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FROM REDUNDANCY TO CLARITY: ADDRESSING CIRCUMLOCUTION IN STUDENTS' ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

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abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of circumlocution in Indonesian-English student translations. Circumlocution, defined as the unnecessary use of repetitive or wordy expressions, often appears when learners translate directly from Indonesian into English, producing texts that are redundant and less communicative. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, 20 translation samples from senior high school students were analyzed to identify types of circumlocution, propose revisions through sentence-combining strategies, and explain possible causes. Four major patterns were found: repetition of words, repetition of phrases, repetition of clauses, and verbose sentences. The analysis shows that circumlocution is influenced by limited vocabulary, transfer from Indonesian discourse norms, restricted syntactic repertoire, and the pressure of timed translation tasks. By reconstructing circumlocution into concise alternatives, this study provides insights into both translation pedagogy and EFL writing instruction. The findings emphasize the importance of training students in economy of expression to produce clearer and more natural English translations.

INTRODUCTION

Language operates primarily within social interaction, with linguistic choices shaped by social purposes, communicative goals, and cultural settings. It functions simultaneously as a means of communication, a tool for thinking, a medium for literary creation, a social institution, and a force that contributes to national development (Borghi, 2023). In the Indonesian context, English is introduced as a foreign language from the primary level and has become increasingly significant in educational settings, professional domains, and academic advancement.

Language learning is commonly understood to involve four core skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Oral skills such as listening and speaking tend to develop earlier, whereas reading and writing typically require intentional instruction and sustained practice. Despite the perception among some learners that literacy skills are secondary to spoken communication, they are essential in an information-oriented world for accessing knowledge and engaging in global communication (Peng et al., 2023). Reading exposes learners to authentic language use, while writing encourages active language production and reflective thinking.

Writing in a foreign language, however, is particularly demanding. It requires both cognitive analysis and linguistic synthesis, and achieving proficiency takes considerable time and effort. For students, especially in EFL contexts, writing not only reinforces vocabulary, idioms, and grammar but also encourages risk-taking with language use and creative

expression (Fodil-Cherif, 2021). Through the act of writing, learners continually experiment with new ways of expressing ideas, refine their ability to select precise words, and strengthen their overall linguistic competence.

Academic writing functions within a social framework, as it is produced and interpreted through discourse practices influenced by disciplinary communities and shared conventions (Suleymanova, 2023). Consequently, writing in English as a non-native language in Indonesia involves more than mastering linguistic forms (such as grammar and vocabulary); it also requires sensitivity to rhetorical norms, including clarity, brevity, and coherence.

One recurrent problem in Indonesian students' English compositions and translations is circumlocution, that is, the tendency to use unnecessarily wordy, repetitive, or indirect expressions. In Indonesian, repetition often functions as a stylistic device to emphasize meaning; however, in English it can reduce clarity and readability. Recent research in EFL writing highlights that redundancy and verbosity are among the most frequent challenges students face, leading to texts that lack fluency and naturalness (Peng et al., 2023).

The phenomenon of circumlocution is not only a linguistic issue but also reflects cross-linguistic transfer and rhetorical interference. In translation studies, this aligns with Toury's (1995) notion of *interference*, where features of the source language affect the target text, and Baker's (1996) concept of *translation universals*, particularly redundancy and explicitation. If left unaddressed, circumlocution hinders the development of students' writing and translation competence.

Developing writing skills in English is essential for senior high school students because writing supports both language mastery and self-expression. Through writing, learners strengthen their understanding of grammatical forms and vocabulary while gradually gaining confidence in using English to communicate ideas. Writing also provides opportunities for students to explore language creatively, as they are encouraged to move beyond familiar expressions and experiment with new ways of conveying meaning. This process requires sustained cognitive involvement, which helps learners become more aware of their language choices and improves overall learning.

In composition writing, students are required to organize ideas systematically into sentences and paragraphs so that their message can be clearly understood by readers. Effective writing is achieved when ideas are presented in a way that allows readers to follow the intended meaning without difficulty. Prijambada (1999) explains that successful composition writing depends on three key elements: adequate knowledge of the topic, coherent paragraph development, and clarity of expression.

Topic knowledge enables writers to elaborate ideas meaningfully, while paragraph development ensures that sentences within a paragraph are logically related and focused on a central idea. Clarity in writing refers to the use of well-structured and connected sentences that avoid ambiguity. Writing becomes unclear when sentences are incomplete, poorly connected, or unnecessarily indirect. Problems such as run-on sentences, dangling modifiers, and excessive circumlocution may interfere with comprehension and reduce the effectiveness of a composition (Prijambada, 1999).

