TRANSLATION PROBLEMS OF IDIOMS AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGES FROM ENGLISH INTO INDONESIAN

Rudi Hartono
Semarang State University, Indonesia
rudi_fbsunnes@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This research reports the problems and solutions of novel translation particularly translation of idioms, metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations from English into Indonesian. Those problems are taken from three main factors that consist of objective factor, generic factor, and affective factor. The objective factor covers translation of idiom, metaphor, simile, personification,
and alliteration from English into Indonesian in the novel entitled “To Kill a Mockingbird” (TKM) written by Harper Lee. The generic factor consists of the novel translator’s education background and experiences on translating the novel. The affective factor is readers’ responses on the novel translation quality. Through this evaluative qualitative research that is based on the holistic criticism approach, it is found that idioms were translated by using idiomatic translation method while metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations were translated by using literal translation method. Idioms were translated accurately, while metaphors, similes, personifications, alliterations were not accurate yet. Based on the naturalness level, the translation of idioms is natural, while metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations are not natural yet. Then, it is suggested that the novel translator has to use the Tripartire Cycle Model when she translates a novel from English into Indonesian.

**Keywords:** novel translation, idioms, metaphors, similes, personifications, alliterations, objective factor, genetic factor, affective factor, Tripartire Cycle Model

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) 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).

The main problems of the research are (1) How are idioms, metaphors, similes, personification, and alliterations in the novel entitled *To Kill a Mockingbird* (TKM) translated from English into Indonesian?, (2) How do the novel translator’s background and experiences contribute to the translation?, (3)
What are the readers’ responses on the novel translation quality?, and (4) What are the principles of translating idioms, metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations from English into Indonesian?

The objectives of the research are firstly, describing the translation products of idioms, metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations from English into Indonesian language in the novel *TKM*. Secondly, finding out how the novel translator’s education background and translation theory mastery, experiences contribute to the novel translation. Thirdly, describing the readers’ responses on the novel translation quality. Fourthly, formulating a set of solutions for translating idioms, metaphors, similes, personification, and alliterations in a novel from English into Indonesian.

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 are stated in the novel. Those difficulties always come to their mind and always make them hard to think about.

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.

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. There are many problems of translating a novel, such as problems of translating metaphors, similes and idiomatic expressions, and else.

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. Saeed (1997), 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 with the domain that is understood by translation text readers or listeners.

The metaphoric expression, for example, ‘Life is a journey’ has various meanings (Saeed, 1997). 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 a 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.

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 example of simile translation. The expression ‘He is a 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.

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 cat 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 example, 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’.

There are some alternative solutions of translating a novel. The followings are what some experts and researchers propose. 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 is 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) 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.

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.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is Qualitative Evaluative Research Based on Holistic Criticism Approach (Sutopo, 2006). The types of data used are only primary data that consist of idiomatic expressions and figurative languages (metaphor, simile, personification, and alliteration) taken from the original and translated novel TKM, interview records with the novel translator, and questionnaire results from target readers. The data were gathered by using documentation, interview, and questionnaire techniques. The data were analyzed by using domain, taxonomy, componential, theme analysis (Spradley, 1980), contrastive analysis (James, 1998), and interactive analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Objective factor was categorized and analyzed contrastively. Genetic and affective factors were categorized and each category was compared componentially. All data were analyzed in the cycle of interactive analysis: data reduction, analysis and discussion of data (display), and verification.

FINDINGS

1) Objective factor
The followings are the findings taken from the objective factor that describes how idioms, metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliteration are translated from English into Indonesian based on the methods and techniques of translation and also ideology used by the novel translator.

### Table 1 Findings of Objective Factor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective Factor (Idiom and Figurative Language Translation)</th>
<th>Translation Technique</th>
<th>Translation Method</th>
<th>Translation Ideology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idiom Translation</td>
<td>Indirect (98%)</td>
<td>Idiomatic (46.8%)</td>
<td>Domestication (66.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor Translation</td>
<td>Direct (76%)</td>
<td>Literal (70%)</td>
<td>Foreignization (84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simile Translation</td>
<td>Direct (57.5%)</td>
<td>Literal (87.5%)</td>
<td>Foreignization (95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personification Translation</td>
<td>Direct (71%)</td>
<td>Literal (88%)</td>
<td>Foreignization (97.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliteration Translation</td>
<td>Direct (59.3%)</td>
<td>Literal (84.3%)</td>
<td>Foreignization (90.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Genetic factor

Findings that describe the novel translator’s background, experience, competency, and strategy along the translation process can be seen in the table 2. These data are based on the interview result with the novel translation. The findings support and have significant correlation with the objective factor. It is the fact that the translator’s background and else determine the translation product.

