

# The Translator's Strategy as a Cultural Mediator in Translating Indonesian Novel into English

## A Case Study On "Jatisaba"

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses a study on the translator's strategy in producing an Indonesian-English translated work (Indonesian-English literary work) entitled "Jatisaba", a novel that is full of Javanese (*Banyumasan*) cultural terms and expressions. Since the translator is a cultural mediator, this study aims to unravel more the strategy of a translator in transferring an Indonesian work full of cultural terms into English. A practice run by a literary translation agent that potentially enables international readers to appreciate the Indonesian author's work and knowing further cultural identity carried out through literary work. Agent in this present study refers to a translator namely Christopher Allen Woodrich, an English native speaker who is considered to have sufficient cultural capital on Indonesian literature due to his academic background. As the framework of thought, this socio-cultural study adapts the Bourdieusian concept of strategy in the theory of cultural production. Meanwhile methodologically, interview and document selection are applied as techniques to gain the data. At the end of the study, it is found that the translator uses the strategy to enable readers to understand the work being translated, while at the same time also keep the local colour of it. This strategy potentially helps raise the translator's visibility. Besides, this study also discloses how cultural capital is significant for translation practice.

**Keywords:** Cultural capital, cultural mediator, cultural terms, translator's strategy, translator's visibility

### 1. INTRODUCTION

For the last decade, the existence of Indonesian-English translated works – published by Indonesian publishers – is highly influenced by the Frankfurt Book Fair (FBF) 2015. The FBF has opened such an opportunity for Indonesian writers and their works to be introduced before the international public readers. Since Indonesia was appointed to be the guest of honor on that particular year, the preparation was started already one year before. In this case, the government conducted the Translation Funding Program (TFP) to select and grab hundreds of Indonesian best works to be translated and exhibited at international events, such as FBF, LBF (London Book Fair), etc. The program itself was managed by the National Book Committee (KBN) established by the Ministry of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia. The mission was to globally promote Indonesian culture and gain more recognition from the international public.

As a result of selection, hundreds of literary books authored by writers across the country were chosen by the KBN to be involved in the program. One of them was a novel entitled "Jatisaba" (firstly published by ICE Yogyakarta in 2011, then republished by Era Baru Pressindo in 2012). This novel is authored by a Yogyakarta young writer Ramayda Akmal (Ayda). From the resource gained from the TFP, the book could be translated – by an English native translator namely Christopher Allen Woodrich (Chris) – and produced into its English version, yet still used the same title. The English version was finally published by a Yogyakarta indie, Gress Publishing in 2015 (reprinted in 2016), and handed over in part to the government.

As a work that is full of Javanese (*Banyumasan*) cultural terms and expressions, the production of *Jatisaba* in the English version becomes an interesting cultural phenomenon. The role of the translator in this particular work is crucial for the transferring process from the source text into the target text must be very challenging.

Besides, even though the original version is mostly written in Indonesian, the use of many *Banyumasan* terms and expressions becomes the distinctive features among other Indonesian novels. This shows how important the value of cultural identity is for Ayda as the writer. In this specific context, how Chris has made an effort to transfer both texts and cultural values into an English work turns out to be an enticing object to be investigated further. It is because, on one side, he must keep the peculiarity of the original work, but on the other side he also aimed the understandability for International readers. Such an investigation can potentially disclose a translator's role as the cultural mediator and his strategy to achieve equilibrium between keeping the originality of work and serving understandability for the target readers.

To investigate the practice of text translation from a cultural point of view, Liddicoat (2016), in the framework of intercultural mediation, believes that translation is the act of intercultural communication. For him, the study on the role of the translator as an intercultural mediator is important for the translator study. Thus, the practice of intercultural mediation that is realized in a form of translation must be unraveled since mediation is an interpretative act of the mediators, in which certain meaning – that is conventionally created – in a particular language is communicated into other languages.

There are three main points explicated by Liddicoat (2016) concerning the concept of intercultural mediation, translation as the act of mediation, and the process of mediation. *Firstly*, he believes that the concept of intercultural mediation is prospective to understand translation as a cultural act. He views intercultural mediation as a relational and interpretative act in which a mediator (translator) must understand, explain, interpret, and negotiate a cultural phenomenon (text). The mediator is a translator of meaning and a communicator upon a translated meaning. Therefore, a translator is positioned amid two different cultures and involved in a complex hermeneutic process.

*Secondly*, Liddicoat (2016) emphasizes that translation is an act of mediation. It is because translation is an intercultural mediation process *per se*. In this case, the translator as a mediator stands – so being isolated – in between the writer and the readers, then rewrites a text for the readers that have never been imagined by the writer earlier. On this point, Liddicoat insists that the eminency of a mediation work from a translator is to make a source text that can be well-received and read as if that text is originated from the target language and culture. To create what Gouanvic (2001) terms as '*willing suspension of disbelief*', so that the readers can be blown away in the game of fiction. Here, the process of translation is decisive to realize such kind of condition.

