An Analysis of the Translation of Cultural Words in the Novel Salah Asuhan into Never the Twain

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Abstract

The aims of this study are to identify the category of cultural words found in Salah Asuhan novel and to find out the translation procedures and process used in translating them into English in Never the Twain novel. Qualitative and quantitative methods were applied in this study. Interview with the translator was also done through e-mail to know the process of translating the cultural words. Fifty five Indonesian cultural words were found in the novel. Material culture was the most frequent cultural word category. Those cultural words were translated with the orientation to the high readability of target readers. Cultural equivalent was the most frequent translation procedures used in translating them.

Keywords: cultural words, translation procedures, translation process, Salah Asuhan, Never the Twain.

Introduction

Translation is an activity which involves not only different languages but also different cultures. Toury (1978, as cited in James, 2002) states that “Translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions.” Therefore, the translator does not only transfer its message from one language into another language but also transfer message from one culture into another culture, especially when translating a novel.

Salah Asuhan novel by Abdul Muis is one of the famous classic novels in Indonesian literature that has been translated into English by Robin Susanto entitled Never the Twain. The background story of Salah Asuhan is about Hanafi, a young man from Minangkabau, western part of Sumatra Indonesia, who was fully in love with Corrie du Bussee, a beautiful Eurasian. However, he had been betrothed to his
cousin, Rapiah, as the way of West Sumatran tradition back in the day. Having been in Western education for a long time, Hanafi rejected this tradition. Overall, this novel represents a story of cultural conflict in the matter of intermarriage.

This novel presents a variety of cultural words related to the culture of Minangkabau, Indonesia, in terms of fauna, traditional clothes, foods, and so on, such as rendang, mamak, rumah gadang, destar saluk, and sembah-menyembah. The cultural words in the novel hardly have equivalent translation in the target language. However, the translation results has nearly no obstruction to the flow of the story.

The aim of this study are to identify the category of cultural words in the Salah Asuhan novel and to find out the procedures and process used in translating the cultural words. The cultural words used as the data were limited to those which are specific to Indonesian culture, especially related to Minangkabau culture and met the criteria developed based on Newmark’s cultural categories (1988a).

**Literature Review**

Studies of cultural word translation have been done to several novels. Abbas (2002) used a novel entitled Madogiwa No Tottochan which was written in Japanese and its Indonesian translation version Tottochan Si Gadis Kecil Di Tepi Jendela as the source to collect the data. Forty nine cultural words were found and they were categorized into religious terms, material cultures, and social cultures. Furthermore, Abbas (2002) applied semantic analysis to identify the cultural words in target language by using theories from Nida (1969), Newmark (1988), and Matsui (1997). Abbas added transliteration of Japanese letter as a guidance for the reader.

Nursalamah (2013) analyzed the translation of cultural words in Negeri Lima Menara novel and its translation version entitled the Land of Five Towers. The cultural words were categorized based on Newmark’s cultural category (1988), the procedures used in translating the cultural words in the novel were analyzed, and the accuracy and the acceptability of the cultural words translation were assessed. Permana (2014) focused the study on categorizing the cultural terms found in the novel Sixty Nine by Ryu Murakami and the Indonesian version Tahun Enam Sembilan and the translation techniques used in translating the cultural terms. Permana used descriptive methods to
analyze the data qualitatively. The techniques used in translating the cultural terms are dominated by amplification technique.

From reviewing the previous studies, analyzing translation of cultural words found in novels is always connected with its translation procedures and strategies. However, the real procedures and strategies used by the translators have not been disclosed. In this present study, the interview with the translator of *Salah Asuhan* novel has revealed the process of translating the cultural words found in the novel.

Newmark (1988) stated that cultural words are words related to one culture and reflect certain culture which cannot be translated literally. Natalia and Nugroho (2014) stated that cultural words are words from source language that cannot be translated into target language because of its cultural background. They named some of cultural words examples such as traditional foods, local animal or plant and places that are hard to be translated because the meaning for those cultural words may not be available in target language. Therefore, cultural words are very specific words related to a particular society’s culture and they cannot be translated literally since the target language may not have equivalent words for those words.

Cultural words can be categorised into ecology, material culture (artefacts), social culture – work and leisure, social organizations – political and administrative, and gestures and habits (Newmark, 1988). For the purpose of this research to categorize the cultural words into Newmark’s cultural categories, the following criteria were used to identify the cultural words found in the novel:

1. Words having specific cultural background, such as *Garuda*
2. Words containing historical interest, such as *meja kenap*
3. Words related to specific terms to address someone, such as *Nyai*
4. Words related to specific traditional ornament, such as *destar saluk*
5. Words related to custom or tradition of a particular society, such as *Pingitan*

The translation procedures for translating cultural terms proposed by Newmark (1988) consist of literal translation, transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, synonymy, through-translation, transpositions, modulation, recognized translation, compensation, paraphrase, couplets, notes, and componential analysis. These theories and references became the guideline and model in analyzing the cultural word translation of the novel.
Methods

The data for this project is a collection of cultural words taken from the novel *Salah Asuhan* which has been translated into *Never the Twain*. The book was written by Abdoel Moeis and translated by Robin Susanto. The original novel consists of 273 Pages and it was published by Balai Pustaka in 1928. This novel was translated into English by Robin Susanto and is entitled *Never the Twain*. The translation version was published by Lontar Foundation in 2010 and has 260 pages.