Prijambada (1999) explains that circumlocution refers to the use of phrases, clauses, or sentence constructions that contain unnecessary wording or excessive elaboration, making the intended meaning difficult to understand. An idea should be expressed as efficiently as possible, using only the words that are truly needed. In this sense, economical writing emphasizes brevity and precision. A sentence is considered concise when it avoids redundant wording and does not repeat the same idea unnecessarily (Prijambada, 1999).

Sentences that convey similar ideas in separate statements may be grammatically correct but not always effective. When related ideas are expressed more economically within a single sentence, the result is often clearer and more engaging. This can be achieved through various sentence-combining techniques, such as coordination, subordination, or modification. By combining related ideas into one well-structured sentence, writers can reduce repetition while maintaining meaning.

It is important to note that there is no single correct way to combine sentences. Writers may choose from multiple possible structures depending on clarity and emphasis. Sentence combining encourages learners to explore different syntactic options and to consider how meaning changes with different arrangements of words. The purpose of this activity is not to create longer sentences, but to help students develop more effective and flexible writing skills. Through this process, students learn to evaluate different sentence constructions and select the one that communicates ideas most clearly and efficiently.

From the explanation given above, it is quite interesting to examine circumlocutions found in students' English composition. The circumlocution I meant in this study is based on Prijambada's definition; that is phrases, clauses, or sentences containing unnecessary words. The research explores the cases of circumlocution and the writer tries to find out ways to combine sentences using some techniques of sentence combining so that the sentences will be connected smoothly and there will be no unnecessary words. These techniques include combining sentence components, employing subordination to relate clauses, linking ideas through appositive constructions, and using participial or absolute phrases, among other syntactic options.

This research is aimed firstly, to examine and to explain kinds of circumlocution that the senior high school students made in writing a composition in English, secondly, to convert the uneconomical sentences into more economical one by using some techniques of revising an ineffective sentence (in this case, using grammatical approaches), and thirdly, to find out the probable causes of the circumlocutions.

METHOD

This study applied a descriptive mixed-method design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative component was used to identify and describe different types of circumlocution found in students' English compositions, while the quantitative component was used to calculate the frequency and percentage distribution of each circumlocution type. Descriptive research of this nature aims to systematically capture patterns and tendencies in data without attempting to generalize beyond the sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dörnyei, 2021).

The primary data consisted of English compositions written by 75 senior high school students who participated in the semifinal of the Quick Quiz English Competition, held by American English Course Purwokerto. In the Writing Section of the competition, students were required to produce a short essay on the topic of Global Warming. Each essay was limited to 150 words and completed within a 15-minute time frame. A total of seventy-five students participated, and the researcher selected twenty compositions that contained clear instances of circumlocution and were directly relevant to the research objectives.

The data analyzed were sentences that contained circumlocutions, including repetition of words, repetition of phrases, repetition of clauses, and verbose or wordy sentences. These data were subjected to qualitative categorization as well as quantitative counting. The quantitative aspect allowed the researcher to measure the frequency and proportion of each type of circumlocution, providing a clearer picture of which forms were most prevalent.

The study employed document analysis, a common qualitative technique for examining written texts (Bowen, 2009). The researcher first collected the students' compositions, read them closely, and identified sentences containing circumlocution. Instances were then categorized according to type and tabulated. For the quantitative dimension, simple frequency counts and percentage distributions were calculated for each category, following descriptive statistics approaches used in applied linguistics (Mackey & Gass, 2021).

The research procedure followed several stages. First, data collection was conducted by gathering the students' written compositions from the competition. Second, an identification process was carried out to locate sentences containing circumlocution. Third, qualitative analysis was performed by categorizing these sentences into four types of circumlocution. Fourth, quantitative analysis was applied by counting the frequency of each type and calculating percentages to determine their distribution. Fifth, interpretation was conducted by presenting the examples alongside revised versions, analyzing causes of circumlocution, and linking them to translation and EFL pedagogy. Finally, conclusions were drawn to address the research problems and objectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The study identified a total of 75 instances of circumlocution in student translations, which were classified into four major categories: repetition of words, repetition of phrases, repetition of clauses, and verbose or wordy sentences. Among these, verbose sentences (28 cases, 35%) and repetition of clauses (24 cases, 30%) emerged as the most frequent problems. These two categories together account for nearly two-thirds of the total instances, highlighting a tendency among students to extend ideas unnecessarily or repeat similar structures instead of condensing them into clear and concise statements. Meanwhile, repetition of words (13 cases, 16.25%) and repetition of phrases (10 cases, 12.5%) appeared less frequently, yet they still reflect significant challenges in managing redundancy at the lexical and phrasal levels.

