

## Exploring Students' Meaning-Making Strategies in Indonesian–Arabic Translation: A Qualitative Inquiry

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### ABSTRACT

Translation in higher education, particularly in Indonesian–Arabic contexts, involves complex cognitive and interpretive processes that go beyond linguistic transfer. However, previous studies have largely focused on translation products rather than the process of meaning-making. This study aims to explore students' cognitive and interpretive approaches in constructing meaning prior to translation. A qualitative exploratory design within an interpretive paradigm was employed, involving undergraduate students of Arabic language and translation studies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that students employ various cognitive strategies, including global reading, inferencing, syntactic analysis, and segmentation, alongside interpretive strategies such as contextualization, intention-based interpretation, and cultural adjustment. The study also finds that students demonstrate metacognitive awareness through meaning prioritization, strategic combination, and self-monitoring. These findings suggest that translation is a process-oriented activity driven by meaning construction rather than direct language transfer. The study concludes that emphasizing students' meaning-making processes can enhance translation learning and support the development of more effective pedagogical approaches.

**Keywords:** Cognitive Strategies, Interpretive Approaches, Meaning-Making, Qualitative Inquiry, Translation Learning

### INTRODUCTION

Translation is a complex activity that involves not only transferring words from one language to another, but also encompasses a process of meaning construction that is cognitive and interpretive in nature. This complexity indicates that translation cannot be separated from the dynamics of an individual's understanding of the text and its context (Yulian et al., 2025). In the context of higher education, particularly in the Indonesian–Arabic language pair, translation becomes increasingly challenging due to significant differences in linguistic structure, culture, and systems of meaning (Nur et al., 2023). Students are not only required to understand lexical meaning, but must also be able to capture semantic nuances, pragmatic elements, and socio-cultural contexts of the source text (Sholeh et al., 2026). Therefore, the process of understanding the text before translating becomes a crucial stage in the overall

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translation activity, although this stage often receives limited attention in higher education practices.

Globally, the demand for translation competence continues to increase alongside the growth of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication. Data indicate that the global language services industry was estimated to exceed USD 60 billion in 2022, reflecting the high demand for professional translation skills (Statista, 2023). On the other hand, the EF English Proficiency Index report shows that Indonesia remains in the moderate category of foreign language proficiency, indicating challenges in second language mastery (EF Education First, 2023). In the context of Arabic, various studies show that students often experience difficulties in deeply understanding Arabic texts before translating them. This strengthens the importance of research focusing on the process of meaning comprehension in translation. Thus, meaning-making ability becomes a key aspect that needs further investigation.

In Translation Studies, translation is no longer viewed as a mechanical activity, but rather as a cognitive process involving active interpretation of the text. This process includes how individuals understand, interpret, and construct meaning based on their experiences, knowledge, and context (Xu & Jing, 2024). This perspective positions the translator as an active agent who negotiates meaning, rather than merely transferring language (Hnit & Almann, 2025). Therefore, it is important to understand how students, as novice translators, develop strategies in constructing meaning (Ali et al., 2025). This approach opens opportunities to explore cognitive dimensions that have been relatively underexplored in translation learning.

In learning practices, students often face difficulties in deeply understanding source texts before translating them. These difficulties are related to limited reading comprehension skills, which affect the process of meaning interpretation (Diem & Ramadhia, 2025). Students tend to focus on finding direct lexical equivalents without considering broader contextual aspects (Muttaqin et al., 2025). As a result, the translation process becomes superficial and fails to reflect the actual meaning of the source text (Nursetiawati et al., 2023). In addition, a lack of awareness of their own thinking processes also affects the quality of understanding (Nashori et al., 2025). This highlights the importance of approaches that emphasize cognitive strategies and reflection in translation learning.

The concept of approaches in translation becomes relevant in explaining how students understand and manage meaning. These approaches include ways of thinking, cognitive strategies, and how individuals interpret texts (Prayitno et al., 2022). In this context, cognitive approaches relate to how students process information, make inferences, and understand text structures (Rana et al., 2026). Meanwhile, interpretive approaches relate to how they consider context, culture, and implicit meaning (Riyanto & Sulong, 2025). These two approaches complement each other in forming a comprehensive understanding of the source text, making it important to explore them in order to better understand the meaning-making process.

In addition, the concept of metacognition plays an important role in the translation process. Metacognition allows students to be aware of, control, and evaluate their thinking processes when understanding texts (Kerasha et al., 2024). With this awareness, students can develop more effective strategies in constructing meaning (Supriyadi et al., 2025). However, in practice, metacognitive aspects are often not optimally integrated into translation learning (Hanifansyah et al., 2025). Students tend not to reflect on how they understand texts, resulting in less directed meaning-making processes that require further exploration.

