

## MEANING IN TRANSLATION

Eli NondangSaragih<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Terjemahan adalah usaha mencari makna yang *equivalen* (setara) Antara bahasa sumber dan bahasa target. Bagi seorang penerjemah mencari makna yang setara harus menjadi tujuannya adalah menterjemahkan, karena penerjemah bukan bertujuan merubah bentuk tetapi maknanya juga harus ikut terbawa agar pesan yang terdapat dalam bahasa sumber bersama dengan pesan yang terdapat dalam bahasa target. Untuk mendapat makna yang setara penerjemah harus memperhatikan faktor kebahasaan bersama dengan pesan yang terdapat dalam bahasa target. Untuk mendapatkan makna yang setara, penerjemah harus memperhatikan faktor kebahasaan, antara lain: pemilihan kosa kata, tata bahasa, situasi komunikasi dan juga yang tidak kalahpentingnya faktor budaya bahasa sumber dan bahasa target.

**Kata kunci:** Arti dan Terjemahan

### A. Introduction

Translation is an effort of finding equivalent meaning of a text into the second language. Meaning equivalence is emphasized since in translation meaning is the object to be rendered from the source language text into the target language text. In this case, a translator is faced with a text as units of meaning in the form of sets of words or sentences.

The main question in translation is of meaning which always appears in the process of translation, not translation as a product of the process. Translating a text from the source text(ST) must be consider the closest natural equivalent meaning. It implies that the meaning of the target text must be equivalent with that of the source language.

---

<sup>1</sup>The English Lecturer at TBI IAIN Padangsidempuan

A translator must be aware of which meaning is possibly intended by the author. Besides, he also must pay attention on the components of meaning embedded in a certain unit of meaning. By understanding the components of meaning of the source language expressions, a translator can make the best decision related to the components.

## **B. Discussion**

### 1. An overview of Translation

Translation is a process of rendering meaning, ideas, or messages of a text from one language to other language. There are some considerations which follow this process, which mainly related to the accuracy, clarity, and naturalness of meaning, ideas, or messages of translation. It means that it is an important thing to consider whether the readers of the target text accept equivalent information as the readers of the source text do. These considerations are clarified in some definitions of translation stated by some experts.

Catford defined translation as the replacement of textual material in one language(SL) by equivalent textual material in one language(SL)<sup>2</sup>. He also said that during the process of selecting, finding, and creating equivalence, a translator should consider at least two factors, namely, linguistic and cultural factors. He said that linguistic factors are those factors which exist at the level of concrete form and abstract meaning of any chunk of language. In addition, cultural factors are those factors that cannot be seen at the level of form or meaning of language. However, they exist among the background of mind of speakers and writers of source language. So, a translator has to consider both cultural and linguistic elements and translate based on these two factors.

Another most prominent definition is stated by Newmark who defined translation as “Rendering the meaning of a text into another

---

<sup>2</sup>J.C.Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1988).

language in the way that the author intended the text”.<sup>3</sup>This definition stresses on rendering meaning of the source language text into the target language text as what is intended by the author.

Hatim and Munday define translation as “The process of transferring a written text from source language (SL) to target language(TL)”.<sup>4</sup>In this definition they do not explicitly express that the object being transferred is meaning or message. That emphasized on translation as a process.

Nida and Taber, on the other hand , state that “Translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalence of the source language message”.<sup>5</sup>This definition is more comprehensive than the previous one. Nida and Tiber explicitly state that translations closely related to the problems of language, meaning and equivalence.

From the definitions mentioned above, it is found that translation is a process which is intended to find meaning equivalence in the target text. Rochayah Machaliand Mona Baker underlined the term meaning equivalence because it is the meaning which is transferred in the target language.<sup>6</sup> In this case, translator is faced with text as unit of meaning in the form of sets of words or sentences. This means that language which is used is unit of meaning in discourse which can be understood by the participants of the communication.

So, the main problem in the process of translation is about meaning which will occur when the process is in progress, not translation as a product. Hatim and Munday also suggest that one of the key problems for the analyst was in actually determining whether the source text meaning

---

<sup>3</sup>Newmark, *A Text book of Translation*, (New York: Prentice Hall International, 1990).

<sup>4</sup>Hatim and Munday, *Translation, An Advanced Resource Book*, (London Routledge, 2004).

