



Students' Challenges in Translating Poetry

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Abstract

This article drawn from the local tracking study of how college students perceive the process of translating poetry. The aim of this study is to investigate the students' challenge in translating poetry. The current study based upon the benefit of understanding poetry to build harmony in the society. Writers used descriptive qualitative research as the design of this study. The subject of the study were the sixth semester students of English Education Department of Universitas PGRI Semarang who had passed the Translation 1 subject and join the Translation 2 at the present time. The population of this study was 143 students in sixth semester. Writers then chose 20 students as the sample of this study. Students were assigned to translate English poem entitled 'Huesca' into Indonesian. The poem was written by John Conford, an American soldier who was endured on World War. After the assignment project, they were asked to respond the questionnaire related to the process of translating the poem and problems encountered. The finding revealed that most of students admitted that their biggest problem in poetry translation is associated with the linguistic difference. It refers to grammatical differences (source language and target language), lexical choices and meaning ambiguity. There were many factors behind the problems that encounter students in translating the English poem into Indonesian. Factors related to the culture, the use of figurative language, and the different structure between original poem and the target language are considered as main hindrances in translating literary works. The educational implication of the study is that our students need to be familiarized with literary works and its process of translation. However, since this study was only held in 2 months and had limited participants, the result of the study cannot be generalized. Further research, therefore, need to conduct by other researcher in order to get broader insight toward the theme

Keywords: poetry; translation process; obstacles

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1. INTRODUCTION

Translation of poetry or literary works is generally defined as the process of relaying poetry into another language. It is usually assumed as a complex process since the poetry's feature itself can be sound-based, syntactic, structural or pragmatic in nature. Poetry is a unique and special work of literature. As stated by Waluyo, (2002) poetry is a literary work that has a peculiarity in the selection of words. Unlike the words in prose that are descriptive, the words used in poetry are very aesthetic, dense and full of meaning. A word in a poem often represents another meaning in its expression. For example, when a poet uses the word 'sun' in the context of expressing his/her feeling for someone, the word 'sun' might represent a symbol of 'hope' or 'a beloved someone'. In addition, a poem might represent geographical, religious, social and cultural background of the writer. Transferring a poem into another language, therefore, might become a problem for the translator (Sukmaningrum & Hawa, 2021). Poetry translation also involves cognition, discourse, and action by and between human and textual part in physical and social setting. This challenge might be experienced by translators when he/she deals with poetry translation. That is why, many translators and linguists argue that translating poetry is not a simple job and very tricky.

In addition, poetry is full of sentimental feeling of the author. Poetry translators really need the ability to shift the inner atmosphere; not only transferring the meaning of the original work but also maintaining the 'beauty' of the work. By doing so, the target readers can feel the sentimental feeling of the literary work. In fact, a good poetry translation text will bring the target reader to the sense of reading the original poem, not the translation work. The challenge of translating poetry also deals with the process of translating self-names, both character names or places that may not be known in the target language (TL). In addition, the culture matters and rules of the source language (SL); the idiolect of the author, and the character dialect might also exist in the phrases, clauses, or sentences containing word(s) related to the four major cultural categories and potentially cause problems in the process of translating poetry (Robinson, 2003). That assumption is in line with Newmark's statement (Newmark, 1988); the challenge of translating literary works, particularly poetry, is the cultural influence of the source and the moral message that the poet intends to convey in the original poetic work. The difficulties of translating poetry are also characterized by the uniqueness of a poem such as rhymes, meter, rhythms, and expressions that cannot be found in other writing text or literary works (Hond, 2021). Those obstacles, hence, pose a bigger challenge in poetry translation. Researchers and translation theorists have never hesitated to proclaim their skepticism regarding the possibility of translating metrical poetry, and, when attempted, the unavoidable necessity to master the metrics both of the source and target literary languages to the utmost (Zarandona, 2002). Furthermore, Bassnett, (2013) stated that the process of poetry translation is not and has never been simple. The translation of literary works, especially poetry is not only for the purpose of transferring the meaning of SL to TL, but also expressing poetry topography (Saleh & Weda, 2018). In conclusion, the process of translating poetry is not simple.