In the context of Islamic higher education, Indonesian–Arabic translation has distinctive characteristics. Many texts are related to Islamic discourse, which contains specific terminology and concepts (Nasser & Saroughi, 2021). This requires students not only to understand the language, but also to possess adequate contextual knowledge (Riyanto & Sulong, 2025). In addition, differences in cultural systems between Indonesian and Arabic further increase the complexity of meaning comprehension (Nur et al., 2023). Therefore, the

process of interpretation becomes highly important in translation, and students need to develop approaches that integrate linguistic and contextual aspects simultaneously.

Nevertheless, translation learning practices in many universities still tend to be product-oriented. Assessment is often focused on the accuracy and appropriateness of the final translation rather than the process undertaken by students (Muttaqin et al., 2025). This results in limited attention to how students construct understanding before translating (Hanifansyah et al., 2025). In fact, this stage is the primary foundation for producing high-quality translations (Yulian et al., 2025). Without adequate understanding, translation results tend to be literal and lack contextual relevance, indicating the need to shift focus from product to process in translation studies.

Along with developments in research in education and language, qualitative approaches are increasingly used to understand individual experiences and thinking processes. This approach allows researchers to explore in depth how students understand and explain the processes they experience (Ali et al., 2025). In the context of this study, a qualitative approach provides space to explore meaning-making strategies more comprehensively (Hnit & Almanna, 2025). The data obtained are not only descriptive but also interpretive, allowing for a more complete understanding of cognitive dynamics (Xu & Jing, 2024). Thus, this study is expected to provide deeper insights into cognitive processes in translation.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to identify and understand the cognitive and interpretive approaches used by students in constructing meaning before translating texts from Indonesian into Arabic. This study specifically focuses on how students understand texts, how they interpret contextual meaning, and how they explain the approaches they use in the process. This focus aligns with the importance of developing thinking strategies in language learning (Diem & Ramadhia, 2025). In addition, this study is relevant to efforts to strengthen bilingual competence in higher education contexts (Muttaqin et al., 2025). By employing a qualitative approach, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of Translation Studies that are oriented toward cognitive processes.

## Literature Review

### *Meaning-Making in Translation as a Cognitive and Interpretive Process*

In modern scholarship, translation is no longer understood as a mechanical activity that merely transfers linguistic forms, but rather as a complex and dynamic process of meaning construction. This perspective positions the translator as an active agent who is involved in understanding, interpreting, and constructing meaning from the source text before producing the target text (Yubin et al., 2025). The shift from a product-oriented to a process-oriented perspective indicates that the quality of translation is largely determined by how meaning is constructed at the initial stage of comprehension (Yulian et al., 2025). In this context, translation is viewed as a cognitive activity that involves various mental processes such as information processing and decision-making (Zulhairi et al., 2026). Therefore, understanding the meaning-making process becomes a key element in examining translation in a more in-depth and comprehensive manner.

In line with this development, attention in Translation Studies has increasingly focused on the pre-translation stage, particularly on how individuals understand the source text. This stage involves cognitive activities such as decoding, inferencing, and integrating information, which determine how meaning is constructed before translation takes place (Diem & Ramadhia, 2025). This comprehension process is not only linguistic in nature, but is also influenced by experience, background knowledge, and individual reading ability (Yu & Kaur, 2024). In addition, comprehension strategies play an important role in helping students capture meanings that are not explicitly stated in the text (Urip et al., 2025). Thus, the stage of understanding before translation serves as a fundamental basis for meaning-making that cannot be overlooked in translation studies.

Furthermore, the meaning-making process in translation also involves an interpretive dimension related to context, pragmatics, and culture. Meaning is not only determined by linguistic structures, but also by how individuals interpret the social and cultural context surrounding the text (Sholeh et al., 2026). In this regard, translanguaging practices show that individuals often utilize multiple linguistic resources to construct meaning in a flexible and contextual manner (Alasmari et al., 2022). In addition, meaning construction is closely related to individuals' identities and social experiences, which influence how they interpret texts (Hnit & Almanna, 2025). Therefore, meaning-making in translation is both a cognitive and interpretive process that involves the interaction between language, context, and individual experience.