*Thirdly*, Liddicoat (2016) explains that the mediation process in a translation including two categories, '*for*

*self*' and '*for others*'. The first category is a process in which a translator (privileged reader) realizes the cultural construction that is emerged while translating the source text. Meanwhile, the latter category is when the translator attempts to rewrite the result of source text translation toward the prospective readers in the target culture. It implies a condition in which a translator is a member of both source culture and target culture. The interpretative ability for each culture enables a translator to understand a written text in one socio-cultural context and communicate it into another socio-cultural context. Therefore, every strategic action taken by a translator is inevitably an important issue to be explored more in the domain of translation study. Thus, the study on strategy is relevant to see how a translator passes through every process necessary for transferring the source text into the target text.

Based on those explanations, it can be understood that translation depends on the translator's ability to run every process in mediating two different cultures for producing a readable and understandable target text. This present study is intended to further investigate the role of Christopher Allen Woodrich as the cultural mediator of *Jatisaba* amid its source text and target text. This study specifically aims to describe the strategy that he implemented both in the process when he translated the text for himself and when he rewrote the text for others. It is important to see how a translator tries to pursue the eminency of a mediation work that has been explained before. Eventually, what he attempted during those processes can be reflected in the English version of *Jatisaba*.

### ***1.1. Translation and the Concept of Strategy***

To understand the concept of strategy in general, this study adopts a concept proposed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1993). In his view, the strategy can be understood as a specific orientation as the result of unconscious dispositions – so that it is an unconsciousness – in a practice. He believes that every action committed by an agent (e.g. translator) tends to follow what he calls the '*feel for the game*' that has already been internally constructed as the agent's habitus. This concept is also related to the capital possessed by the agent, especially the cultural capital.

For Bourdieu (1993), cultural capital is a set of intellectual capabilities and practical skills that can be accumulated – one of them – by pursuing formal education. By that characteristic, this kind of capital needs such a long process of learning and field experiences. In the context of literary translation practice, a translator needs mastery of both source and target languages, along with the understanding of socio-cultural context carried out by those languages. Besides, a translator also needs the skill to translate a specific text such as a novel, poetry, or drama script. Therefore, this

capital cannot be so easily possessed by any random individual. It requires a capability to become – what Liddicoat terms previously – a cultural mediator.

The strategy of a cultural mediator is what Damrosch (2009) called the paraphrase. This concept refers to a mode of translation practice that is oriented to balance the originality of the source text and the adjustment to the socio-cultural context of the target text. However, as a non-value-free cultural product, a translated work must be influenced by a translator's practical bias and motive. Therefore, Venuti's concept (as cited in Munday, 2016) of domestication – is believed as a target reader-oriented translation mode – and foreignization – as a source text oriented translation mode – potentially enables us to see the translator's strategy in a more specific context.

## **1.2. Previous Studies**

The studies on the translator's strategy in literary translation have been conducted by scholars in recent years. Some of them are Xu (2012), Hadley and Akashi (2015), Haroon (2017), and Zahrawi (2018). Here, each study proves that the translators strategize to pursue various aims in the translation practice. In her study, Xu (2012) finds that a scholar translator such as Jeffrey C. Kinkley tends to pursue his visibility by applying a specific strategy in his literary translation practice. As Kinkley translated Shen Congwen's "*Biancheng*", Xu detects two main strategies applied by him: (1) Using Congwen's reputation as a legitimate modern Chinese writer in the world so that it can attract readers to read his translation work; (2) Exposing his expertise on Congwen's works by giving footnotes and endnotes so that the readers can see his academic qualification as a scholar translator.

Kinkley's second strategy is related to the paratextual devices in translation text. This is also what Haroon (2017) finds in Malay-English literary translation, but in this case, is in a form of the preface (translator's notes). She argues that the preface written by the translator has an important role not only in helping the reader's reception toward text but also in showing the existence of a translator and their translation concept in front of the reader. Hence, it can be seen that supporting text such as the preface has two aims, which are to increase the reader's understanding of the translated text and to encourage the translator's visibility upon the work that is translated.

What is done by Kinkley is almost identical to Haruki Murakami when Hadley and Akashi (2015) reveal his strategy to pursue visibility as a celebrity translator for he is known earlier as a Japanese prominent writer. Based on their study, they explain how Murakami applied the foreignization strategy so that the readers can pay attention to the translator of the work. By this Murakami believes that his existence as a translator can be realized

by the literary public. Once more certain strategy is applied by a translator to show his existence as a translator.

