

# TRANSLATING A NOVEL: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS (A HOLISTICALLY CRITIQUE ON NOVEL TRANSLATION) Rudi Hartono – Semarang State University

## Abstract

Translating a novel is more difficult than translating academic texts. Novel translators (Genetic factor) usually have problems in translating figurative languages (metaphors, similes, personifications, etc.) and idiomatic expressions because they should reproduce in the target language (TL) the closest natural equivalence of the source language (ST) message, firstly in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style accepted socio-culturally. Other problems come from the translation document (e.g. an English novel translated into *Bahasa Indonesia*) and readers of the translated novel. The translation document (Objective Factor) has mistakes in equivalence of words. Some expressions are not translated into the acceptable ones in the target language. The readers of translated novel (Affective Factor) are often confused on what they are reading because some sentences are not understandable. The solution of those problems is to provide the novel translators some practical guidance of translating a novel in order to produce the high quality of translation product.

**Key words:** translation, novel, metaphors, similes, idiomatic expressions, ST (Source Language), TL (Target Language)

## Introduction

Novel as a broad and complete literary work is translated into many languages. Translating a novel seems difficult to do. It is not as easy as translating academic texts, such as texts of mathematics, biology, chemistry, etc. Translators usually have problems in translating this literary work. They have difficulties, for examples, in translating figurative languages and idiomatic expressions. The figurative languages and idiomatic expressions from the source language must be translated socio-culturally into the acceptable target language. This is what they face in translating a novel. Newmark (1988) in Suparman (2003:144-145)

says that the translators of literary works mainly have difficulties in translating the linguistic aspects, socio-cultural aspects, and moral aspects implicitly stated in the literary works (e.g. novels).

Here are some difficulties that novel translators usually face every time on which they translate English novels into Indonesian. Firstly, linguistically they usually do not understand some long complex sentences with complicated structures. They also find so many very long paragraphs that are difficult to understand with complicated grammatical patterns. Secondly, culturally they are difficult to find out the closest natural equivalence of the socio-cultural terms exist in the novel

because the author always uses unique words based on his or her cultural background. Thirdly, literarily they are difficult to translate figurative languages and idiomatic expressions that are stated in the novel. Those difficulties always come to their mind and always make them hard to think about.

Hendarto Setiadi in Taryadi (<http://wartahpi.org/content>) adds that there are other problems of translating a novel. The first is unnatural ways of translating the title of novel, for example, a translator translated the title of novel "The Currious Incident of the Dog in the Middle of the Night-time" into "*Insiden Anjing di Tengah Malam Buta yang Membuat Penasaran*". Is it translated accurately? We can analyze and assess it ourselves. This problem linguistically relates to lexical and structural problems. The second is inappropriate pronoun choices. Translators usually have difficulties in translating pronouns from English to Indonesian language because they should choose the nearest pronouns and almost the same as the target ones. The translators should translate the pronouns carefully and accurately by referring to appropriate equivalence of pronouns (based on the principles of exophoric and anaphoric references) and social context (level, position, and social status of someone) in the target language. For

example, the pronoun **YOU** can be translated into various meanings, as follows:

1. (Tsu) Andi: Budi, are you fine today?  
(Tsa) Andi: *Budi, apakah kamu baik-baik saja hari ini?*
2. (Tsu) Andi: Do you teach English today, Sir?  
(Tsa) Andi: *Apakah Anda mengajar bahasa Inggris hari ini, Pak?*
3. (Tsu) Mr. X: Do you know me, Madam?  
(Tsa) Mr. X: *Apakah Saudara mengenaliku, Nyonya?*

From those examples, it is stated that the pronoun **YOU** can be translated into the various pronouns in Indonesian language based on the appropriate reference and social context. In the first sentence, the pronoun **YOU** is translated into **KAMU** because it refers to the same age level between two people (Andi and Budi). In the second sentence, the pronoun **YOU** is translated into **ANDA** because of the reference of social status (Andi and his teacher). The pronoun **ANDA** is more politely used than the pronoun **KAMU**. In the third sentence, the pronoun **YOU** is translated into **SAUDARA** because it refers to respecting adult people, particularly among the people who have not met one another, 3) the difficulties of translating figurative languages. This problem is much found in the novel translation. The

followings are examples of it. It is the translation of metaphors:

1. Tsu: 'Her words stabbed at his heart'.

Tsa: '*Kata-katanya menusuk kalbu*'.

2. Tsu: 'She has a heart of stone'.

Tsa: '*Dia berhati baja*'.

3. Tsu: 'All the world's a stage'.

Tsa: '*Dunia adalah panggung sandiwara*'.

4. Tsu: 'Life is no bed of roses'.

Tsa: '*Susah senang itu permainan hidup*'.