### ***Students' Cognitive and Interpretive Approaches in Translation***

The concept of approaches in translation refers to the ways of thinking that students use in understanding and constructing meaning, rather than merely linguistic techniques or mechanical procedures. These approaches reflect how students organize their cognitive processes when engaging with a source text (Yulian et al., 2025). From this perspective, translation involves not only language skills but also reflective and strategic thinking abilities in meaning construction (McKinley et al., 2024). Therefore, understanding these approaches is essential to reveal how students conceptually interpret the translation process they engage in. This perspective also positions students as active agents who construct meaning based on their knowledge and experiences (Ali et al., 2025).

Within the cognitive dimension, cognitive approaches include various strategies used by students in processing texts, such as meaning inferencing, sentence structure analysis, and integration of information across different parts of the text. This process involves the ability to connect new information with prior knowledge in order to achieve comprehensive understanding (Diem & Ramadhia, 2025). In addition, inferencing plays a crucial role in understanding implicit meanings that are not directly expressed in the text (Zulkhairi et al., 2026). Text processing strategies also include how students identify main ideas, relationships between ideas, and the communicative purpose of the text (Yu & Kaur, 2024). Thus, cognitive approaches play a fundamental role in establishing the basis of understanding before translation occurs.

On the other hand, interpretive approaches relate to students' ability to interpret meaning based on context, culture, and communicative situations. Meaning in a text is not always explicit, requiring students to consider pragmatic and cultural factors to achieve accurate understanding (Sholeh et al., 2026). Linguistic ambiguity also requires students to engage in flexible and contextual interpretation so that the meaning aligns with the author's intention (Urip et al., 2025). In addition, translanguaging practices demonstrate that individuals often draw on multiple linguistic resources to support more effective meaning interpretation (Alasmari et al., 2022). Therefore, interpretive approaches are essential in explaining how students construct contextual meaning in translation.

Furthermore, the relationship between approaches and thinking awareness highlights the importance of metacognition in the translation process. Metacognition enables students to reflect on the strategies they use and evaluate the effectiveness of their understanding of the text (Stofiana et al., 2025). This ability helps students regulate their thinking processes, including selecting the most appropriate strategies for meaning comprehension (Kerasha et al., 2024). In addition, reflection on thinking processes contributes to the development of more independent and adaptive learning competencies (Nursetiawati et al., 2023). Therefore, the integration of cognitive and interpretive approaches supported by metacognitive awareness becomes central to understanding how students construct meaning in translation.

### ***Translation Learning in Higher Education Contexts***

Translation learning in higher education is generally still dominated by a product-oriented approach, where students' success is measured based on the accuracy and quality of the final translation. This approach tends to position translation as an evaluative activity rather than a learning process that emphasizes students' cognitive development (Yulian et al., 2025). In practice, students are more directed to produce "correct" translations rather than to understand how meaning is constructed during the translation process (Setiyadi et al., 2025). This condition leads to limited exploration of the thinking strategies actually used by students in understanding texts (McKinley et al., 2024). Therefore, a paradigm shift toward a more process-oriented approach in translation learning is needed.

A process-based approach in translation learning provides space for students to develop cognitive and reflective strategies in understanding texts. This approach emphasizes the importance of exploring students' ways of thinking, including how they make inferences, understand context, and reflect on their comprehension (Stofiana et al., 2025). In addition, process-oriented learning enables students to develop metacognitive awareness, which plays a significant role in improving comprehension quality (Kerasha et al., 2024). In language learning contexts, strategies such as translanguaging can also support more flexible and adaptive meaning construction (Gusdian et al., 2026). Thus, a process-based approach not only enhances learning outcomes but also strengthens students' thinking abilities in translation.

In the context of Islamic higher education, Indonesian–Arabic translation learning has a more complex dimension because it involves not only language mastery but also an understanding of values, culture, and Islamic discourse. Education in this context requires the integration of linguistic competence and deep contextual understanding (Nasser & Saroughi, 2021). In addition, the development of bilingual competence becomes an important goal in supporting students' ability to comprehend and produce cross-linguistic texts (Muttaqin et al., 2025). Arabic language learning practices also highlight the need for more communicative and contextual approaches to enhance student engagement (Murtadho et al., 2025). Therefore, a process-based approach in translation learning is highly relevant to bridge theory, practice, and contextual needs in Islamic higher education.

### ***Relevant Studies***

Previous studies indicate that research in language learning and translation has developed toward more contextual and process-oriented perspectives. Alasmari et al. (2022) found that translanguaging practices help students construct meaning flexibly through the use of multiple linguistic resources. Setyaningrum et al. (2022) showed that translanguaging also functions as a scaffolding strategy that supports students' understanding in bilingual learning contexts. Gusdian et al. (2026), through their systematic study, emphasized that translanguaging plays an important role in facilitating cognitive processes and meaning interaction in language learning.

