



Issues in Translating Cultural Terms

A Case Study of the Novel *Laskar Pelangi* into *Niji no Shounen Tachi*

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Abstract. Translation has a vital role to access every literary work outside a certain language. A translator is required to have a broad insight to reach an adequate idea as the original. In this case, a perception equivalence of the readers of the source language and the target language is very important. This study used the novel *Laskar Pelangi* and its Japanese translation as the object of discussion and elaborated difference of cultural terms in original novel and Japanese novel version. This paper is expected to contribute ideas in translation studies, especially the translation of Indonesian into Japanese. This literary study used qualitative approaches with several steps, namely identifying several cultural terms highlighted in *Laskar Pelangi* and its Japanese translation, analyzing shifts in the translation of the elements, exploring issues in translating cultural terms, discussing several data, and concluding an implication. Translators of the novel *Laskar Pelangi* (*Niji no Shounen Tachi*) used various strategies to find equivalent of the cultural terms in the novel. However, the consistency of the translators in giving a foreignization is still felt since beginning to the end of the translation, which is necessary in developing the coherence of a text.

Keywords: Translation · Cultural terms · Literary works

1 Introduction

Not many Indonesian literature have been translated into foreign languages, mostly Japanese. Several Indonesian literary works have been translated into Japanese, including the novel *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, which was translated into Japanese under the title *Ningen Daichi* by Noriaki Oshikawa in 1986. Later in the same year, Shinobu Yamane translated the novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* into Japanese with *Parukku Mura no Odoriko*. In 1998, the novel entitled *Saman* by Ayu Utami was translated into Japanese by Ai Takeshita with the same title, *Saman*. And in 2006, the novel entitled *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan was translated into Japanese by Ribeka Ota under *Bi Wa Kizu*. Moreover, the most recent is the novel *Laskar Pelangi* by Andrea Hirata, which was translated into Japanese by Hiroaki Kato and Shintaro Fukutake in 2013. *Laskar Pelangi* is an international bestseller novel translated into 20 languages, one of which is Japanese. *Laskar Pelangi* is the first novel by Andrea Hirata published in 2005 by the publisher Benteng Pustaka Yogyakarta.

This novel tells the life of the main character Ikal with 9 of his friends. The ten of them were given the name *Laskar Pelangi* by their homeroom teacher when they were in elementary school because of their different characters but able to create a beautiful harmony like a ‘pelangi’ (rainbow). The novel is set in the life of poor people in the village of Gantong, East Belitung, the majority of which are fishermen, farmers, low-level employees, and laborers. Most of their children only received basic education. *Laskar Pelangi* tells the story of the struggles of life for the poor, education gaps, but also tells about the dreams, hopes, and spirits of the characters.

Laskar Pelangi is the first book in the *Laskar Pelangi* tetralogy. Another book is entitled *Sang Pemimpi*, *Edensor*, and *Maryamah Karpov*. This novel became a best seller in Indonesia and has been reprinted fourteen times. In 2008, *Laskar Pelangi* was appointed to the big screen with the same title and directed by the famous Indonesian director Riri Reza. The film *Laskar Pelangi* is set in Belitung, the same location as the novel’s setting. In 2009, it became one of the films screened at the International Film Festival in Fukuoka, Japan.

In 2011, *Laskar Pelangi* was staged in the musical drama at Taman Ismail Marzuki Jakarta which was produced by Mira Lesmana. In the same year, it was made into a television drama series that aired in Indonesia starting on December 26, 2011 with 15 episodes. The *Laskar Pelangi* television drama series, whose title is translated as *Niji no Heishi-tachi*, was later included as one of the drama series that received the Special Award for Foreign Drama at the International Drama Festival in Tokyo in 2013.