The steps in analyzing the cultural words are as follows:
1. Reading the novel and identifying the cultural words
2. Copying the sentences containing cultural words
3. Categorizing the cultural words
4. Analyzing the translation procedures
5. Analyzing the translation process
6. Calculating the frequency of cultural words and translation procedures

Results and Discussion

More than 100 cultural words have been found in the original novel. They are words related to Islamic terms such as *Astagfirullah*, words related to other country’s culture such as *smocking jacket*, and words related to Indonesian culture. However, this study limited to Indonesian cultural words which are specific and related to Minangkabau culture. Fifty five Indonesian cultural words were identified and could be grouped into five categories.

Table 1 shows the percentage of the Indonesian cultural words found in the novel based on their categories. The highest percentage is material culture category with 22 cultural words (40.2%), followed by social culture category with 14 cultural words (25.4%), social organizations category with 9 cultural words (16.2%), ecology category with 6 cultural words (11%), and gesture and habit category with 4 cultural words (7.2%). Here are the examples of each category of the cultural words found in the novel:
1. Ecology: “*Burung garuda* belum tentu di dunia ini, Corrie!”(p.7)
2. Material Culture: Dengan kekerasan ia menolak pakaian *destar saluk*, yaitu pakaian orang Minangkabau. (p.73)
3. Social Culture: Tapi di dalam hal serupa itu keyakinan ibunya kepada dokter dengan kepada dukun adalah sama besarnya. (p.62)

4. Social Organizations (Religious term): “Sudah kedelapan kali Kamis ini aku berpuasa sunah, Ibu,” (p.121)

5. Gestures and Habits: “Lepas dari sekolah, ia dipingit, lalu diajar ke dapur, menjahit, dan merenda.” (p.66)

Table 1. Percentage of Cultural Words Based on Category

| No | Category of cultural words | Number | %   |
|----|----------------------------|--------|-----|
| 1  | Ecology                    | 6      | 11  |
| 2  | Material Culture           | 22     | 40.2|
| 3  | Social Culture             | 14     | 25.4|
| 4  | Social Organizations       | 9      | 16.2|
| 5  | Gestures and Habits        | 4      | 7.2 |
|    | **Total**                  | 55     | 100 |

In terms of translation procedures based on Newmark’s (1988), it could be identified the procedures applied in translating these cultural words in Salah Asuhan novel into Never the Twain, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Percentage of Translation Procedures Used to Translate the Cultural Words

| No | Procedures of Translation    | Number | %   |
|----|------------------------------|--------|-----|
| 1  | Cultural Equivalence         | 15     | 27.2|
| 2  | Synonymy                    | 12     | 21.8|
| 3  | Descriptive Equivalence      | 9      | 16.3|
| 4  | Transference                 | 8      | 14.5|
| 5  | Componential Analysis        | 4      | 7.3 |
| 6  | Functional Equivalence       | 3      | 5.4 |
| 7  | Couplets                    | 2      | 3.7 |
| 8  | Paraphrase                  | 1      | 1.9 |
| 9  | Recognized Translation       | 1      | 1.9 |
|    | **Total**                    | 55     | 100 |

Cultural Equivalence was the most frequent translation procedure used with 27.2%. The other procedures such as Synonymy, Descriptive Equivalence, Transference, Componential Analysis, Functional Equivalence, and Couplets were used frequently in the range of 21% to 3%. The lowest frequent translation procedures used were Paraphrase and Recognized Translation with 1.9% each. Here
are the examples of the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) for each translation procedures used in translating the cultural words:

1. Cultural Equivalent
   ST: “Jika mereka menunggu piutang, apalagi Engku Sutan Batuah, haruslah mereka menerima kuangsur dengan gajiku.” (p.32)
   TT: “If they expect me to repay my debt, especially Uncle Sutan Batuah, they will have to be content with money,” (p.25)

2. Synonymy
   ST: “Tapi sebab begini, keadaanku, kita coba berjalan sekuat-kuatku, jika tak kuat, naik auto atau ebro.” (p.106)
   TT: “If my knee really starts to hurt, then we can hire an auto or buggy.” (p.89)