Other studies highlight the importance of pedagogical approaches that promote students' cognitive and interpretive engagement in language learning. Baharun et al. (2025) demonstrated that a constructivist approach through storytelling enhances students' ability to actively construct meaning. Murtadho et al. (2025) found that a communicative approach in Arabic language learning improves student interaction and contextual understanding. Setiyadi et al. (2025) also revealed that a genre-based approach helps students understand text structure and purpose more deeply in academic contexts.

In addition, several studies emphasize the importance of cognitive and reflective aspects in understanding language meaning. Stofiana et al. (2025) identified a metacognitive gap in students' thinking processes that affects the quality of their understanding. Urip et al. (2025) showed that students' reflection on pragmatic meaning enhances interpretive awareness in understanding texts. Zulkhairi et al. (2026) revealed that processing idioms in a second

language involves complex cognitive strategies, particularly in understanding non-literal meaning.

Although these studies have made important contributions to understanding language learning and translation, most of them still focus on learning strategies, language skills, or comprehension outcomes without specifically exploring how students conceptualize their cognitive and interpretive approaches in the translation process. Existing research tends to highlight pedagogical practices or linguistic performance rather than students' ways of thinking in constructing meaning before translating. In addition, there is still limited research that examines the meaning-making process in depth within the Indonesian–Arabic translation context in Islamic higher education. Therefore, further research is needed to specifically explore students' cognitive and interpretive approaches in constructing meaning as part of the translation process.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory design aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of how students construct meaning before engaging in the translation process. This approach is selected because the study focuses on subjective experiences, thinking processes, and how students interpret texts, which cannot be measured quantitatively. Thus, this study seeks to explore the phenomenon in a naturalistic manner based on participants' perspectives.

Epistemologically, this study is grounded in an interpretive paradigm that views reality as socially and cognitively constructed by individuals. In this context, meaning is not considered fixed but is constructed through the interaction between individuals, language, and context. Therefore, this study positions students as active subjects who construct meaning through cognitive and interpretive approaches in the pre-translation process.

### **Respondents**

The participants in this study are students from Arabic language or translation study programs at the intermediate to advanced semester levels. The selection of participants is based on the assumption that students at this level already have experience in translation activities and possess a basic understanding of Arabic and Indonesian language structures. This is important to ensure that participants are able to reflect on their thinking processes more deeply. The participant selection technique uses purposive sampling by considering specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. These criteria include experience in taking translation courses and basic competence in understanding Arabic texts. With this approach, the data obtained are expected to be richer and more relevant in describing the approaches students use in constructing meaning.

### **Instruments**

The main instrument in this study is a semi-structured interview designed to explore in depth the strategies used by students in understanding texts before translating. The interview uses open-ended questions that allow participants to explain their experiences, thoughts, and strategies in a reflective manner. This approach provides flexibility for the researcher to explore participants' responses more deeply. The primary focus of this instrument is on how students understand texts, how they determine meaning, and how they overcome difficulties in the process. In addition, the interview aims to reveal how students explain the approaches they use, both cognitive and interpretive. Therefore, this instrument is designed to capture students' thinking processes rather than the translation products they produce.

## Procedures

The research procedure begins with selecting participants who meet the research criteria, followed by scheduling individual interviews. Before the interviews are conducted, participants are provided with an explanation of the research objectives and are asked to give their consent to participate. This step is intended to ensure that the research process is conducted ethically and transparently. Subsequently, the interviews are conducted either face-to-face or online, with duration adjusted according to the needs of data exploration. All interview sessions are recorded to ensure data accuracy, and then transcribed verbatim. These transcripts serve as the primary basis for data analysis to identify patterns and themes related to students' approaches in constructing meaning.

## Data analysis

Data analysis in this study employs thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning emerging from the interview data. The analysis process begins with reading and thoroughly understanding the transcripts to gain a general overview of the data. This is followed by initial coding to identify units of meaning relevant to the research focus.

The next stage involves categorizing the codes into two main groups, namely cognitive strategies and interpretive strategies, which reflect the approaches used by students in understanding texts. After that, themes are generated to represent the main patterns found in the data. This process is conducted iteratively to ensure that the resulting themes accurately reflect the participants' experiences and perspectives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Cognitive Approaches in Understanding Source Texts Prior to Translation

The findings of this study indicate that students employ various cognitive approaches in understanding texts before translating, reflecting active, strategic, and gradual thinking processes. These approaches are not singular but consist of multiple complementary strategies, such as meaning inferencing, global reading, syntactic analysis, and problem-solving through text segmentation. These findings demonstrate that students do not read texts linearly, but instead develop systematic ways of thinking to construct deeper understanding. These cognitive approaches serve as the primary foundation in the meaning-making process prior to translation. This is consistent with the view that text comprehension in language learning involves complex cognitive processes, including active interpretation and information processing (McKinley et al., 2024). In addition, cognitive strategies play an important role in helping students connect new information with their prior knowledge (Diem & Ramadhia, 2025).