### Table 2 Findings of Generic Factor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genetic Factor (The Novel Translation of TKM)</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-formal education background of translation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having no English education background</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chemical Engineering graduate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Self-study</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Parents’ motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Part time translator at book publishers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Novel translator of book publishers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3) Affective factor

The following table describes about the research finding taken from the affective factor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective Factor (Target Readers of Translated Novel)</th>
<th>Idiom</th>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Simile</th>
<th>Personification</th>
<th>Alliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy Level</td>
<td>Accurate (59.5%)</td>
<td>Inaccurate (36%)</td>
<td>Less accurate (75%)</td>
<td>Less accurate (54.7%)</td>
<td>Less accurate (65.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalness Level</td>
<td>Natural (61.7%)</td>
<td>Less natural (80%)</td>
<td>Less natural (55.5%)</td>
<td>Less natural (66.7%)</td>
<td>Less natural (56.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readability Level</td>
<td>High (48.9%)</td>
<td>Middle (52%)</td>
<td>Middle (47.5%)</td>
<td>Middle (59.5%)</td>
<td>Middle (56.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the tables above the research findings state that 1) idioms were translated generally by using idiomatic translation method, 2) metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations were translated by using literal translation method. Then, idioms were translated by using indirect translation techniques, while metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations were translated by
using direct translation techniques. So, it indicates that the novel translator oriented to the source text (ST) and kept the domestication ideology for translating idioms, oriented to the source text (ST) and kept the foreignization ideology for translating metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations. Based on interview with the novel translator, it is found that the translator used idiomatic translation method and transposition technique for translating idioms and used word-for-word, literal, and faithful translation methods for translating figurative languages. Then, based on the target readers’ responses, it is found that idioms were translated accurately, while metaphors, similes, personifications, alliterations were not accurate yet. Based on the naturalness level, the translation quality of idioms is natural, while metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations are not natural yet. The translation quality of readability level indicates that idioms get high level of readability, while metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliteration are on the middle level of readability.

DISCUSSION

Translation of idioms and figurative languages in the novel To Kill a Mockingbird have different characteristics. This is proved with holistic analysis on the objective factor, genetic factor and affective factor. In this case, the novel translator translated idiom by using indirect translation techniques, such as transposition, modulation, adaptation, and established equivalent techniques (Bosco, 2008). Then, the translator used idiomatic translation method for translating idioms. This strategy is very precise because it is based on the rules of
translating idioms (Hoed, 2009; Wang, 2009). According to what the translator did above, it can be stated that the novel translator tends to the domestication ideology. It means that she refers more to the target language. Then based on the target readers’ responses, it is known that the idiom translation is accurate, natural, and high on readability level.

On the contrary, most of metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations are not translated accurately, naturally, and low on readability level. The novel translator translated metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations by using direct translation techniques, such as literal and borrowing techniques (Bosco, 2008). These techniques are not appropriate for translating metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations; whereas, metaphors should be translated into metaphors (Newmark, 1988), similes into similes (Larson, 1994), personifications into personification (Xiaoshu and Dongming, 2003), and alliterations into alliterations (Retmono, 2009). Because of those idioms and figurative languages are not translated using appropriate methods and techniques, the translation products are not inaccurate, less natural, and difficult to read. It means that the novel translator tends to use foreignization ideology that refers to the source language.

To anticipate the problems of translating a novel in general, I try to introduce an alternative solution that is called Tripartite Cycle Model of Novel Translation. This model will be effective for all translators if they want to translate a novel from English into Indonesian or vice versa.
Figure 1 Tripartite Cycle Model on Novel Translation
CONCLUSION

Based on the research, idioms translation products are accurate, natural, and reach the high level of readability because the translator translated them by using appropriate methods and techniques. It means that the translator tends to use domestication ideology that refers to the target language. On the contrary, most of metaphors, similes, personifications, and alliterations are inaccurate, less natural,
and reach the middle level of readability, because the translator translated them by using inappropriate methods and techniques. It means that the translator tends to use foreignization ideology that refers to the source language. As the solution of novel translation problems, there is a new model of translating a novel that is called *Tripartite Cycle Model of Novel Translation* (Figure 1).

**SUGGESTION**

From those research findings, I recommend that idioms should be translated into idioms, metaphors into metaphors, similes into similes, personifications into personifications, and alliterations into alliterations. On the other hand, the novel translator should have relevant education background, master both English and Indonesian languages, understand literary studies, know translation theories and have a broad concept of cultures, so that her translation products would be accurate, natural and readable. Then, it is suggested that the novel translator has to use the *Tripartite Cycle Model of Novel Translation* when she translates a novel from English into Indonesian. 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 as a message stated in the novel. The novel itself is the broad message explored by the author. The message can be in the form of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and texts. The message itself has both connotative and denotative meanings. It is a must for the translator to understand, to know, and to recognize all well before she reproduces the message in the target
language. So, there will be a collaboration among the novel writer, translator and target readers in the translation process.

REFERENCES


