meaning of a word based on its context is appropriate for students with a limited command of vocabulary, who do not often use their previous knowledge, and who typically derive little meaning from text (Hazel, 2013). Typically, phrases and sentences surround a word, so employing context is a more effective technique for helping pupils identify its meaning (Brown,

2001). Besides, there are several different types of context clue: Definition/explanation clue; example clue; synonym clue; and antonym clue. In addition, the advantages of context clues are: Vocabulary acquisition intends to stimulate the critical thinking of the reader. For a critical reader, it does not take more time than opening a dictionary, and it can be useful to define the meaning of any polysemous word depending on the context.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

In this research, the writers carried out a descriptive-qualitative design. According to Miller, (2010), The qualitative method is a technique of inquiry in which the researcher, acting as a data-gathering instrument, strives to answer questions about how or why a certain phenomenon happens. The researcher participated in the event or condition during teaching and learning activities. For this reason, the results of this research required a depth of analysis from the researcher. In addition, the results of this research were subjective, so they could not be generalized.

### **Research Subject**

The subjects of this study were eighth-grade students in junior high school. Twenty-three students were chosen as participants in this study. The reasons for choosing them were that the students were too lazy to bring a dictionary to school and they could not memorize new vocabulary, so they were still lacking in vocabulary mastery. The reasons obtained from preliminary research.

### **Research Instruments**

A research instrument is necessary for the study. It is needed for obtaining and collecting information that is relevant to the research (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). It helped the writers do the research and get the data needed to find the result of the study. To collect the data for this study, the writers need tools to collect them. It is referred to as an instrument. The research instrument used in this study were observation, interview, and documentation.

Observation is the act of observing real-world social processes and documenting occurrences as they occur (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Observation was needed to monitor the students' learning activity in the classroom, especially the English teaching and learning process. The writers used an observation checklist to collect data. An observation checklist was used to identify students' difficulties during the teaching and learning process. In addition, the interview is a versatile and

productive instrument of data collection that is particularly suited to gathering information on the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of participants. (Coughlan, 2016). The interview was used to inquire about the students' responses to the teaching and learning process. The researcher interviewed the students directly, using the structured interview method. It was the writers had prepared some questions and alternatives in advance and we also provided recorder stuff (smartphone). Meanwhile, documentation was used to complete the other instruments. It could help to strengthen the existing data so the evidences of the data could be trusted. Good documentation is essential for the long-term viability of data collection; without it, the resource would be unusable in the future and its provenance will be lost (Joseph, 2022). Proper documentation contributed the scientific value of data collection substantially.

### **Data Collecting Procedures**

Procedures of data collecting referred to the instruments used for this study. The first step the writers did an observation by using observation checklist. It provided a list of observations to monitor the condition of twenty-three students during the teaching and learning process. The writers monitored the student's progress in translating unfamiliar words. The writers noted any difficulties that the students may have encountered. Besides, the writers applied participatory observation to see the conditions of the students. They might be exhibited when using the context clue technique. It helped to find out how capable the students were of translating unfamiliar words by using the context clues technique.

Then, after the observation, the writers selected several students to be interviewed. They certainly met homogeneous standards. The interview was used to determine the students' responses during the teaching and learning process. The writers interviewed the students directly, using the structured interview method to five respondents, and recorded the whole process. In addition, documentation was used to complete the other techniques of collecting data. The data collected were some pictures of teaching and learning activities in class and also added the documents that might be needed such lesson plan.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in this research used the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), which consists of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion. In process of analyzing data, the writers collected data first from the results of the data observation, interview and documentation. Then, the data continued with data reduction. Data reduction is a procedure that

decreases the amount of the original data and portrays it in a much lower form. Data reduction methods are used to generate a significantly more compact representation of the dataset while preserving the original data's integrity. By lowering the amount of data, the data mining process becomes more efficient, yielding the same analytical outcomes. After obtaining the data reduction, the next analysis was data display. At this step, the writers tried to categorize and present the data following the research questions, beginning with data extraction and displaying it with descriptive explanations. The last analysis was drawing a conclusion where it involved the writers' interpretation regarding the data display. Moreover, throughout the analytical process, the derived findings were also validated.

## FINDINGS

In this study, firstly, the writers explained the implementation of context clues to the students. Besides, in this study, the writers acted as a teacher and an observer. The teaching process was conducted in four meetings. The writers taught four different types of context clues. Those were definition/explanation clue, example clue, synonym clue, and antonym clue.

The first type of context clue was the definition clue. In the processing activity, the writers conveyed the meaning of definition/explanation clues, which were easy for the students to understand, and asked them to guess the meaning of the words underlined above by using the definition/explanation clues. Besides, they were also asked to pay attention to the signal word of the definition/explanation clues, which are *is, are, means, refers to*, et al. Below are the sentences:

1. Kingfishers are a group of small to medium-sized brightly colored birds.
2. A person who has lost his parents by death is called orphan.
3. Dehydration is when your body is low on water.