Each category of circumlocution was addressed through specific conversion strategies. In instances of word repetition, redundancy was reduced by employing referential expressions, pronoun substitution, and lexical variation. For repeated phrases, restructuring techniques such as relative clauses, appositive phrases, and deletion of unnecessary elements were applied to streamline meaning. Repetition of clauses was addressed through sentence combining, subordination, and ellipsis, which allow multiple ideas to be merged without unnecessary duplication. Finally, verbose or wordy sentences were simplified by using parallel structures, gerunds, and omission of redundant expressions, thereby making the text more compact and communicative.

Table 1. Types of Circumlocution and Conversion Strategies

Type of Circumlocution Frequency Percentage			Main Conversion Strategies
Repetition of Words	13	17.3%	Elimination, lexical substitution
Repetition of Phrases	10	13.3%	Relative clauses, appositives
Repetition of Clauses	24	32.0%	Subordination, clause combining
Verbose Sentences	28	37.3%	Parallel structure, simplification, deletion of redundancy

Type of Circumlocation	Frequency	Percentage	Main Conversion Strategies
Total	75	100%	—

The table presents the types of circumlocation, their frequency and percentage, and the main conversion strategies used to address them. Overall, the data show that verbose sentences are the most frequent type of circumlocation, accounting for 28 instances (37.3%). These are primarily handled through parallel structure, simplification, and deletion of redundancy, indicating a strong tendency toward reducing unnecessary elaboration at the sentence level. The second most common type is repetition of clauses, with 24 cases (32.0%). This type is mainly resolved through subordination and clause combining, suggesting a preference for restructuring complex or repetitive clause-level information into more compact forms. Less frequent are repetition of words (13 instances, 17.3%), which are typically addressed through elimination or lexical substitution, and repetition of phrases (10 instances, 13.3%), often managed using relative clauses and appositives. In total, the table covers 75 cases (100%), illustrating that circumlocation most commonly occurs at the sentence and clause levels and is predominantly resolved through structural simplification and syntactic reorganization rather than purely lexical changes.

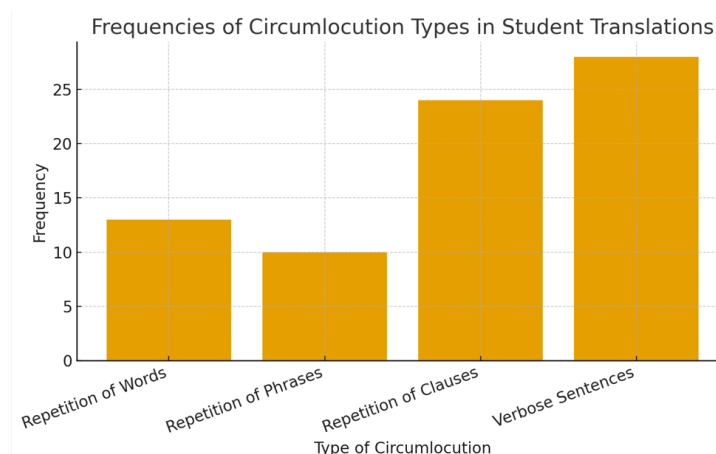


Figure 1. Frequencies of Circumlocation Types in Student Translations

The figure clearly illustrates the frequencies of different circumlocation types in student translations. It shows that verbose sentences occur most frequently indicating that students most often produce overly elaborate sentence structures. This is followed by repetition of clauses suggesting frequent redundancy at the clause level. Less common are repetition of words and repetition of phrases which appear comparatively less often. Overall, the distribution highlights that circumlocation in student translations is predominantly a sentence- and clause-level phenomenon, rather than one limited to individual words or short phrases. This also suggests that the main challenge lies not only in vocabulary choice but also in sentence structuring, where students tend to extend ideas unnecessarily or repeat clauses instead of condensing them.