5. Tsu: 'Variety is the spice of life'.

Tsa: '*Perbedaan itu rahmat*'.

All English metaphors above are not translated but replaced them with Indonesian metaphors because the important thing here is finding out the closest natural equivalence of metaphors used in the socio-cultural context of the target language. What the translator did is a good effort because he or she tried to translate the metaphors into metaphors that are accepted socio-culturally and contextually. If he or she translates the metaphors literally or word for word, the translation product will not be adaptive to the socio-cultural context of target language.

Hardjoprawiro (2006:35) argues that translating a novel is different from translating an ordinary text. The difference is on the usage of idiomatic expressions and figurative

languages. The figurative languages and idiomatic expressions contain connotative meanings because they are categorized into literary words that are different from technical words or terms that have denotative meanings. He also adds that novel translators have problems in translating local proper nouns or names and very long paragraphs.

Iser in Bassnett-McGuire (1991:115) states that translating is not just rendering the explicit notion in the sentences but understanding the implicit purpose beyond the sentences or statements, so translators should do translating process carefully. Many novel translators do carelessness when they translate novels, for examples, they do mistakes in transferring information; add their own interpretation that is out of the original text; do narrow interpretation toward worth messages stated in the novel and finally they produce a bias translation that is not matched between the source text and the target one.

Those phenomena are very interesting to search, so it is important for us to conduct a research about problems of translating a novel and find out the solutions that will be useful for translators in particular and publishers in general.

### **Problems of Translating a Novel**

There are many problems of translating a novel. Three of them are problems of translating metaphors, similes and idiomatic expressions.

### ***Translating a Metaphor***

Translating a metaphor is different from translating an ordinary expression. A metaphoric expression is a statement that consists of metaphor. The metaphor itself is a literary form that is difficult to translate because it has complex contextual meanings. A metaphoric expression has two domains: target domain and source domain. The target domain is the concept that is described, whereas the source domain is the concept of analogy. According to Richards in Saeed (1997:302-303), the former is **TENOR** and the later is **VEHICLE**, for example, in the sentence 'Computer is a human being', the word 'computer' is **TENOR**, whereas 'a human being' is **VEHICLE**. The sentence above is not an ordinary statement but is a metaphoric expression. How can a computer be analogized as a human being? A translator needs to understand and appreciate the statement deeply because the metaphoric expression is very tied to speaker's empirical domain, so the translator should be able to translate it according to the domain that is understood by translation text readers or listeners.

The metaphoric expression, for example, 'Life is a journey' has various meanings (Lakoff dan Turner in Saeed (1997:306). The meanings of that metaphoric expression can be as follows: (1) The person leading a life is a traveller; (2) His purposes are destinations; (3) The means for achieving purposes are routes; (4) Difficulties in life are impediments to travel; (5) Counsellors are guides; (6) Progress is the distance travelled; (7) Things you gauge your progress by are landmarks; (8) Material resources and talents are provisions.

Those various meaning can be translated into Indonesian language as follows: (1) *Hidup itu kembara*; (2) *Hidup itu kelana*; (3) *Hidup adalah sebuah pengembaraan yang panjang*; (4) *Pengalaman adalah guru yang paling baik*; (5) *Hidup adalah safari tiada henti*.

Holman and Harmon (1992:287) state that metaphor is an analogy that compares one object to the other directly, for example, 'She is my heart'. The pronoun 'she' is directly compared to 'heart'. It is an analogy that directly compares a lady to a heart. How can we treat the same a lady as a heart? That is a metaphor. In translating a metaphor, for instance, a translator should have an extraordinary skill in order to produce an accurate meaning in the target language and it is good for the translator not just to translate

the metaphor but to find a similar metaphor in the target language accurately based on its socio-culture and context. The metaphoric expression 'She is my heart' can be translated into *Dia belahan jantung hatiku*. See other examples of metaphoric expressions. 'She is a book worm' translated into *Dia seorang kutu buku*; 'That man is a regular ass' translated into *Orang itu bodoh sekali*, etc.

### **Translating a Simile**

Holman and Harmon (1995:44) state that simile is a figurative language that expresses indirectly the comparison of two objects. It is different from metaphor. The simile usually uses the linking words **LIKE, AS, SUCH AS, AS IF, and SEEM**, whereas the metaphor uses the auxiliary **BE**, for examples, 'He is like a frog' is a simile, whereas 'He is a frog' is a metaphor.