The next type was an example clue. The implementation process in this type was similar to the previous explanation. However, the material given was different. The students were also asked to pay attention to the signal word in the sentence as a clue, which are *including, such as, for an example, point out example*, et al. Below are the sentence of example clue:

1. The decor, including the fancy light, beautiful paintings, and unique furniture made the house look stunning.
2. The student was suffering from anxiety, for an example when he first saw the test, he began to tremble.
3. In science, we were studying marine mammals, such as whales, dolphins, and porpoises.

Another type was synonym clue. This type was taught in the third meeting where the writers provided the sentences that referred to this type as follow:

1. She hums continuously, or all the time, and it annoys me.
2. This situation is a conundrum, similarly a puzzle.
3. It was an idyllic day, sunny, warm, and perfect for a walk in the park

The students were also asked to pay attention to the signal word in the sentence as a clue, which are *also, as, like, similarly*, etc.

The last type of context clues was antonym clue. The writers provided sentences that related to the topic and they were asked to pay attention to signal word in the sentence as a clue, which are *although, however, but, rather than, while*, et al. Below were the sentences:

1. Jerry is very clumsy, but his sister Jenny is adroit.
2. Brad does not like his quiet and calm family, while he is garrulous.
3. I despise liver, but I adore steak.

After the writers had given the students the context clue materials, the students would be given a test to measure their ability to interpret unknown terms using the context clue technique. The exam consisted of 10 multiple-choice questions. It was distributed to the twenty-three eighth-grade kids. The researcher employed definition/explanation clues for numbers 1 and 2, example clues for numbers 3 and 4, synonym clues for numbers 5, 6, and 7, and antonym clues for numbers 8, 9, and 10. Below were the students' test result:

Table 1. Students' test result of context clues

Types of Context Clues	Numbers of Question	Correct	Incorrect
Definition/explanation clues	1	20	3
	2	16	7
Example clues	3	6	17
	4	7	16
Synonym clues	5	7	16
	6	8	15
	7	12	11
Antonym clues	8	12	11
	9	6	17
	10	7	16

Based on the result above, the writers could describe the students in the eighth grade to show their conditions in translating unfamiliar words by using context clues. The students' tendencies to use a dictionary were still very high. They still looked very confused about translating the unfamiliar word through the context clues technique without using a dictionary. The students also asked for a lot of the unfamiliar word meaning to the researcher as their teacher.



### **The Students' Difficulties in Translating Unfamiliar Word by Using Context Clues Technique**

To find out about the students' difficulties in translating unfamiliar words using the context clues technique, the writers used an observation checklist. Based on the result, the writers drew it into the graphic as follows:

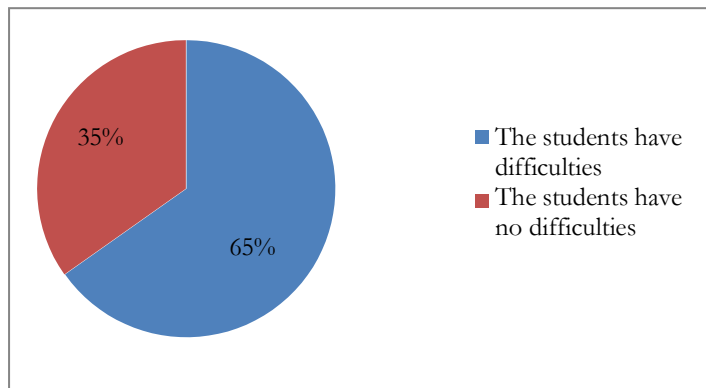


Figure 1. Percentage of Students' Difficulties

Referring to result of the observation, the students still had some difficulties on translating unfamiliar words especially to the use of context clues technique. The students' difficulties were difficulty focusing on the English learning process, difficulty understanding the explanation of context clues technique, difficulty using the definition/explanation, example, synonym, and antonym clue techniques, difficulty guessing the meaning, and difficulty guessing the word class of the unfamiliar word through context clues technique.

### **The Students' Response in Translating the Unfamiliar Words by Using the Context Clues Technique**

The result of the interview was the data to explain the students' responses in translating the unfamiliar word by using context clues. The writers used structured interviews in this study to five students as respondents. Below were students' responses:

#### ***The students felt enjoy***

It was the fifth response from respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. All of them said that they felt enjoyed the teaching and learning process. It could be shown by the answers of respondents 1, 3, 4, and 5 who said the same statement, "Yes I do, I enjoy learning English", and looked with happy expressions. Whereas respondents 2 answered, "I think.... yes I do", but looked in doubt.