One of the main approaches identified is the use of global reading strategies combined with meaning inferencing. Students tend to read the entire text first to gain a general understanding before focusing on difficult parts. This strategy reflects an awareness of the importance of understanding the global context before analyzing linguistic details. Furthermore, students use inferencing to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases based on sentence context. This approach shows that students do not rely solely on dictionaries but attempt to maximize their cognitive abilities in understanding texts. This strategy is illustrated in the following excerpt:

“Usually I read the text twice. First to get the general idea, then to focus on difficult words. If there is a word I do not understand, I try to guess it from the context before opening the dictionary.” (Student 1, Interview, 2025)

This strategy demonstrates that the meaning-making process involves systematic stages, beginning with global understanding and followed by detailed analysis. This aligns with findings that effective readers use both top-down and bottom-up strategies simultaneously in

text comprehension (Yu & Kaur, 2024). Moreover, inferencing ability is an essential component in understanding implicit meanings in texts (Zulkhairi et al., 2026).

Another cognitive approach identified is syntactic parsing, where students focus on identifying basic elements such as subject and predicate to understand sentence meaning. This strategy indicates that students employ an analytical approach to deconstruct linguistic structures as a foundation for comprehension. By understanding sentence structure, students can more easily grasp relationships between elements and the intended meaning of the sentence. This suggests that syntactic understanding plays a crucial role in the meaning-making process. This finding is supported by the following statement:

“I focus more on sentence structure. If I already know the subject and predicate, it becomes easier to understand the meaning of the sentence.” (Student 2, Interview, 2025)

This strategy shows that students rely on linguistic analysis as a tool to understand texts more systematically. This approach is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of structural understanding in enhancing text interpretation skills (Gomez-Laich et al., 2026). In addition, structural analysis is also part of a genre-based approach that helps students understand the function and purpose of texts (Setiyadi et al., 2025).

In addition, students employ segmentation strategies as a form of problem-solving when dealing with complex texts. This strategy involves breaking the text into smaller units, such as phrases or clauses, to facilitate comprehension. This approach indicates that students are able to manage cognitive load by simplifying complex information. After understanding smaller units, students reconstruct the meaning to achieve a comprehensive understanding. This is reflected in the following excerpt:

“If the text is difficult, I break it into smaller parts first. I understand it phrase by phrase, then combine it again.” (Student 3, Interview, 2025)

This strategy demonstrates problem-solving ability in the meaning-making process, where students actively seek ways to overcome comprehension difficulties. This approach aligns with the concept of scaffolding in language learning, which supports students in understanding material gradually (Oktavera et al., 2025). Furthermore, problem-solving through segmentation reflects an effective cognitive strategy in managing linguistic complexity (Ollerhead & Pennington, 2026).

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the cognitive approaches used by students do not operate independently but interact with one another during the comprehension process. For example, global reading strategies may be combined with structural analysis and inferencing to produce a more comprehensive understanding. This indicates that the meaning-making process is dynamic and involves the simultaneous use of multiple strategies. This approach reflects students' cognitive flexibility in dealing with different types of texts. The findings also show that students are able to adjust their strategies according to the level of text difficulty they encounter. This is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of strategic flexibility in language learning (Gusdian et al., 2026). In addition, the simultaneous use of multiple strategies indicates an integration between cognitive processes and prior learning experiences (Baharun et al., 2025).

In the context of Arabic language learning, the use of these cognitive approaches indicates that students have developed strategies that support deeper text comprehension. This is particularly important given the complexity of Arabic, which has grammatical structures and meaning systems that differ from Indonesian. Cognitive approaches help students bridge these differences through systematic analysis and interpretation processes. Moreover, these strategies also contribute to the development of better communicative competence in Arabic. This finding is consistent with research showing that communicative and cognitive approaches can significantly enhance language comprehension (Murtadho et al., 2025). Additionally, the integration of language learning and meaning comprehension is an important factor in improving learning quality (Muslimah et al., 2025).