3. Descriptive Equivalent
   ST: “Jika ia dating ke negeri ini dengan tidak membawa nyonya sebangsa dengan dia, tidak dipandang terlalu hina, bila ia mengambil ‘nyai’ dari sini.” (p.16)
   TT: “And if a white man comes to this country without bringing a wife from his homeland, it’s not considered dishonorable for him to take an native woman as a concubine.” (p.13)

4. Transference
   ST: “Yang sangat bimbang ibu memikirkan halmu dengan mamak kandungmu, Sutan Batuah, saudara tuaku seibu sebapa.” (p.30)
   TT: “And what troubles me most is your uncle, Sutan Batuah, my own brother.” (p.24)

5. Componential Analysis
   ST: Suara suling orang buta yang musafir di tempat-tempat perhentian kereta, sangat merawankan hatinya, dan merdulah ia terdengar oleh telinganya. (p.151)
   TT: Even the song of the bamboo flute played by the blind men in the train stations on their journey would sound melodious and deeply moving to such a woman. (p.126)

6. Functional Equivalent
   ST: “Kuali yang engkau pergunakan pembuat rendang pelepas suamimu, belum akan kering lagi daripada dicuci, niscaya ia sudah pulang kembali.” (p.96)
   TT: “He’ll be back before you know it, even before the pot you used to cook his last meal dries up, and certainly before it’s washed.” (p.81)

7. Couplets (Literal & Componential Analysis)
   ST: “Enak-enaknye betul kalu lu nggak banyak tingkeh, biarin kek orang tue makan sirih disini, bise jadi kenape sih?” (p.171)
   TT: “And if you don’t mind, would you let me chew my betel nut?” (p.141)
8. Paraphrase

ST: Perempuan Bumiputra dari kampung memang lebih senang duduk bersimpuh daripada duduk di atas kursi. (p.24)
TT: Like most village women, she preferred sitting on the floor. (p.21)

9. Recognized Translation

ST: “Ya—tapi jika dilihat pula perangai Hanafi yang berkata menurut tarekat Belanda, ragu pulalah hati.” (p.131)
TT: “But Hanafi was raised in the Dutch way.” (p.111)

The results of this study show that the translator tends to be oriented to the target readers when translating the cultural words. For example, meja kenap (Salah Asuhan, p.15) was translated into coffee table (Never the Twain, p.12) because the target readers may not be familiar with the term meja kenap, which is a small antique table possessed by the Dutch government in the Dutch colonial era in Indonesia. By translating it into coffee table, it will be understood easily although its cultural aspect was missing. Yet, the translation of meja kenap into coffee table does not obstruct the flow of the story.

The interview with the translator, Mr. Susanto, revealed that the process of translating began with analyzing the structure of the language to get the meaning by reading the novel a couple of times. Then, he transferred the meaning from source language into target language and re-expressing the cultural words using familiar and readable words to the target readers. This translation process supports Nida and Taber’s (1969), which consists of three main stages: analyzing message from the grammatical structure of the source language to get the meaning of words, transferring the meaning from SL into TL, and restructuring the message in target language so that it is accepted and equivalent with the target language. Although the translator has neither educational background of literature nor translation studies – his translation skills are autodidact (personal communication, June 2015) – he could apply the same process of translation as proposed by Nida and Taber.

The results of this study also support and add to the findings of Abbas (2002) in terms of the missing cultural aspects in the target texts. He reported that inappropriate translation procedures and linguitic mistakes may result in missing cultural aspects of the source texts in the target texts. Another potential factor, as revealed from this present study, is the cultural background of the translator. Mr. Susanto comes from
Medan which has different culture from Minangkabau. He may not quite familiar with Minangkabau cultures when translated Salah Asuhan novel (Personal communication, July 2015). As a result, the nuance of the story in the translation version of Salah Asuhan novel is affected by the missing cultural aspects. However, in general the flow of the story is not obstructed.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study showed that the Indonesian cultural words in the Salah Asuhan novel were dominated by words related to material culture and social culture. Cultural Equivalence was the most frequent translation procedure used in translating those cultural words. The translator tends to be oriented to the target readers because he translated the cultural words in a way that is acceptable and readable by the target readers. Consequently, the cultural aspect from the source texts is somewhat missing. However, the cultural words were translated in the way that could not obstruct the flow of the story. To preserve the cultural words without distracting the translated texts, it is suggested to provide a glossary giving explanation of the cultural words.

For further research with similar topic, getting feedback from the target readers about the translation of the cultural words will be valuable to evaluate the quality of the translation results. Moreover, to evaluate whether the selection of translation procedures is appropriate or not, the evaluation parameters may include the purpose of translation itself, the intended readers, text types, etc., (Nida, 2004, as cited in Wan-jun & Yuan, 2007).

Note: ST = Source Text; TT= Target Text

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