Those challenges are mostly caused by the dynamic of poetry translation that involves many aspects in its process. The dynamics of poetry translation are described by Newmark, (1988) as follows:

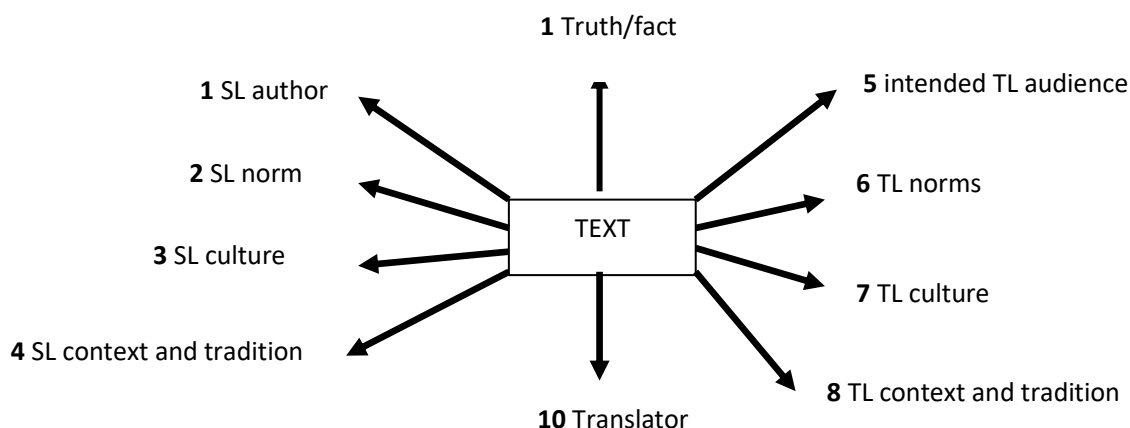


Figure 1. Dynamics of Poetry Translation (Newmark, 1988)

Furthermore, many translation experts (Baker, 2012; Bassnett, 2013; Carter, 2005; Larson, 1984; Newmark, 1988), state that a translator of literary works needs to have the following conditions:

- a. In translating a poem, the translator should use appropriate punctuation to maintain the original tone.
- b. The translator must be proficient and able to use the target language properly, correctly and in context.
- c. Translators must know and understand literature, appreciate literature, and master translation theory.
- d. The translator must be able to interpret the literary work as a text with a high aesthetic value.
- e. The translator must have the cognitive ability and sociocultural knowledge, especially regarding both languages.
- f. The translator must use precise translation of metaphors. Mistakes in translating metaphors will mislead the reader.
- g. In translating a poem, translator must be able to convey the invisible message contained in the original poem.
- h. Translators must consider the syllable in translating the poem.

Poetry translation has long been seen as an important issue among scholars and researchers (Awabdeh, 2014; Bednarova-Gibova, 2017; Burnshaw, S., Fitts, D. & Peyre, 1995; Fedychenko, 2018; Harto & Handayani, 2018; Rutherford, 2009; Saleh & Weda, 2018; Zarandona, 2002) who discussed the challenge of translating poetry. These studies have enhanced our understanding of the problems in translating poetry or literary works. Researchers and translation experts have never hesitated to proclaim their skepticism regarding the possibility of metrical poetry and the unavoidable necessity to master the metrics both of source and target literary work (Zarandona, 2002). Moreover, Barber cited in (Rutherford, 2009) divides problems in translation poetry into two categories; linguistic differences and fiction differences. Linguistics differences refer to grammatical differences, lexical and meaning ambiguity. Meanwhile, fiction differences refer to divergent of material culture, religious beliefs, traditional customs, dan social life.