The analysis of student translations revealed that circumlocation can be effectively reduced through a range of linguistic and translational strategies. One useful approach is lexical substitution, where repeated words are replaced with synonyms or more specific terms. For example, instead of repeating “Indonesia country” several times, the expression can be

simplified to “Indonesia.” Similarly, pronouns and demonstratives (*it, they, this*) allow writers to avoid unnecessary repetition of full noun phrases, creating smoother sentences that maintain clarity. In translation pedagogy, teachers can design vocabulary enrichment tasks that encourage students to use synonyms, pronouns, and cohesive devices to achieve conciseness.

Another strategy is the use of relative clauses to combine ideas without restating them. For instance, instead of writing two separate clauses about people burning forests and cutting trees, a more economical construction would be: “People burn forests and cut trees, which causes global warming.” Likewise, appositive phrases can condense information by renaming or further identifying a concept. For example, instead of multiple sentences describing REDD, the revised form “REDD, an international program, is a solution to reduce emissions and fight global warming” demonstrates economy and clarity. Teachers can guide students to practice sentence combining exercises where they merge multiple short sentences into one coherent structure, thereby avoiding redundancy.

Circumlocution can also be avoided through parallel structure and nominalization. Activities such as cutting trees, burning forests, and polluting can be listed in parallel gerund form rather than being repeated in separate sentences. Similarly, clauses such as “if people cut trees, it will cause pollution” and “if people burn forests, it will cause pollution” can be nominalized into the concise phrase: “Deforestation and forest burning cause pollution.” Pedagogically, instructors can incorporate writing drills focused on parallelism and nominalization to help students restructure repetitive clauses into compact, logical sentences.

In addition, circumlocution can be reduced by deletion of redundant elements and condensation through cause-effect connectors. Words such as “broken and damaged” do not need to be repeated if they convey the same meaning. Likewise, clauses that show causal relations can be integrated into one sentence using connectors like “because,” “so that,” or “therefore.” For example, “The temperature is hot. The ice melts. This happens because of global warming” becomes “Global warming causes high temperatures and ice melting.” Translation pedagogy can apply this strategy by teaching cohesive devices explicitly, raising students’ awareness of rhetorical differences between Indonesian (which often tolerates redundancy) and English (which values conciseness).

Other strategies include passive constructions and cohesive devices. When subjects are unnecessarily repeated, the passive voice can foreground the object and condense the expression, as in “CO₂ emissions from factories increase global warming.” Cohesive devices such as ellipsis and substitution also help avoid repetition, e.g., “We must save energy, water, and the environment,” instead of restating three separate clauses. These approaches can be reinforced in translation classrooms by designing editing workshops where students are required to revise wordy translations into more economical versions.

Altogether, these strategies highlight the importance of training students to restructure their writing and translations with conciseness in mind. By applying lexical, grammatical, and discourse-level adjustments, students can transform circumlocution into clear and natural English expressions. This shift not only improves translation accuracy but also enhances rhetorical appropriateness, helping learners to bridge differences between Indonesian and English writing traditions. From a pedagogical perspective, such training equips students with practical tools: sentence combining, lexical expansion, cohesive devices, and translation shifts that make their translations both faithful and communicative.

The next section presents examples of circumlocution identified in students’ Indonesian–English translations. Four major categories found in the quantitative analysis are: (1) repetition of words, (2) repetition of phrases, (3) repetition of clauses, and (4) verbose or

wordy sentences. For each type, representative data are provided along with proposed revisions into more economical English expressions.

The first category identified in the data was repetition of words. This type of circumlocution was observed when students repeatedly used the same lexical items within one sentence or across several sentences. For example, in the sentence *“Indonesia is some one country that include the global warming because in Indonesia many event pollution the air that include by motorcycle or the car,”* the words *Indonesia*, *include*, and *pollution* appear multiple times. Such repetition does not contribute to clarity but instead weakens the expression. The revised version, *“Global warming, caused by vehicle emissions and forest fires, significantly affects Indonesia”*, illustrates how the same meaning can be conveyed more economically and naturally in English. This type of circumlocution reflects limited lexical resources, as students tend to rely heavily on a small set of vocabulary items rather than employing synonyms or cohesive devices.