Laskar Pelangi has been translated into various foreign languages and published in 24 countries, including Japan. The novel was translated into Japanese by an anthropologist from Sophia University Tokyo, Shintaro Fukutake and a Japanese artist lives in Indonesia, Hiroaki Kato. The translation of the novel in Japanese is entitled *Niji no Shounen-tachi* and was published in Japan in 2013 by the Japanese publisher Sunmark. When the novel *Niji no Shounen-tachi* will be published in Japan in 2013, publisher Sunmark created a program called Rainbow Project. Rainbow Project is a program to gather demand from bookstores who want to sell the novel in their stores. By the time the program closed in September 2013, Sunmark had garnered requests from 636 bookstores for 5088 copies.

The novel *Laskar Pelangi* is written from the first person point of view, the character Ikal. Ikal is a small Andrea Hirata figure, so this novel is a picture of the life experienced by the author. Andrea Hirata was born on October 24, 1967 in the village of Gantong, East Belitung. He successfully finished school and continued his studies in economics at the University of Indonesia. He then received a scholarship to continue his education to master’s level at the Universite de Paris Sorbonne, France and Sheffield Hallam University, England. *Laskar Pelangi* novel is his first novel which he dedicated to his teacher, Mrs. Muslimah. Andrea Hirata once worked at an Indonesian telecommunications company, but now he chooses to become a writer and build a museum in his hometown. The museum was named the Word Museum. He hopes that the museum will become a reading and writing space for many people. After completing the *Laskar Pelangi* Tetralogy, Andrea Hirata has written 9 other novels.

Literary research with qualitative approaches will be conducted in this research. The steps are divided into three main parts. First, identifying several cultural terms highlighted in *Laskar Pelangi* and its Japanese translation. The next step is to analyse

the shifts in the translation of the elements. The final step is to explore the issues in translating cultural terms, discussing several data and giving implication in conclusion.

This research is technically diachronic type to provide an overview of research on the translation of existing cultural terms, and tries to discuss future developments with new ideas which of course still need to be explored with other observers of translation studies.

Research on the translation of Japanese cultural words into Indonesian has been widely carried out, but not vice versa. There is a possibility that this is because there are not many Indonesian literary works, especially novels that have been translated into Japanese. Some previous studies that discuss the translation of Indonesian novels into Japanese are as follows.

Translation of Indonesian Cultural Terms in Novel *Laskar Pelangi* into Japanese by Mike Nurjana in thesis, 2017 [1]. This research aims to describe the method and technique of the translation of cultural words in *Laskar Pelangi* into a Japanese novel, *Niji no Shoonentachi*. Cultural words in this study are determined based on the classification proposed by Newmark's models. In this research 186 data have been collected according to the Newmark's cultural words categories.

Another research that also examines the translation of cultural terms but uses different material object is Foreignization of Cultural Lexicon in the Translation of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* into Japanese by Sa'idatun Nisfullayli in journal, 2017 [2]. This article discusses the strategies and techniques used by translators in translating *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* into Japanese. Based on the analysis, the article concludes that the dominant translation techniques used are borrowing and paraphrasing, so it can be seen that the strategy used in translating this novel is foreignization. Foreignization is a translation strategy that is oriented to the source text. The article also states that by using foreignization strategy, the translator tries to maintain the cultural concept in the source text, but this is considered to create a distance between the reader and the translated work, making it difficult to meet the reader's taste.

Most previous studies with similar themes still focus on analysing the translation strategy of cultural terms based on the classification of the originators of the existing translation theory and then matching the data. This research tries to analyse the data first and explain the phenomena that exist in the data, create a new classification, and add an analysis of the cultural context, not only terms that are in the form of words.

1.1 Translation of Cultural Terms and Cultural Translation

Translation is essential in today's information and communication age [3]. Literary works, such as novels, short stories, and poetry, are also translated. Larson [4] defined translation as "the transfer of the meaning of the source language into the target language." The meaning of the source language will be reproduced in the target language. It is accomplished using the semantic structures of the two languages.