Overall, these findings demonstrate that students employ complex cognitive approaches in understanding texts before translation. These approaches include global reading strategies, meaning inferencing, structural analysis, and segmentation as a form of problem-solving. These strategies indicate that the translation process begins with deep and structured cognitive activity. This reinforces the idea that translation is not merely a linguistic activity but also a thinking process involving various cognitive strategies. Therefore, understanding these approaches is essential in developing translation learning that is more process-oriented. These findings also highlight the importance of integrating thinking strategies into language learning to enhance students' meaning-making abilities (Alasmari et al., 2022). In addition, this approach suggests that language learning should consider reflective and cognitive aspects in developing students' competencies (Setyaningrum et al., 2022).

### **Interpretive Approaches in Understanding Contextual Meaning**

The findings of this study indicate that students employ various interpretive approaches in understanding contextual meaning before translating texts. These approaches reflect students' efforts not only to understand literal meaning, but also to consider context, communicative purpose, and cultural aspects underlying the text. The findings confirm that meaning-making in translation cannot be separated from interpretive processes that are contextual and situational. Students actively interpret texts by considering domain, ambiguity, and the appropriateness of meaning in the target language. This aligns with the view that translation involves a complex interpretive process in which meaning is constructed through the interaction between text and context (Yubin et al., 2025). In addition, contextual understanding is a key factor in enhancing deep text comprehension (Yu & Kaur, 2024).

One of the dominant interpretive approaches identified is contextualization and domain awareness, where students first identify the general context of the text before determining the meaning of words or phrases. Students recognize that the meaning of a word may change depending on the field or topic being discussed, so they do not immediately translate literally. This approach demonstrates awareness that meaning is dynamic and influenced by context of use. By understanding the domain of the text, students are able to select more accurate and relevant equivalents. This is reflected in the following excerpt:

“Sometimes the meaning of a word is different depending on the context. So I first look at what the text is about, for example religion or general topics, then determine the most appropriate meaning.” (Student 1, Interview, 2025)

This strategy indicates that students use a top-down approach in understanding texts by relying on context as the basis for interpretation. This approach is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of context in determining meaning in language learning (Setiyadi et al., 2025). In addition, the ability to understand domain is also related to the development of contextual literacy in Arabic language learning (Muslimah et al., 2024).

Another interpretive approach identified is intention-based interpretation, where students attempt to understand the author's intention before translating the text. Students do not only focus on linguistic structure, but also try to imagine the communicative purpose conveyed by the author. This approach indicates that students possess pragmatic awareness in understanding texts. In addition, this strategy is used to resolve ambiguity in texts by considering meanings that best fit the context. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

“If a sentence feels ambiguous, I try to imagine what the author means. So I do not translate word for word immediately.” (Student 2, Interview, 2025)

This strategy shows that students use an interpretive approach that involves understanding the communicative intention of the author. This approach is consistent with research showing that understanding pragmatic meaning requires interpreting the author's intention (Urip et al., 2025). Furthermore, the ability to resolve ambiguity is an essential part of complex language processing (Zulkhairi et al., 2026).

In addition, students employ cultural adjustment and pragmatic interpretation strategies in understanding textual meaning. These strategies are used when students encounter terms or concepts that do not have direct equivalents in the target language. In such cases, students attempt to find equivalents that are more appropriate culturally and pragmatically, even if they are not lexically identical. This approach indicates that students understand that translation is not always literal, but requires adaptation to ensure that meaning is effectively conveyed. This is reflected in the following excerpt:

“Some terms cannot be translated directly, so I look for equivalents commonly used in Arabic even if they are not exactly the same.” (Student 3, Interview, 2025)

This strategy demonstrates that students use an adaptive approach in constructing meaning appropriate to the cultural context of the target language. This approach aligns with research showing that translanguaging and linguistic flexibility support cross-cultural meaning construction (Setyaningrum et al., 2022). In addition, the use of pragmatic strategies reflects the ability to adjust meaning according to social and cultural contexts (Waluyo & Khan, 2026).

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the interpretive approaches used by students are dynamic and complementary. Students do not rely on a single strategy, but combine multiple approaches to achieve a more comprehensive understanding. For instance, contextualization can be combined with intention-based interpretation to produce more accurate understanding. This indicates that the meaning-making process is flexible and depends on the complexity of the text. This finding is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of using multiple strategies simultaneously in language learning (Oktavera et al., 2025). In addition, this approach reflects students' adaptive ability in dealing with different types of texts (Ollerhead & Pennington, 2026).