To add up to the challenge of translating poetry, Carter, (2005) stated that there are other characteristics that assumed as unique and are not found in other literary works. Those unique characteristics are rhymes, meter, rhythm, and 'special' expression or word that are not used in daily conversation. Hence, those pose an even bigger challenge in translating poetry. Considering the complexity of poetry translation, it can be stated that translating a poem is not easy and very tricky. However, a good translator must acquire the skill. Investigating students' ability in translating literary works, therefore, become an important need. By identifying their ability and challenge in translating poetry, lecturers can formulate or design appropriate curriculum in teaching Translation. This study, therefore, is designed to answer the question of how the students perceived the poetry translation process and what are their challenges in poetry translation.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted by selecting a purposive sample consisting of 20 students at the sixth semester of English Language Education Department of Universitas PGRI Semarang. In choosing the sample, writers have several considerations, such as; (1) respondents of this study got A score in Translation 1, and (2) respondents are the sixth semester students who got A score in Poetry. By considering those facts, it is hoped that the chosen sample have good understanding about poetry and also acknowledged the technique of translation.

The purpose of this study was to find out the difficulties of students in translating poetry from English into Indonesian. Based on these objectives, the relevant approach is an inductive-qualitative approach. At the very early step, students were asked to translate a poem entitled '*Huesca*' written by John Conford. Students were then asked to answer questions related with challenges and problems that encounter the student during the process of translating the poem. The qualitative descriptive approach was selected in this study based on the consideration that the data were in the form of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences derived from document data sources (i.e. student translation texts) and students' responses from of the questionnaire. In analyzing data, writers adapted Miles and Huberman's interactive model data analysis technique. According to Miles and Huberman as cited in (Sutopo, 1996), there are three components in the interactive analysis model, namely; (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, and (3) drawing conclusion and verification. Steps of analyzing the data, therefore, can be elaborated into the following explanation:

1. *Data reduction*

After giving the assignment to the sixth semester students, writers then collected the translation product and asked the students to answer the questionnaire relating their difficulties in translating poetry. At this stage, writers do the reduction to analyze the data. Data reduction means the process of selecting, identifying, classifying, and coding the data that are considered important. Writers, therefore, selected, identified, and focused on the data by referring to formulation of research problem. It means, writers only took the data sample of students' translation texts that confirmed their responses toward the questionnaire.

2. *Data presentation*

Data presentation refers to the process of simplifying the data in form of sentence, narrative or table. In this study, the data were displayed in form of table and sentence. The result of questionnaire was presented in table while the translation products were displayed in form of sentence. Since the design of this study was a descriptive qualitative, writers, therefore, described the data in a good narrative sentence or description. The benefit of this stage is to help writers and readers in understanding the data.

3. Drawing conclusion

After selecting, displaying and analyzing the data, the last step is drawing conclusion. In this stage, writers gave concluding remarks and implication toward the result of analysis

3. FINDINGS

To find out students' obstacles in translating English poetry, writers administered a questionnaire consisting of 16 items. The result is presented in table 1:

Table 1 Students' difficulties in translating poetry

Aspect	Responses	
	Yes	No
Difficulty in translating metaphors contains in original poetry	17	3
Lack of English vocabulary	15	5
Difficulty in finding the right equivalent	13	7
Difficulty in maintaining language style	13	7
Difficulty in transliteration	11	9
Socio-cultural differences	14	6
Lack of understanding of meaning in original poetry	15	5
Lack of understanding of original poetry	14	6
Difficulty in drafting good sentences in Indonesian	14	6
Difficulty in making natural translations	16	4
Never read a poem that was translated	12	8
Not interested in the process of translating	8	12
Not interested in the translation course	7	13
Lack of knowledge about good translation techniques	7	13
The time provided to translate the text is less	10	10
Not interested in being a translator	10	10

In this study, writers identified several difficulties or problems faced by students related to the process of translating poetry. In classifying problems encountered by the students, writers divided translation problems into two categories: the linguistic aspect and students' internship aspect. Table 1 indicated that in translating English poem entitled '*Huesca*' into Indonesian, most of students encountered problems on linguistics aspect. The linguistic aspect related to the difference in language patterns or grammatical structure between SL (i.e. English) and TL (i.e. Indonesian). First linguistic aspect is related with translating metaphors. Majority of the students cannot choose correct dictions to the equivalent to English metaphors in Indonesian. Seventeen out of 20 respondents found it difficult to adjust. It is understandable because metaphors from different languages call on different elements to express the same idea. Translating metaphors, therefore, can rarely be translated literally.