<sup>5</sup>Nida, Eugene A and Charles R. Tiber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, (Leiden:E.J. Brill, 1982).

<sup>6</sup>Machali, Rochayah, *CampurTanganPenerjemah: 'Menghianatiteksasli? Makalahdalam Seminar NasionalPenerjemahan*, (Yogyakarta: FBY UNY, 2007).

had been transferred into the target text.<sup>7</sup> It is clear here that meaning is the key problem; whether meaning of the source language text is accurately transferred into the target language text.

## 2. Meaning

Translation is not merely concerning on meaning as a unit of lexical meaning. The process of rendering meaning involves some aspects as diction, grammatical structure, communication setting, and cultural context of the source text. Meaning of the source text and target text must be equivalent.

The meaning equivalence is involved, at least, language. The system of rules in one language, which is different from other language, will have role for the translator in his or her decision making in the process of translation. For example in the process of translation which involves Indonesian and English language. Both languages have different system on the structure of noun phrase. Noun phrase of English language usually follow the structure of modifier + noun head. While in Indonesian language usually follows the rules of D – M (diterangkan – menerangkan) where modifier comes after the noun head. For example: the English phrase ‘a beautiful girl’ is translated into ‘ seorang gadis cantik’ in Indonesian language.

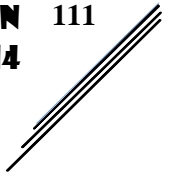
Meaning of a phrase in one language can’t always be translated in the way as the example above. The Indonesian phrase ‘kambing hitam’ is not translated as ‘black goat’ in English language. If it means ‘a goat which is black’ the phrase can be translated as ‘a black goat’. But if it has a specific meaning ‘a person who is blamed for something that someone else has done’, it will be equivalent with the English phrase ‘scapegoat’.

## 3. Kinds of Meaning

Nida and Taber classified meaning into two classes: referential meaning and connotative meaning. They state, ”There is a distinction between

---

<sup>7</sup>Hatim and Munday, *Op.Cit.*,



conceptual meaning ‘on the hand, and connotative, stylistic, affective, reflective and collective types of meaning on the other hand’.<sup>8</sup> The two types of meaning will be discussed here.

### 3.1 Referential meaning

People usually think of meaning as something that a word or sentence refers to. This kind of meaning is called referential meaning. Referential meaning is word which refers to an object, process, abstract thing, and relation. As Larson said, ” The word refers to a certain thing, event, attribution, or relation which a person can perceive or imagine is called referential meaning. Referential meaning is what the communication is about, it is the information content”.<sup>9</sup> Giving the meaning of a word referentially, a translator must be aware of any markers appears in the text. There are two markers that can be used to give meaning of words, syntactic and semantic marking.

#### a. Syntactic marking

In some cases, the meaning of word is governed by their grammatical structure. For example:

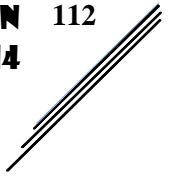
1. He picked up a stone \_\_\_\_\_ 1. They will stone him.
2. She has a beautiful face \_\_\_\_\_ 2. He will face the audience.

From the example above, it can be seen that in the left side, the word ‘stone’ is usually translated into ‘batu’. While in the right side, the word ‘stone’ is a verb and translated into ‘melempar’. The word ‘face’ in the left side is a noun and translated into ‘wajah’ but in the right side it is a verb and translated ‘menghadapi’. In this case, grammatical structure of each word refers to the intended meaning explicitly.

---

<sup>8</sup>Nida, Eugene A and Charles R Tiber. *Op. Cit*

<sup>9</sup> Larson. L. Mildred 1984. *Meaning-based Translation. University Press of America*.p



b. Semiotic marking

Meaning of a word is also determined by its relationship with other words in a certain context. In other words, semiotic environment differentiates meaning. For example:

1. I dressed myself
2. I dressed a chicken
3. I dressed the wound

The words 'dress' in sentence 1,2 and 3 have different meaning. In the first sentence 'dress' means 'I put my clothes on'. In the second sentence 'dress' means 'I defeathered a chicken and took its innards out'. While in the third sentence 'dress' means 'I put the medicine on and bandaged the wound'.

3.2 Connotative meaning

Understanding meaning of a word is not merely based on the referential object of the word. Sometimes, a translator also needs to give emotional reaction to the word. The reaction might be strong, weak, positive, or negative. This kind of meaning which is closely related to individual emotional reaction, then, is named as connotative meaning. Connotative meanings are often culturally conditioned.