The second category was repetition of phrases, which often emerged from literal translation of Indonesian expressions. For instance, in the sentence *“Indonesia country is more global warming country. Almost all of area of Indonesia country have gotten effect of global warming,”* the phrase *Indonesia country* is unnecessarily repeated, likely as a direct rendering of *negara Indonesia*. The revised translation—*“Indonesia is among the countries most affected by global warming”*—removes redundancy while maintaining the intended meaning. Phrase-level repetition highlights the influence of L1 rhetorical habits, where redundancy is tolerated, and also indicates students’ lack of awareness of more concise English equivalents.

The third category, repetition of clauses, was the second most common type found in the data. For example, the clause *“if the intensity of carbon dioxide in atmosphere was overload”* is repeated with minimal variation: *“... and if carbon dioxide in atmosphere was overload ...”*. This repetition not only creates unnecessary length but also obscures the central idea. The revised translation—*“Excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere damages the ozone layer and prevents ultraviolet rays from escaping, raising Earth’s temperature”*—demonstrates how the clauses can be combined into one concise and coherent sentence. Clause repetition reflects limited syntactic flexibility, where students rely on repetitive conditional structures rather than exploring more complex sentence-combining strategies.

Finally, the most frequent type was verbose or wordy sentences, in which students produced lengthy constructions that restated the same ideas multiple times. An illustrative example is: *“We must keep our earth and make some activity for go away from this problem ... For go away from this problem we must hard work and we must keep this earth because this earth it’s our ...”*. Here, the obligation to “keep the earth” is reiterated several times, mirroring Indonesian rhetorical style where repetition functions as emphasis. However, in English, this results in redundancy and loss of clarity. The revised sentence—*“We must protect our Earth from global warming by working hard and acting responsibly”*—expresses the same idea in a more concise and communicative way. Verbose constructions suggest both linguistic and cognitive factors: on the one hand, limited proficiency in selecting precise vocabulary, and on the other, the pressure to produce sufficient text within a limited timeframe, leading to padding through repetition.

Taken together, these four categories of circumlocution illustrate how Indonesian EFL learners struggle with economy of expression in English. While lexical repetition (words and phrases) is less frequent, structural circumlocution (clauses and verbose sentences) is more dominant, indicating that syntactic and discourse-level challenges outweigh vocabulary limitations. These findings resonate with previous studies that show redundancy and verbosity

are persistent issues in EFL writing, particularly when learners transfer rhetorical habits from their first language into English (Tikhonova, 2024; Hudaib & Nofal, 2025).

Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that circumlocution is a recurring feature in students' Indonesian–English translations. This finding highlights a persistent challenge in EFL learning, where students often rely on repetitive or verbose constructions that reduce clarity and naturalness. The phenomenon can be better understood when viewed through the dual lenses of translation studies and EFL pedagogy.

One of the primary causes of circumlocution is first language (L1) transfer. In Indonesian, repetition is widely accepted and even valued as a rhetorical device to emphasize meaning. When students translate directly into English, they carry this rhetorical habit with them, resulting in unnecessary repetition of words, phrases, or clauses. Similar forms of interference have been documented in other contexts, such as Arabic–English translation, where lexical interference is a recurring issue for undergraduate EFL learners (Hudaib & Nofal, 2025), and Thai–English translation, where errors stem from the transfer of local rhetorical patterns (Jeharsae, 2024).

Another factor is limited vocabulary, which prevents students from employing synonyms or paraphrasing strategies. As a result, they rely on literal, word-for-word repetition. This aligns with recent findings that redundancy and lexical repetition remain common problems in academic writing among EFL learners worldwide (Tikhonova, 2024). In addition, a restricted syntactic repertoire contributes to the problem. Many students rely on basic additive structures such as *and* or *if*, rather than experimenting with subordination, coordination, or sentence combining. Finally, task-related pressure also plays a role. Under timed conditions, students often repeat ideas as a way to “fill” the text, which inadvertently produces circumlocution.

From a translation studies viewpoint, circumlocution may be understood as a type of interference occurring in the translation process. Toury (1995) describes interference as the transfer of source-language features into the target text, and this is clearly evident in the students' translations. The repetition of words such as *Indonesia*, the phrase *Indonesia country*, or the clause *if carbon dioxide in atmosphere was overload* illustrates how Indonesian rhetorical structures directly shape English output. This pattern also resonates with Baker's (1996) notion of translation universals, specifically redundancy and explicitation. While explicitation is typically intended to improve clarity, in these student texts it often manifests as verbosity. Recent work has also confirmed that redundancy can hinder L2 development, including grammar acquisition, making it a critical area for pedagogical intervention (Kenanidis, 2024). Similar issues have been noted in Chinese–English interpreting studies, where strategies are required to minimize redundant wording in order to maintain fluency (Li, 2024).