Moentaha (2006:190) stresses that simile compares two different objects that have different categories or classes, so the expression like 'The boy seems to be as clever as his mother' (*Anak lelaki itu sepandai ibunya*) is not a simile but an ordinary comparison because the words 'boy' and 'mother' are from the same category. According to him, the example of a simile is 'He is as brave as a lion' (*Dis seberani banteng* or *Dia seberani pendekar*) because the words 'he' and 'lion' are from the different

category. The pronoun 'he' refers to the man, whereas the noun 'lion' refers to 'the animal'. But why is the word 'lion' translated into 'banteng' or 'pendekar' not 'singa'? Contextually the word 'banteng' or 'pendekar' is more acceptable in the socio-culture of Indonesia. Thus the English similes and also metaphors should be transferred and reproduced into the accepted language and culture.

See other examples of simile translation. The expression 'He is as sly as a fox' is translated into '*Dia secerdik kancil*' not '*Dia secerdik rubah*'. The word 'fox' is not natural in Indonesian context, so it is translated into '*kancil*' not '*rubah*' because the former is more natural than the later.

### **Translating an Idiomatic Expression**

Crystal (1985:152) states that an idiom or idiomatic expression is the term that is used in grammar and lexicography that refers to a set of words limited semantically and syntactically and has a function as single unit. For example, the idiomatic expression 'It's raining cats and dogs' cannot be translated word-for-word because that expression is an idiomatic expression. It must be translated into the target language idiomatically, so its accurate translation can be '*Hujan lebat*'.

Frye et al (1985:234) argue that idiom is a specific expression that is difficult to translate. For example, the expressions 'Please, don't mention it'; 'Not at all'; 'It was a pleasure'; or 'Forget it' as the response of 'Thank you' cannot be translated word-for-word but the translator should search the similar idiomatic expressions in Indonesian language accurately. For instance, those expressions can be transferred into *Terima kasih kembali*, not *Jangan dipikirkan*; *Nggak apa-apa*; *Ini suatu hal yang menyenangkan*; or *Lupakan saja*.

Richards (1992:172) adds that idiomatic expression is a single unit of which meaning cannot be separated, for example, 'She washed her hands of the matter' = 'She refused to have anything more to do with the matter', or other examples, the idiomatic expression 'May I wash my hands?' does not mean that someone asks permission to wash both of his hands, however, it is just an idiom that is usually expressed by a student who asks permission to his teacher to go to the toilet room. Thus, that idiomatic expression can be translated into '*Bolehkan saya ke belakang?*'

Translating an idiomatic expression is the same as translating a metaphoric expression. It means that the translator should have a perspicacity and deep experience of target

language and culture in order to be able to translate the idiomatic expressions accurately. Compare the following two sentences that use the word 'hands': 'Bill has two hands, a right hand and a left hand' and 'Bill is an old hand in the store' (<http://www.andeanwinds.com>). The first sentence is a literal sentence that contains denotative or lexical meaning, whereas the second sentence is idiomatic sentence. The phrase 'two hands' in the first sentence is two real hands of Bill, however the phrase 'an old hand' in the second sentence means the man who has long experience in his job or '*orang berpengalaman*' not '*sebuah tangan tua*'.

### Solutions of Translating Novel

There are some alternative solutions of translating a novel. The followings are what some experts and researchers propose. Hilaire Belloc in Bassnett-McGuire (1991:116) says that there are six rules of translating a prose (novel) that translators should refer to:

- (1) The translator should not **PLOD ON**, word by word or sentence by sentence, but should 'always **BLOCK OUT** his work'. By **BLOCK OUT**, the translator should consider the work as an integral unit and translate in section, asking himself 'before each what the whole sense he has to render'.

- (2) The translator should render **IDIOM BY IDIOM** and idioms of their nature demand translation into another form from that of the original'.
- (3) The translator must render **INTENTION BY INTENTION**, bearing in mind that 'the intention of a phrase in one language may be less emphatic than the form of the phrase, or it may be more emphatic'.
- (4) The translator warns against **LES FAUX AMIS**, those words or structures that may appear to correspond in both SL and TL but actually do not, eg. 'demander – to ask', translated wrongly as 'to demand'.
- (5) The translator is advised to 'transmute boldly' and it is suggested that the essence of translating is 'the resurrection of an alien thing in a native body'.
- (6) The translator should never embellish.