A word which has a positive connotation in one culture may actually have a negative connotation in another, as for example, the English word 'tribe'. In some parts of the world, ethnic groups react very positively to being called a tribe, but in other parts of the world this same word has negative connotation and people don't want to be called members of the tribe. Referentially, the word 'tribe' would be referring to an ethnic group, but the positive and negative overtones must also be taken into consideration if the word is chosen to be used in translation, or wrong meaning may be conveyed.

Words often occur in sets which range from negative to positive. For example, the words skinny, thin, and slender, probably have the

following connotation for most people: negative for skinny, neutral for thin and positive for slender. As far as the referential meaning, they are synonyms, but they are used very differently because connotation.

Words may also vary in connotation depending on whether they are old or new. Generally speaking, there are words that are archaic, old-fashion, neutral or modern. Each language will have words which would not be appropriate because they are considered archaic or old-fashioned. But in some situation, a translation using words which are modern might be inappropriate because ,to some speakers of the language, they would not be accepted vocabulary.

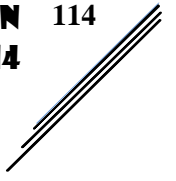
In other words, giving the meaning of a word is not merely from its concrete or abstract dimensions, but it also involves the sender's emotional condition. And there are three main principles how to understand connotative meaning in a translation, namely:

a. The relationship between word and the speaker

When certain words become very closely related with certain types of speakers, this will be well accepted by the member of the group. For example are words which are used and understood by members of certain social class, level of education and religion.

b. Condition of the speaker

The same word expressed by the same speaker but in different condition or setting may rise different connotative meaning. Some expressions are related to certain environment as in court, police station, market tourism objects, etc. For example: there was a woman who met her friend while she was shopping in a market. She told a story to her friend that last night there was a robbery at her neighbor's house. Her friend may respond it as new information that warns her to be more careful at home. Different respond will appear when the woman told the story to the police officer. This will become a report to be seriously handled.



c. Linguistic factor

Parallel words which are always in pairs with other words give different various connotations. The word 'kick' for example, when it is in pair with the following words have different meaning.

Kick over the traces - to cast off restraint

Kick up the ladder - to promote to high position

4. Elements of meaning

Larson states that there are some characteristics of language which involves in the process of translation.<sup>10</sup> By knowing the elements of meaning of the source language, translators can make the right decision related to these elements. The elements are described below:

a. Plural system

English and Indonesian language are different in marking plural nouns. In written communication, English uses inflectional morpheme – s, or –es, or adds phoneme /-s/, /-z/, or /-is/ in spoken. Some irregular forms are also exist. While in Indonesian, markers of plural noun are shown by using repetition. For example :

Fruit > fruits                      buah>buah-buahan

Book > books                      buku>buku- buku

b. One form will be used to represent several alternative meanings

A word has a primary meaning, which is the meaning which at first time is got by the receiver or reader. The second or alternative or connotative meaning is one which is affected by the context. For example:

The boy runs fast                      - Anak itu berlari dengan cepat.

He runs his eyes over the crowd   - Ia melayangkan pandangannya  
Pada kerumunan orang.

---

<sup>10</sup> Op.Cit.,p.6





For example: the word 'pig' has a very negative connotation in the Jewish culture, but in the culture of Papua New Guinea pig has a very positive

Connotation because pigs are a very important part of the culture. In American culture, this word is neutral in most of its uses. The difference is based upon cultural variations and the part that pigs play in the society.

Different cultures have different focuses. For example, the cultures of New Guinea focuses on gardening, fishing, foods, trees, plants and ceremonies; whereas the culture of America focuses on working, earning, money, sports, schooling, and marriage. Some societies are more technical and others less technical. This difference is reflected in the amount of which is available to talk about a particular topic.

There may, however, also be both technical and non-technical vocabulary to talk about the same thing in a given society.

The culture is often reflected in the figurative usages of words. For example: in America we use 'sheep' in a figurative sense as 'one who follows without thinking'. In Papua, people use 'cassowary' in figurative speech, but this word never be used figuratively in America because there are no cassowaries. The important thing to note here is that the object is the same.