Cultural terms are designed to symbolize cultural manifestation. Cultural manifestation can be both abstract and concrete [5]. The form of abstract culture or what is commonly called non-material culture, in the form of thoughts, ideas or ideas that exist in the head. This abstract culture can be expressed in oral or written form. This form of culture creates values and norms that apply in society and its derivatives can become a

law or rule. While concrete culture can be in the form of activities carried out by humans in their lives, also known as social systems. Almost all human activities are included in the form of culture, except activities that are done reflexively because of instinct. This form of culture can create custom and tradition. Concrete culture can also take the form of human works that can be perceived by the five senses. This culture is born from human thought and activity. This kind of culture can be called physical culture or material culture. Its relics can be called artefact.

Based on this explanation of culture, it can be understood that the domain of the term culture is very broad. It finds it difficult to accept the concept of “culture translation” as a kind of expansion or overcoming of the narrowness of linguistic concepts of translation. Rather, it argues that the “cultural” dimension has always been present in translation conceptions derived from general thoughts on language or linguistics. More specifically, they not only suggest a cultural theory, but also show how deeply political this implication is, as their understanding of sociality in language is strongly tied to one of the foundational myths of political modernity [6].

Newmark [7] provides categories of cultural terms based on ecology, material culture, social culture, customs and organizations, and gestures and habits. And of course, there are several theories regarding culture specific items in translation theory. However, if we return to the understanding that almost all human actions are forms of culture, including communicating in a particular language, then other elements such as dialect, onomatopoeia, and even humour can be categorized as cultural terms and the problem of translation deserves to be studied. This can be the basis for rethinking in translation studies, especially the translation of cultural terms. Some translation researchers choose to use culture translation instead of translation of cultural terms or words, to provide a more holistic coverage of the study of cultural translation.

2 Results and Discussion

The uniqueness of the *Laskar Pelangi* novel is how Andrea Hirata tells the events experienced by the main character *Ikal* and his friends. Simple events in everyday life are told in an interesting language style, such as the use of hyperbole and metaphors that make the reader not feel bored. And what stands out the most about this novel is the rich cultural context that gives rise to various cultural terms. Not only Indonesian Malay culture, but also assimilation of Chinese, Arabic, Indonesian culture.

The term culture in *Laskar Pelangi* is translated well using various translation strategies. And when viewed from the translation method used, there are times when the translator uses methods that are close to the source text, by maintaining the cultural terms that appear so that the target text has an exotic impression. However, on several occasions, the translator brings the target text close to the reader by looking for the closest equivalent in Japanese to translate words related to Indonesian culture. The following is an example of data for the two cases above.

“...Mahar memberi sebuah nama yang sangat memberi inspirasi untuk band kami, yaitu: **Republik Dangdut.**” [7] p. 153.

Mahar gave a very inspiring name for our band, namely: **Republik Dangdut.**

...僕たちのバンドに大きなインスピレーション与える名前をつけた。「リパブリック・ダンドゥット」 [6] p.126.

Mahar gave a very inspiring name for our band, namely: *Republik Dangdut*.

Republik Dangdut in the sentence fragment in the novel *Laskar Pelangi* is translated as is without any additional explanation regarding *dangdut*. For readers of the source text, especially Indonesians and people who understand *dangdut*, of course, they will feel their own nuances when reading them. *Dangdut* is a genre of traditional Indonesian music with the characteristics of a drum music instrument. The song lyrics in this genre of music describe a lot about romance, love and suffering in life. The flow of *dangdut* music is heavily influenced by Indian and Arabic music. Translating the word ‘*dangdut*’ into Japanese is certainly a challenge for translators. The translation equivalence to be achieved is faced with another choice, namely the understanding that a good translation of literary works should not provide additional explanations that can interfere with the aesthetics of sentences and storylines, so that the translator chooses a foreignization strategy that makes the target text retain a foreign feel for the reader. Meanwhile, when a cultural word can be translated using its equivalence, the translator can replace the cultural word with a general word to achieve an image that matches the source text. The results obtained from translation with such a strategy will have a domestication effect on the target text readers.

“*Berada di tengah toko ini serasa direbus dalam panci sayur lodeh yang mendidih.*” [8].