In the context of Arabic language learning in higher education, the use of interpretive approaches indicates that students have developed the ability to understand texts contextually and critically. This is particularly important because many Arabic texts contain implicit meanings and complex cultural nuances. Interpretive approaches help students bridge differences between the source and target languages. Moreover, these strategies support the development of more effective communicative competence. This aligns with research emphasizing the importance of communicative approaches in Arabic language learning (Zainuddin et al., 2025). In addition, integrating cultural context into learning plays a crucial role in improving students' understanding (Uekusa et al., 2026).

Beyond cognitive and interpretive aspects, the findings also reveal a connection with students' reflective awareness in understanding texts. Students indirectly evaluate the meaning choices they make based on context and communicative purpose. This indicates the presence of a metacognitive dimension in the interpretation process, although it is not always explicitly recognized. This ability helps students select the most appropriate strategies for understanding texts. This finding is consistent with research showing the existence of metacognitive gaps in students' thinking processes that need to be developed (Stofiana et al., 2025). In addition, reflection plays an important role in enhancing the quality of language comprehension (Yu & Kaur, 2024).

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that students employ complex interpretive approaches in understanding contextual meaning before translation. These approaches include contextualization, domain awareness, intention-based interpretation, disambiguation, as well as cultural adjustment and pragmatic interpretation. These strategies indicate that students do not merely understand texts literally, but also consider various contextual aspects in constructing meaning. This confirms that translation is an interpretive process involving deep understanding of both text and context. Therefore, interpretive approaches become a crucial component in the meaning-making process in translation. The findings also suggest that translation learning should place greater emphasis on developing students' interpretive abilities as part of complex thinking processes (Yubin et al., 2025).

## **Students' Explanations of Their Meaning-Making Approaches in Indonesian–Arabic Translation**

The findings of this study indicate that students not only use various approaches in understanding texts, but are also able to reflectively explain how these approaches are applied in the translation process. These explanations reveal an awareness of the stages of thinking they go through, from understanding meaning to producing translations. Students demonstrate that translation is not an immediate activity, but rather involves structured stages of comprehension. These findings confirm that students are capable of articulating their thinking strategies explicitly. This suggests that the translation process involves an important reflective dimension in meaning-making. This finding is consistent with the view that modern language learning emphasizes awareness of thinking processes in language use (McKinley et al., 2024). In addition, the ability to explain strategies also reflects deep cognitive engagement in the learning process (Baharun et al., 2025).

One of the main approaches explained by students is meaning prioritization, which emphasizes understanding meaning before translating. Students consistently stated that they do not directly translate, but first attempt to understand the overall meaning of the text. This approach reflects a comprehension-first orientation, where understanding becomes the primary priority before language transfer takes place. This indicates that students are aware of the importance of the pre-translation stage as the main foundation for producing accurate translations. This approach is reflected in the following statement:

“I do not translate immediately, but first understand the meaning. Once I understand it, then I convert it into Arabic.” (Student 1, Interview, 2025)

This statement shows that students are aware of the sequence of processes in translation, namely understanding first before transferring meaning. This approach aligns with research emphasizing the importance of meaning comprehension in language learning and translation processes (Muslimah et al., 2025). Furthermore, this approach reflects meaning-based learning practices that place comprehension at the core of language activities (Murtadho et al., 2025).

In addition, students explained that they use a combination of strategies in the process of understanding and translating texts. This approach indicates that students do not rely on a single source or strategy, but combine various methods to achieve better understanding. One commonly used combination is the use of dictionaries integrated with contextual understanding. This shows that students are aware that meaning cannot always be obtained directly from a dictionary. The following statement illustrates this:

“I combine using a dictionary and understanding the context. If I rely only on the dictionary, sometimes the result does not make sense.” (Student 2, Interview, 2025)

This approach reflects a strategic combination that demonstrates flexibility in the use of strategies. Moreover, the use of combined strategies indicates metacognitive awareness, where students recognize the limitations of each strategy and attempt to overcome them. This finding is consistent with research showing that translanguaging and the use of multiple linguistic resources can enhance meaning comprehension more effectively (Alasmari et al., 2022). In addition, strategic flexibility is an essential component of pedagogical practices in language learning (Gusdian et al., 2026).

Furthermore, students also demonstrate awareness of self-evaluation processes in understanding and translating texts. They recognize that their initial understanding is not always accurate, so rechecking is necessary. This approach reflects self-monitoring and evaluative strategies in students' thinking processes. Students actively evaluate their comprehension and translation outcomes to ensure meaning accuracy. This is evident in the following excerpt:

“I realize that I often feel unsure, so I usually check my work again to be more confident.” (Student 3, Interview, 2025)

This statement indicates that students possess reflective awareness of their own thinking processes. This approach aligns with the concept of metacognition, which emphasizes the importance of monitoring and evaluation in learning (Stofiana et al., 2025). In addition, self-evaluation plays a crucial role in improving the quality of comprehension and learning outcomes (Oktavera et al., 2025).

