

# TRANSLATING METAPHORES FROM ENGLISH INTO INDONESIAN: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Rudi Hartono  
Semarang State University

## ABSTRACT

Translating metaphors is unique and specific. It needs an extraordinary skill and knowledge because it is different from translating ordinary texts. Translators of metaphors should pay attention to not only the meaning but also the context and culture of both source text and target text. Translating a metaphor is not just transferring the meaning but replacing the metaphor itself into the target language culturally and contextually accepted. It is suggested that translator can use semantic translation method when he or she translates metaphors, reproduces the same metaphors, replaces metaphors with metaphors or translate metaphors by similes.

**Keywords:** translation, metaphor, tenor, vehicle, semantic translation method

## INTRODUCTION

Toury in James (2000:1) says:

*“Translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions.”*

Referring to this definition, translating metaphors is also an activity that involves not only two languages but also two cultures or we call that as bilingual and bicultural transformation. Here translators translate the source language into the target language and also replace the source culture into the target one.

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 with the domain that is understood by translation text readers or listeners.

Grabe in Kruger (1991) maintains that there are two basic types of metaphorical construction. In the first type the focus is usually a verb or an adjective which functions to specify the content of a noun or nouns in the syntactic frame metaphorically. The noun in this frame may therefore be described as an “argument (A)” (subject or object), modified or qualified by a focus. However, the focus of a metaphorical construction does not have to be restricted to a single word, since an argument is often qualified

by a "focus expression (FE)" (a focal word, focal phrase or even a focal sentence).

In the second type of construction two arguments interact and can be explicitly recognized as a tenor and a vehicle. However,

Example:

[= she is (like) a pot (that is boiling over because it is too full)]

A

FE

[= Fiela is a pot]

Tenor Vehicle

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 a the translator not just to translate the metaphor but to find a similar

according to Grabe, an explicit relation between tenor and vehicle is rarely given in one syntactic unit in poems and even when the tenor and vehicle are linked horizontally, they are textually specified.

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 metaphor is different form simile. Simile is a figurative language that expresses indirectly the comparison of two objects. 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.

## TYPES OF METAPHORS

Newmark (1988:106-113) defines and exemplifies six types of metaphors, as follows:

### (1) *Dead metaphors*

Dead metaphors are metaphors where one is hardly conscious of the image, [they] frequently relate to universal terms of space and time, the main parts of the body, general ecological features and the main human activities: for English, words such as: 'space', 'field', 'line', 'top', 'bottom', 'foot', 'mouth', 'arm', 'circle', 'drop', 'fall', 'rise', etc.

## (2) *Cliché metaphors*

Cliché metaphors are metaphors that have perhaps temporarily outlived their usefulness, that are used as a substitute for clear thought, often emotively, but without corresponding to the facts of the matter. Take the passage: 'The County school will in effect become not a *backwater*, but a *break through* in educational development which will *set trends* for the future. In this its *traditions* will help and it *may well* become a *jewel in the crown* of the county's education.' This is an extract from a specious editorial....'

## (3) *Stock metaphors*

Stock metaphors are established metaphors. In an informal context, a stock metaphor is an efficient and concise method of covering a physical and/or mental situation both referentially and pragmatically — it has a certain emotional warmth — and which is not deadened by overuse. It keeps the world and society going, for instance, they '*oil the wheels*'.

## (4) *Recent metaphors*

A recent metaphor is a metaphorical neologism, often 'anonymously' coined, which has spread rapidly in the source language (SL). It may be a metaphor designating one of a number of 'prototypical' qualities that constantly 'renew' themselves in language, for examples, fashionable ('*in*', '*with it*'), good ('*groovy*'); without money ('*skint*').

## (5) *Adapted metaphors*

Adapted metaphors are metaphors which involve an adaptation of an existing (stock) metaphor, for example, '*the ball is a little in their court*' (Ronald Reagan), adapted from the stock metaphorical idiom '*the ball is in their court*'.

## (6) *Original metaphors*

Original metaphors are metaphors which are non-lexicalized and non-adapted, for example, '*The past is another country*'.

## EXAMPLES OF PROBLEMS ON TRANSLATING METAPHORS

The followings are examples of problems on translating metaphors found in the novel entitled "*To Kill a Mockingbird*" that is translated from English into Indonesian.

*Problem 1:*

ST: Thing is, foot-washers think women are sin by definition.

TT: *Masalahnya, kaum pembasuh kaki menganggap perempuan sama dengan dosa.*

If we analyze the metaphorical expression above, '*women are sin*' is translated into 'perempuan sama dengan dosa'. Based on the translation method that metaphor is translated literally and even word-for-word, so that the meaning in *bahasa Indonesia* is rigid and sounds unnatural. In this case the translator may translate it into 'wanita adalah dosa' not 'perempuan sama dengan dosa' but 'wanita adalah dosa'. It will be the same as the way of translating '*All the world's a stage*' into 'Dunia adalah panggung sandiwara'. The word 'perempuan' is replaced with 'wanita' in order to make it more aesthetic, and grammatically the plural form '*women*' is transposed into the singular one 'perempuan' or 'wanita' that represents a part for a whole. The linking verb '*are*' is translated into '*adalah*' not '*sama dengan*' or sometimes it is omitted or replaced with '*itu*' ('wanita itu dosa').

*Problem 2:*

ST: She said, "Atticus, you are a devil from the hell."

TT: Katanya, "Atticus, 'kau iblis dari neraka'.

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If we analyze the problem above, we see that the metaphor 'you are a devil from the hell' translated into 'kau iblis dari neraka' is rendered literally or even word-for-word. But actually the case is the metaphor should be translated naturally and culturally accepted. In Indonesia context and culture, the metaphor 'you are a devil from the hell' can be similar to 'jahanam kau'. This will be contextually familiar with and more naturally understood by Indonesians.