***The students were not able to focus on the teacher's explanations***

Several of the students had enough difficulty understanding the use of the context clue technique because they did not focus on the teacher's explanations. It was shown that respondent 2 said, "I think it is really hard for me to focus on." It was followed by the answer of respondent 4, who said, "No, I do not... and the materials are really hard for me to understand." Whereas respondents 1, 3, and 5 admitted that they were able to focus on the learning process. But they had still a hard to understand some of the types of context clues technique. It was seen that respondent 1 answered, "I can focus on the explanation, but it is a little bit difficult for me." The same problems were also felt by respondents 3 and 5.

***The students remembered several of the types of the context clues***

Students were able to concentrate on the learning process because they retained several context hints. In addition, some students were unable to focus on their academics. The replies of responders 2, 3, and 4 demonstrated this. There are synonym clues, antonym clues, and example clues, said Respondent 2 haltingly. Similarly, respondent 3 said, "There are example clues, synonym clues, and synonym clues." In contrast to respondent 4, who only noted two categories, "there are synonym and antonym hints." In addition to these replies, respondent 1 responded fluently to the fourth category of context hints. However, there was also respondent 5 who could not recall any of the context hint strategies. In addition, all of the respondents believed that it was difficult for them to use context cues to translate unfamiliar words.

***The students preferred to use a dictionary***

After the students studied the context clue technique, they felt the use of a dictionary was an easier way to get the meaning of the unfamiliar words. It was shown by all the responses of the respondents. Respondent 1 said, "I think I prefer to use a dictionary," looking guilty. Likewise, respondents 2, 4, and 5 made similar statements. While respondent 3 confidently said, "I prefer to use the context clues technique."

***The students suggested the context clues technique to be applied in the class***

All of the students recommended this technique be applied in the class. It was shown by all of the respondents' responses. Respondent 3 expressed an interest in learning the context clues technique and said, "Yes, I do. "I propose it," she said enthusiastically. There was also respondent 2 who said, "I think it is fine for me." It was followed by the response of respondent 1, who said,

"Yes, I like it." And respondents 4 and 5 answered, "It is no problem," and looked a little bit confused.

## **Discussion**

### **The Students' Difficulties in Translating Unfamiliar Word by Using Context Clues Technique**

Based on the findings that have been collected in the field directly, the researcher had seen the students' conditions during the learning English process. Most of the students had some difficulties in using the context clues technique. It was seen from the results of the observation checklist. The researcher found most of the students had not been able or had difficulty translating unfamiliar words by using context clues. Direct instruction on how to use context clues to figure out what a word means could help students who have trouble adding words to their vocabularies, understanding what they mean, and figuring out what they are when reading (Baumann et al., 2003). The point of the students' difficulties that the researcher had discussed in this context clues technique was very hard for the students in Junior High school. They do not know or cannot use or identify the contextual information in or around the recognized words to infer or derive the meaning of any unknown words (İlter, 2019).

### **The Students' Response in Translating the Unfamiliar Words by Using the Context Clues Technique**

After the writers explained the material context clues technique in four meetings. In the last meetings, the researcher interviewed five students randomly. It was conducted by the structured interview method. One by one student were interviewed based on the questions that had been provided by the researcher. The responses given by the respondents were varied. The researcher also saw the expressions that were displayed by the respondents directly. There were the respondents who answered excited, interested, the usual reaction, stammering, and confused. The students had positive responses. It was seen by the respondents' responses. Despite the many difficulties that the students had, they said that they enjoyed the learning process. Then they also suggested the context clues technique to be applied in the class. Although, they were able to focus on understanding the explanation. But they still remembered several of the types of context clues technique. They had different ways of understanding the context clues technique. So they preferred to use a dictionary. The ability to use context to infer word meanings can compensate for learners' lack of vocabulary knowledge (Parel, 2004). But in fact, the students still really needed a

dictionary to translate the unfamiliar word. The lack of vocabulary made it difficult for the students to use the context clues technique.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to determine the difficulties and responses of eighth-grade students while translating words terms using context cues.

Based on the study results, the researcher finds that the majority of students struggle to translate foreign terms using context cues. The students struggled to concentrate on the English learning process. They had problems comprehending the context hints technique explanation. Even though there were signal words, they had trouble employing the context hints types approach. They had trouble determining the meaning of the unfamiliar terms based on their context. Using context cues, they had difficulties predicting the word classes of the unknown terms.

However, The students also have positive responses. They reported enjoying the learning process despite the many obstacles they encountered. They also proposed using the context clues in class. In additon, they were able to concentrate on comprehending the information and they still recalled some context hint techniques. Therefore, the context clues technique was comprehended by students in a variety of ways andthey still preferred using a dictionary.

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