The findings also show that students do not merely use strategies intuitively, but are able to explain the reasons behind their use. This indicates a connection between learning experience and reflective ability in the translation process. Students demonstrate that they learn from previous experiences when dealing with difficulties in understanding texts. This approach reflects a constructive and continuous learning process. This is consistent with research showing that experience-based learning can enhance reflective thinking skills (Ollerhead & Pennington, 2026). Furthermore, this process also reflects the development of learner identity in the context of language use (Uekusa et al., 2026).

In the context of Arabic language learning, students' ability to explain their approaches indicates that they have developed strategies suited to the characteristics of the language being learned. Arabic, with its complex structure and distinctive meaning system, requires students to adopt more reflective and adaptive approaches. These approaches help students understand texts more deeply before translating them. In addition, this ability supports the development of communicative competence in Arabic. This finding is consistent with research showing that communicative approaches can improve language comprehension and use effectively (Murtadho et al., 2025). Moreover, the integration of comprehension and language production is a crucial factor in language learning (Muslimah et al., 2024).

Moreover, the findings indicate that the approaches used by students are dynamic rather than static. Students are able to adjust their strategies according to the level of text difficulty and the purpose of translation. This demonstrates that students possess flexibility in applying various approaches situationally. This approach reflects adaptive competence, which is essential in language learning. This is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of flexibility in strategy use in language learning (Setiyadi et al., 2025). In addition, the contextual use of multiple strategies reflects the integration of cognitive and social aspects in language learning (Setyaningrum et al., 2022).

Additionally, students' ability to explain their approaches reflects a significant development of metacognitive awareness. Students not only apply strategies, but also understand how and why those strategies are used. This indicates that they have control over their own thinking processes. Such awareness enables students to select the most effective strategies for understanding texts. This finding is consistent with research showing that metacognitive awareness plays an important role in improving learning quality (Stofiana et al., 2025). Furthermore, reflection on thinking processes helps students develop more effective strategies (Gomez-Laich et al., 2026).

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that students are able to explain their approaches in the translation process in a reflective and systematic manner. These approaches include meaning prioritization, strategic combination, as well as self-monitoring and self-evaluation. This indicates that translation is not only a linguistic activity, but also involves complex reflective thinking processes. Therefore, students act not only as language users, but also as individuals who actively manage their thinking processes in understanding and constructing meaning. These findings highlight the importance of integrating metacognitive aspects into translation learning. In addition, the results suggest that a process-oriented approach can help students develop more effective thinking strategies in translation.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students employ a range of cognitive and interpretive approaches in constructing meaning prior to translating Indonesian texts into Arabic. The

findings reveal that students do not engage in translation as a direct linguistic transfer, but rather as a structured meaning-making process that involves global reading, inferencing, syntactic analysis, and segmentation strategies. In addition, interpretive approaches such as contextualization, intention-based interpretation, and cultural adjustment play a crucial role in helping students understand contextual meaning. The study also highlights that students are capable of articulating their own strategies, indicating the presence of metacognitive awareness through meaning prioritization, strategic combination, and self-monitoring. Overall, translation is demonstrated to be a cognitively and interpretively driven process rather than a product-oriented activity.

The findings of this study have important implications for translation pedagogy, particularly in higher education contexts. First, translation teaching should shift from a product-oriented approach to a process-oriented approach that emphasizes students' meaning-making strategies. Second, instructors should design learning activities that foster cognitive and interpretive engagement, such as encouraging students to reflect on how they understand texts rather than focusing solely on translation accuracy. Third, integrating metacognitive training into translation instruction can help students become more aware of their thinking processes and improve their strategic decision-making. Furthermore, the findings suggest that contextual and cultural understanding should be explicitly incorporated into translation teaching, especially in Indonesian–Arabic contexts where linguistic and cultural differences are significant.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the data are based on self-reported interviews, which rely on students' ability to reflect on and articulate their thinking processes, potentially limiting the accuracy of the findings. Second, the study does not capture real-time cognitive processes, as it does not employ methods such as think-aloud protocols or observational techniques. Third, the relatively small and context-specific sample limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings. Therefore, future research is recommended to use multiple data collection methods, including real-time cognitive tracking and triangulation techniques, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of meaning-making processes. Additionally, further studies could explore different language pairs or educational contexts to enhance the applicability of the findings.

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