In addition, students also have difficulty in finding poetic language in the translation process. A total of 14 respondents answered that they had difficulty in maintaining the aesthetic value of *'Huesca'* in their translated poem. This is understandable considering that respondents in this study were not literary writers who had qualified in literary skills. The result of the study also revealed that students also encounter problem in finding a natural equivalent. A total of 16 respondents answered that they had difficulty in translating *Huesca* naturally. Those problems might reduce the aesthetic value of the translated poem. The following examples proved the result:

Table 2 Sample of students' translation text using literal translation

No Data	Source Language	Target Language
S09/SL15/ TL15	<i>Remember all the good you can Don't forget my love</i>	<i>Ingatlah semua kebaikan yang kau bisa Jangan lupakan cintaku</i>
S05/SL03/ TL03	<i>Is the pain at my side The shadow that chills my view</i>	<i>Apakah sakit itu di pihakku Bayangan yang menyejukkan pandanganku</i>
S10/SL13/ TL13	<i>And if bad luck should lay my strength Into the shallow grave, Remember all the good you can; Don't forget my love</i>	<i>Dan saat takdir buruk melemahkanku Sampai di kuburan sepi Ingatlah semua kebaikan yang kau bisa lakukan Jangan abaikan cintaku</i>

In those examples, respondents translated the original poem using literal meaning; even some phrases translated word by word. In S09/SL15/ TL15, the array *remember all the good that you can* literally translates into *ingatlah semua kebaikan yang kau bisa*. Though the translation text has a high level of equivalence, the aesthetic value of a poem is diminished. This is reinforced by the results of the translation in the next array where the respondent translates *don't forget my love* into *jangan lupakan cintaku*. The two arrays have quite significant sound differences: *a* and *u*. This reduces the aesthetic value of a poem. It will be a bit different if the respondent used the word *semampumu* to translate *you can*. The 'sound' will be a little more beautiful.

A bit similar with the example above, respondents in data S05/SL03/TL03 and S10/SL13/TL13 also used a literal translation method to translate the arrays. The use of literal methods in translating the array can produce accurate meanings, but the use of metaphor was not translated precisely. Another difficulty faced by students is that they do not understand the content of the text or original poem. A total of 14 respondents admitted that they did not understand the content of *Huesca*. This hinders the translation process because in the process of translating, understanding the content of the SL text becomes a very decisive factor. The difficulty in understanding this text is reinforced by the fact that the respondents in this study felt that their vocabulary skills in English were still not good; 15 respondents admitted that they lacked mastery of vocabulary in SL (English). This is a serious obstacle because source language mastery is the key in understanding the original text. In translating literary work, the scholars' lack of vocabulary might cause the failure in understanding some idioms or metaphors contained in the original work. The following examples showed the evidence:

Table 3 Sample of students' failure in translating idioms and metaphors

No Data	Source Language	Target Language
S20/SL09/ TL09	<i>On the last mile to Huesca, The last fence for our pride, Think so kindly, dear, that I Sense you at my side</i>	<i>Saat semakin dekat dengan Huesca Dengan sisa-sisa kebanggaan dan harga diri Coba pikirkan dengan hatimu, sayang, bahwa aku merasakan kehadiranmu didekatku</i>
S13/SL10/ TL10	<i>Heart of the heartless world, Dear heart, the thought of you Is the pain at my side, The shadow that chills my view</i>	<i>Hati yang beku dalam dunia yang sepi, dengarkan aku.. Memikirkanmu terasa sangat menyakitkan untukku Membayangkanmu membuatku sangat hampa</i>

Some students mentioned that their intuition in determining word choices leads them to translate using the literal meaning of each word. On the other hand, a few students attempted to translate the SL poem within their knowledge which they had already gained through their experience in poetry class and arrange the SL text to be most appropriate for Indonesian expression. It means, their process of translation is affected by their experience, not by their understanding toward the content of the original poem.