Taryadi (2000:1) suggests that translator should follow the following rules in order to produce good translation products. The rules that the translators should keep are (1) Translators ought to depend on their language feeling in translating novels; (2) They must have a good mastery of source language; (3) They should be able to master the target language and culture; (4) They should be familiar with the culture of source language; (5) They also should be familiar with the culture of target language; and (6) They must

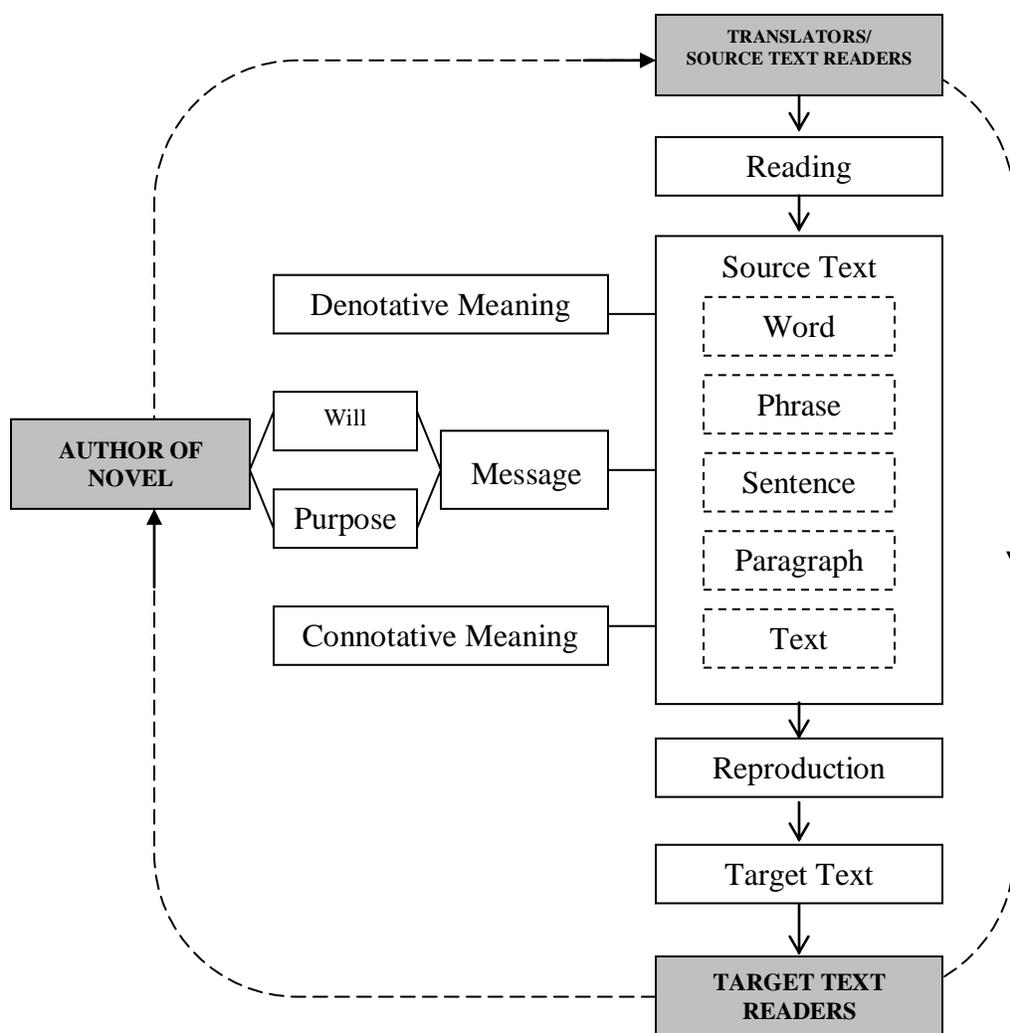
have a broad knowledge and science of literary works (<http://wartahpi.org>).

On the other hand, though in different object of translating an Arabic novel into Indonesian one, El Shirazy (2008:1-3) proposes six basic skills that can anticipate the problems of translating a novel that will be useful for translator if they do translating process. A translator of a novel should (1) master the vocabulary of source language well; (2) master the grammar of source language completely; (3) should have a deep sense of language, particularly source language or understand the author's will and purpose; (4) understand the socio-cultural of both source and target language; (5) have sense of literature well.

Besides keeping the applicable and practical rules or guidance of translating a novel, in order to produce a good translator product, translators should pay attention to essence of the translation process itself. A translator should understand the philosophy of translation. He or she should follow the cycle of translating process simultaneously. He or she ought to do the steps in the form of **TRIPARTITE CYCLE** as a natural model runs in translation process. This cycle puts three parts: author, translator, and reader in a simultaneous cycle. The author of novel is the source of information that should be known

well by a translator because the author of novel has a will and purpose stated in the novel. His or her will or purpose are in the form of message. The novel is the message itself broadly. The message can be in the form of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and texts. The message itself has both cycle that should be followed naturally by translators in translating process.

connotative and denotative meanings. It is a must for translator to understand, to know, and to recognize all well before they reproduce the message in the target language. Here is the model of tripartite  
Source: Hartono (2009:8)



## Conclusion

In order to avoid some problems and get an appropriate solution in translating a novel, even to produce a high quality of novel translation, translator should keep a basket of masteries of both source and target languages and cultures. They must follow the applicable rules and natural and simultaneous cycle of translating a novel.

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