In every culture, there will be certain actions which will be symbolic. These will occur in the source language text, usually without indication of what the significance of the action is. If the action is simply translated literally, it may result in zero or wrong meaning.

For example: various movements of the head are symbolic in most languages. If the text simply says He nodded his head, without any indication of why, this might be misunderstood; if in the source language culture, nodding the head meant yes and in the receptor

language culture, nodding of the head had no particular symbolic meaning.

The important thing is that the translator be aware of the fact that symbolic actions often have different meanings in the receptor language and in the source language. An adjustment may need to be made in order avoid a wrong meaning or no meaning at all.

Newmark defines culture as “The way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression”.<sup>12</sup> Some words in the source language may express concepts which absolutely can’t be understood by the native of other language. The concept can be concrete or even abstract thing related to religion, social tradition or meals.

The following example is taken from Opera Kecoak which is used by Machali.

SL :Panggilsaya ‘Mas’.

TL : Call me ‘Honey’.

The word ‘mas’ in the dialogue above is translated into ‘honey’ in English. However, in different context, of course, the word ‘mas’ can’t be translated as ‘honey’ when it is used to address one’s older brother.

b. No equivalent word in the target language

Sometimes a word express a concept which can be understood in the target language but there is no exact equivalent expression. The word ‘standar’ in Indonesian is represented by some meaning as ‘ukuran’ dan

---

<sup>12</sup>Newmark, *Op.Cit.*, p.94.

‘patokan’, but they are not fully equivalent with the meaning of the word in the source language. Other example is given by Machali:

SL: (kepadawartawan)...Saudara-saudara, acara ini sudah selesai. Bapak yang mulia dan tamunya hendak menikmati acara yang sifatnya lebih pribadi. Mohon maaf. Press-release akan dibagikan nanti sore secara tertulis. Juga amplopnya sekalian.

TL: (for the underlined expression) : You will get a written press release by this evening and, of course, **a little something extra as a sign for our appreciation for your hard work.**

In the translation version, the connotative meaning in the word ‘amplop’ is translated into a more neutral expression in English (see bold expression), even the phrase “your hard work” seems to be likely an irony. It seems that the translator considers that the target readers will understand the phrase ‘hard work’ as the realization of the connotative meaning of ‘amplop’. This technique is more relevant to the target readers than using the word ‘envelope’ literally.

c. Source and target language make differences in meaning

A translator sometimes makes different meaning of the source and target language text. One expression in the source text might be differently expressed in the target text. As an example in the sentence: “She was going out in the rain”. It can be understood differently in Indonesian: ‘Diapergikeluarkan patahukalau hujansedang turun’ or ‘Diasengajakeluarmeskipun hujansedang turun’. In this case, the translator must be quite aware of the context in the source text.

d. There is no specific expression in the target language

English has some specific term for ‘house’ as “bungalow”, “cottage”, “villa”, “hall”, “lodge” and “mansion”. Javanese, on the other

hand, also has some specific terms related to plants as “manggar”, “bluluk”, “cengkir”, “degan”, “klopo”, and “cumplung” which is not found in Indonesian and English.

### **C. Conclusion**

Translation is basically a process of conveying meaning or meaning of a given-linguistic discourse of a language into other language, more than just transferring words or grammatical structure of the SL. The meaning of a word or set of words can be well understood because of its role in the whole linguistic expression in where they occur. For this reason, the meaning of a word is not only determined by the referred object or idea, but it is also governed by the use of the words or phrases in a certain way, context and effects.

When a translator tries to find the equivalence, he/she is faced with text as unit of meaning, even in the form of sets or words or sentences. It is important to note that language is used as a communication means, so in translating a text he/she should remember the principle of “A text is a whole entity, to be translated as a whole”.

### **References**

Baker, Mona. 1992. *In Other Words, A Coursebook on Translation*. London: Routledge.

Hatim dan Munday. 2004. *Translation, An Advanced Resource Book*. London: Routledge.

Larson, Mildred. 1984. *Meaning Based Translation: A Guide To Cross Language Equivalent*. Boston: University Press of America.

Machali, Rochayah. 2007.

*Campur Tangan Penerjemah: 'Menghianati' teks asli? Makalah dalam Seminar Nasional Penerjemahan*. FBS UNY.

Newmark. 1988. *A Text Book of Translation*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall International.

Nida, Eugene A and Charles R. Taber. 1982. *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.