Problem 3:

ST: "Cecil Jacobs is a big wet he-en!"

TT: "Cecil Jacobs induk ayam baa-saah!"

The translation of English metaphor 'Cecil Jacobs is a big wet he-en!' to Indonesian metaphor 'Cecil Jacobs induk ayam baa-saah!' is still literal. The translator translates using literal translation method not semantic translation method, whereas he or she should replace English metaphor with Indonesia metaphor, not just translate literally. The metaphor itself describes someone's anger. He or she is very angry, so that the metaphorical expression is 'He is a big wet hen' (= 'Dia itu induk ayam yang geram'). This expression describes how someone goes berserk like a hen that is brooding on disturbed by picking up her eggs. This can be described in a metaphor 'mad as a wet hen' or in Indonesian context this can be similar to 'banteng ngamuk'.

Problem 4:

ST: I was a ham.

TT: Aku jadi daging asap.

This metaphor is also translated literally. The translator does not replace the source metaphor with the target one. The word 'ham' is translated into 'daging asap', denotatively it may mean meat cut from the thigh of a hog (usually smoked). However, connotatively it means an unskilled actor who overact; all-star; hot; to act with exaggerated voice and gestures; to overact;

someone who wants to be the center of attention. They are always performing, always 'on'. In the theatre, someone who 'hams it up' overdoes everything and makes everything bigger than life, broader than life, and general goes overboard on his presentation, to the detriment of others on the stage. So the metaphor 'I was a ham' can be appropriately translated into 'Aku jadi bintang panggung' or 'Aku jadi pusat perhatian'.

Problem 5:

ST: He is trash.

TT: Dia itu sampah.

This metaphor seems translated into the similar metaphor, but it is not exactly yet. Contextually the meaning of 'trash' is not 'sampah' but 'worthless people' (= 'orang yang tidak berharga'), so that the appropriate equivalent metaphor is 'dia itu orang yang tak berharga' or familiarly stated as 'dia itu sampah masyarakat'.

## SOLUTIONS OF TRANSLATING METAPHORS

To overcome the problems on translating metaphors, a translator should find out solutions in order to translate metaphors appropriately based on the target culture and society. He or she can use appropriate methods, techniques or procedures. The followings are alternative solutions that can be adopted by translators in doing their translation process.

There are some alternative solutions of translating metaphors proposed by theorists of translation. Newmark (1988:46) and Machali (2009:52), for example, state that a semantic translation is a better method used for translating metaphors than using literal translation and faithful translation. By using semantic translation method, a translator can produce more natural product of translation. Both literal and faithful translation methods lead to rigid translation

results. Semantic translation method adapts more flexibly to target text (TT) and it considers aesthetic aspects of source text (ST) and compromises the meaning as far as it is natural both languages linguistically and socio-culturally. Look at the following example:

ST: *He is a book-worm.*

TT: *Dia adalah seorang yang suka sekali membaca.*

Phrase 'book-worm' is translated flexibly into '*Dia adalah seorang yang suka sekali membaca*'; however, it is still unappropriately translated. The translation itself should be '*Dia seorang kutu buku*'. Semantically it is meaningful because this is natural and functional in Indonesian context and culture.

On the other hand, Barańczak in Dobrzyńska (1992:599-600) states that a translator can choose among three possibilities: he or she can use in his or her text an exact equivalent of the original metaphor (this procedure can be represented as M→M); he or she can look for another metaphorical phrase which would express a similar sense (the procedure that can be represented as M1→M2); finally, he or she can replace an untranslatable metaphor of the original with its approximate literal paraphrase (the M→P procedure). The principle of faithfulness in translation requires a specific adaptation in every individual case.

A translation may represent the sense exactly while blurring at the same time the cultural specificity of imagery that is the metaphorical vehicle, or it may deliberately bring into prominence the semantic exoticism of the original by transferring a metaphor in its surface form. The choice of translational tactics should depend on the type of text translated and the function it is supposed to fulfill for its new audience in its new communicative context. Such decisions are conditioned by various factors, and

made under the pressure of various poetics. In any case, it is not always possible to adhere to the principle of faithfulness, M→M, without risking that a metaphorical utterance will become incomprehensible or will lead to an interpretation which is incompatible with the one intended in the original.

Summarizing what Newmark (1988) proposed, Dobrzyńska (1995:599) suggests possible approaches to metaphor in translation. Newmark (1988) apprehends metaphor in a large way, taking into consideration dead, cliché, stock, recent and original metaphors as well as some other kinds of figurative language - metonymy and simile. The classification of possible procedures for translating stock metaphors particularly (the most detailed one) includes seven cases:

- (1) reproducing the same metaphorical image in another language;
- (2) replacing the original metaphorical image with some other standard image in another language;
- (3) translating metaphor by simile;
- (4) translating metaphor (or simile) by simile plus sense (i.e. a literal paraphrase, a 'gloss');
- (5) converting metaphor to sense only,
- (6) using deletion (if the metaphor is redundant or otiose);
- (7) translating metaphor by the same metaphor with the sense added (with 'gloss').

## CONCLUSION

It is not easy to translate metaphors. Translating metaphors is different from translating other ordinary expressions or utterances. Metaphors originally represent hidden messages that need a deep analysis of meaning. All metaphors have connotative meanings, so translators could not

translate them denotatively. In other words, translating metaphors is replacing the source metaphors with the target ones. Translated metaphors should be accepted in the target culture and society. Therefore, there are some alternative ways for translators to do, for examples, using semantic translation method, reproducing the same metaphors in the target language, replacing the original metaphors with the standard ones in the target language or translating metaphors by similes.

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