These findings carry significant pedagogical implications for translation teaching. First, explicit training in sentence combining and reduction is needed to help students restructure repetitive clauses into concise and effective expressions. In addition, students should be guided to develop greater lexical flexibility by using synonyms, paraphrasing techniques, and cohesive devices such as pronouns and ellipsis, which can help reduce unnecessary repetition. Raising discourse awareness is also essential: students need to recognize that rhetorical traditions differ across languages, and what is effective in Indonesian may not be appropriate in English. Finally, translation training should emphasize translation shifts and functional

equivalence, reinforcing the idea that fidelity does not mean literal reproduction. Instead, effective translation often requires omitting redundant elements to produce a natural and communicative text in the target language. Through the application of these strategies, students are able to reduce repetitive expressions and improve clarity, resulting in translations that accurately convey the source text while adhering to appropriate stylistic norms in English. This shift from circumlocution to economy of expression is a key step in strengthening students' overall competence as writers and translators.

To make these strategies more practical for classroom application, this study also proposes a pedagogical framework consisting of four stages: identify, diagnose, revise, and reflect. In the first stage, students identify instances of circumlocution in their own or peer translations. In the second stage, they diagnose why the circumlocution occurs, whether it stems from first-language transfer, limited vocabulary, or lack of syntactic flexibility. The third stage involves revising the sentences by applying strategies such as substitution, sentence combining, or deletion. Finally, in the fourth stage, students reflect on the original and revised versions, evaluating which is clearer, more concise, and more natural in English.

This four-step Identify–Diagnose–Revise–Reflect (IDRR) framework not only provides learners with a practical process for correcting circumlocution but also fosters long-term awareness of rhetorical differences between Indonesian and English. By applying the framework systematically, students can move beyond redundancy and verbosity toward producing translations that are faithful to meaning while stylistically appropriate in English. In the broader pedagogical context, this model has the potential to strengthen translation competence and improve overall writing proficiency in English as a foreign language.

To reduce circumlocution, students need continuous practice in sentence-combining activities that encourage them to restructure short or repetitive sentences into more effective forms. The objective of this practice is not merely to lengthen sentences, but to improve clarity, coherence, and overall writing quality. Through repeated practice, students learn that there are multiple ways to arrange words and clauses, and that some combinations are more effective than others. After experimenting with different options, learners should be encouraged to reflect critically on their revisions, either individually or in peer groups, by evaluating whether the sentences convey the intended meaning, achieve clarity on first reading, maintain logical coherence, place emphasis appropriately, and express ideas concisely. By integrating this reflective evaluation into classroom practice, students not only gain greater control over sentence structure but also cultivate a heightened awareness of economy and effectiveness in their writing and translation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined circumlocution in Indonesian–English student translations, identifying four main types: repetition of words, repetition of phrases, repetition of clauses, and verbose sentences. A total of 75 instances were recorded, with verbose sentences (37.3%) and repetition of clauses (32%) being the most frequent. These findings suggest that the primary challenges faced by students lie in syntactic structuring and discourse-level organization, rather than simply in vocabulary choice. The analysis revealed that circumlocution is primarily caused by first-language transfer, limited lexical resources, restricted syntactic repertoire, and task-related pressures. From the perspective of translation studies, these features exemplify Toury's notion of interference and Baker's concept of translation universals, particularly redundancy and explicitation. From a pedagogical standpoint, they highlight the need for targeted instruction in sentence combining, lexical variety, and discourse awareness. By applying strategies such as lexical substitution, the use of pronouns,

relative clauses, appositives, parallel structures, and deletion of redundancy, students can transform circumlocution into concise, effective, and natural English expressions. The proposed IDRR (Identify–Diagnose–Revise–Reflect) framework offers a practical model for classroom application, helping learners not only to correct circumlocution but also to develop long-term sensitivity to rhetorical differences between Indonesian and English. A shift from redundancy to clarity is essential for developing translation competency in English as a Foreign Language and improving overall writing abilities. Consequently, this research contributes both to translation pedagogy and to the broader field of EFL writing instruction, emphasizing the importance of conciseness.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES

This research report was written with the support of ChatGPT to enhance clarity, structure, and readability. All analyses, interpretations, and judgements are entirely the authors' own.

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