“Being in the middle of this shop is like being boiled in a boiling *lodeh soup* pot.”

この時間に店内にいと、沸騰した野菜煮が入った鍋の中で一緒に煮られている気分になる。[7].

“Being in the middle of this shop is like being boiled in a boiling *vegetables soup* pot.”

Translating cultural contexts and terms can be understood as a big challenge for a translator, because not only language skills must be possessed, but cultural knowledge, even validation of translation results is important because culture is the identity of a particular community. The following is an example of data that still requires validation of the results of the translation of cultural terms.

“*Titik-titik keringat yang bertimbulan di seputar hidungnya menghapus bedak tepung beras yang dikenakannya, membuat wajahnya coreng-moreng seperti pemeran emban bagi permaisuri dalam Dul Muluk, sandiwara kuno kampung kami.*” [8].

Beads of sweat that lined her nose wiped away the rice flour powder she was wearing, leaving her face streaked with smudges like **a maid for the empress** in *Dul Muluk*, our village’s ancient play.

何かに気をとられ、まぶたに流れる汗も気にならないようで、汗のしずくが化粧を落とし、顔はまるで落書きされたようになっていた。それは僕たちの村に伝わる古い演劇『ドゥル・ムルック』に登場する王妃のようだった。[8].

The sweat flowing on her eyelids didn’t seem to bother her, and the sweat drops removed her makeup and her face looked crumpled. It was like **the empress** in the old play “*Dul Muluk*” in our village.

The word *emban* in Indonesian can be interpreted as carrying or nursing. In the context of the sentence above, *emban* means a maid of the empress who is usually

in charge of looking after the empress. However, when translated into Japanese, the meaning of a maid is not translated, leaving only the empress, so that the crumpled face of the maid in the sentence is interpreted as the empress's crumpled face. This can lead to a misinterpretation of how Indonesian describes the image of the empress.

The issues that arise in translating cultural terms certainly do not come from words related to culture alone. However, cultural products that are expressed in words such as rhymes, provide another challenge. This is what it means that compared to the translation of cultural terms, cultural translation is more appropriate to use. Pantun, in Indonesian can be interpreted as an old style poem that has four lines in a-b-a-b rhythm. Maintaining this pattern in the translation process is not easy, in fact often the aesthetics of the pattern of the pantun have to be sacrificed. Here is an example of the data.

“Jalan ke ladang berliku-liku, jangan lewat hutan cemara, segera nyanyikan lagumu, biar kutahu engkau merana...” [8].

“The road to the fields is tortuous, do not pass through the pine forest, sing your song immediately, let me know your misery...”

曲がりくねった畑への道すがら、松の森を通ってはいけません。すぐに歌ってね、あなたが悲しみにくれているのがわかるように... [9].

“Do not go through the pine forest on the way to the winding fields. Sing right away so I can see that you're sad ...”

The cross rhythm a-b-a-b (in the example above, it is rhymed with u-a-u-a) is lost because it is almost impossible to maintain the original meaning of the sentence in the rhyme and at the same time maintain the cross rhythm as the source language.

Observing the trend of previous research, most of the researchers in the field of translating cultural terms examined data based on the classification of cultural terms that had been defined in the theory of translation. Of course, this needs to be rethought, because the data can see the phenomenon of the emergence of cultural terms and contexts that need to be analyzed. To translate the cultural context, of course, it is necessary to carry out steps that are not only obtained by the literature review method. Field research, interviews, and validation from cultural experts are important considerations to achieve dynamic equivalence in cultural translation.

3 Conclusion

The categories of cultural terms have been formulated several times by experts in translation studies, such as categories of cultural terms related to ecology, geography, proper names, occupation, food, or organizations. However, several other cultural-related issues that need attention are how to translate the cultural context that is present, such as in dialects, proverbs, humour, satire, and other contexts.

Author's Contribution. L. Rosliana carried out, took the lead in writing the manuscript, and were in charge of overall direction as well as planning in a qualitative study.

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