Social-cultural differences between SL and TL also considered as a problem in translating poetry. Socio-cultural differences between Indonesian and English have an impact on students' ability to formulate the right terms in poetry translation. In this study, writers found 14 students stated that they had little difficulty in finding a suitable equivalent in translating terms used in the original poem because of these socio-cultural differences. The following example proved the assumption:

Table 4 Sample of students' failure in finding suitable equivalent

No Data	Source Language	Target Language
S09/SL5/ TL5	<i>The wind rises in the evening, Reminds that autumn is near</i>	<i>Angin berhembus diwaktu senja Mengingatkanku bahwa musim kemarau telah dekat</i>

In S09/SL15/TL15, student translated *reminds that autumn is near* into *mengingatkanku bahwa musim kemarau sudah dekat*. The misconception between *autumn* and *kemarau* in the translation text bring us to the assumption that the student in that data example had difficulty in finding suitable equivalence in translating the word *autumn*. It might be underpinned by the fact that the student only knew *kemarau* and *penghujan* season in the target culture.

To sum up the result above, this study revealed that the internal aspects also contribute to the low-quality of poetry translation product. The internal aspect referred to students' interest and motivation in the process of translating, especially translating poetry. Although this study found that this aspect of student internship is less dominant, it cannot be ignored. Difficulties in the process of translating related to the internal aspects of students found in this study include students' disinterest in being a translator, their disinterest of translation process, their ignorance of translation technique, and their disinterest of translation course

4. DISCUSSION

The finding of the present study revealed that most of the students acknowledged that the biggest problem in translating poetry is related with linguistic difference. In more specific explanation, this problem refers to grammatical differences (source language and target language), lexical choices, and meaning ambiguity. The result of the study then comes up with concluding remarks and implication.

The first concluding remarks is; although most of students have passed the subjects of English Grammar, Lexical Studies, and Semantic, they still have problems in translating English literary work into Indonesian, especially poetry. This fact showed the evidence that translating poetry is not simple and has never been a simple process. There are many linguistics devices need to consider in its process. The result is strengthened by other researches (Fedyuchenko, 2018; Harto & Handayani, 2018; Saleh & Weda, 2018; Sukmaningrum & Hawa, 2021) that comes to the same conclusion.

The second concluding remark is translating poetry is quite different from translating academic or other text. Although most of the students have passed Translation 1 subject, the problem still encounters in poetry translation. It is understandable since the process of translating poetry is trickier than the academic one. A translator must be able to convey the invisible message contained in the original poem and also needs to consider the syllable in translating the poem. It means, in translating poetry someone needs to be aware to the aesthetic value of the original poem and then be able to transfer it into exactly at the same sense of the target language. This is not an easy thing to do since this process involved the translator's experience and culture understanding (Carter, 2005; Rutherford, 2009; Zarandona, 2002). The implication that can be drawn from the above results is that the Head of the English Department need to revise the translation curricula. The subject about theory of translation in general and literary translation practice in particular need to be separated. In addition, our students should be familiarized more about the literary work and its process of translation

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study is to determine the students' perception toward the process of translating poetry. The result of this study implies how students negotiate with the original poem, how they choose appropriate words and their obstacles toward the process of translating poetry. Most of students admitted that their biggest problem in poetry translation is related with linguistic differences. It refers to grammatical differences, lexical choices dan meaning ambiguity. Those results confirmed the assumption that translator's experience is the most important factor in process of translation, especially in translating literary works. The more experience translators have the more natural meaning of the translating text they can generate. On the other hand, the less experience they have the more literal, directional and word-associated translation they produce. Less experienced translator tends to translate poetry literally, with less attention to the poetic or aesthetic value of the work.

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