A little bit different from what Hadley and Akashi can prove, Zahrawi's study (2018) finds out that the translators of two different works (Wannous' *The Glass Café* and Udwan's *Reflection of Garbage Collector*) use the strategy to negotiate the meaning and keep the cultural identity of the source text into the target text. Her study proves that each translation has a different kind of strategy. In Wannous's work, she finds out that the translator utilized the domestication strategy to help the readers understanding the translated work. On the other side, the translator of Udwan's work mostly used the foreignization strategy to keep the cultural identity of the source text. From this study, it can be understood that each strategy has a specific virtue. The domestication aims at the good reception of target readers, while the foreignization strategy attempts to preserve the cultural identity of the originality of the source text.

Those studies show how the translators' strategies have been an interesting issue being discussed by the literary translation scholar. The strategy of a translator can be examined to understand the translator's role not only as the cultural mediator but also as the literary agent who fights for esteem upon the work that has been translated. Related to that, the following section is written to understand more the concept of strategy based on the theory of cultural production.

## **2. METHOD**

### **2.1. Material and Formal Objects**

According to Udasmoro (2012), a material object is an object being studied in particular research, and the formal object is an aspect taken to be discussed from a material object. Based on that definition, the researchers decide that the material object in this study is the practice of Indonesian-English translation toward Ramayda Akmal's *Jatisaba* by Chris Woodrich as the translator. Meanwhile, the formal object is the translator's strategy in translating the original version into its English version. This formal object leads to the translator's actions as a cultural mediator amid the original version and the English version of the novel.

### **2.2. Data Collection and Data Analysis**

Here, the formal object will link to what kind of data needed for supporting this study (Udasmoro, 2012). Related to that, this present study needs to figure out the relevant data about the translator's strategic actions during the production of *Jatisaba*. Thus, the data are collected by interviewing the translator and comparatively reading the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). In reading both texts, the researchers focus on

the way the translator rewrites the *Banyumasan* expressions into the target text and uses paratexts (sub-title and footnotes). Besides, the written sources such as the translator's notes in a form of articles are also used to later support the analysis.

Those kinds of data are analyzed by synchronizing data from interview transcriptions and translator's articles that explain the actions he took during the translation of the novel. It is done to understand the strategy that the translator took in mediating the cultural transfer between ST and TT. This will also be reverified by comparing texts in ST and TT. It is conducted for seeing how the translator's strategy is reflected in the English version of the novel. Theoretically, this technique of analysis refers to what Moleong (2013, p. 288) explicates as "the constant comparative method". The results were then discussed by using the Bourdieusian concept of strategy in the theory of cultural production.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Translator's Strategy on the Novel's Title

Based on the direct interview with Chris Woodrich as the translator and his article on translating *Jatisaba*, the researchers find that the novel's title was one of the issues that should be overcome during the translation process. When it is compared, there is a distinction between the Indonesian title and the English title. The original version does not have any sub-title, while the latter one does. It is because both the writer and the translator believed that the title must not be translated (since it refers to the main setting of the novel), but on the other side, they also believed title *Jatisaba* would be very hard to be understood by the target readers, due to its unfamiliarity for the foreign readers. The book was presumably unattractive if they insisted to keep the original title without giving any improvisation. Therefore, they decided to give a sub-title to make it more attractive. After selecting some probabilities proposed by Ayda, the translator selected a sub-title "Kindling from the Green Tree". According to him, there are three functions of this sub-title as he testifies through his article as follow:

"This subtitle served three purposes. First, it functioned to draw readers' interest; as green wood is, by its very nature, difficult to burn, the idea of using green wood as kindling appeared nonsensical. Second, it reflected the difficulties faced by the main character both in convincing her fellow villagers to leave *Jatisaba* and abandoning her work in human trafficking. Third, it hinted at the prominence of Islam in the novel's narrative; the phrase "Kindling from the Green Tree" is derived from the Qur'an, specifically Verse 80 of the Surah *Ya-Sin*: "[It is] He who made for you from the green tree, fire, and then from it you ignite...." (Woodrich, 2016b, p. 4)



Figure 1 Cover of Indonesian and English version.

The translator's explanation implies that despite finding out a representative sub-title that can reflect the content of the novel as seen in the second and the third functions, he also tries to make the book as attractive as possible so that it can catch the readers' interest, as seen in the first function. In the quotation, he mentions the sub-title as a nonsensical phrase. However, based on the tone of his testimony, he seemingly realizes that people are so easily attracted by something strange and nonsensical. It is intended to raise the readers' curiosity.

This is a strategic action to mediate a gap between the source text and the target culture, in which a presumably confusing title is improvised by the translator to be more intriguing when it turns to the title of the target text. This strategy can only be done if only the translator understands the target culture where the novel is transferred. As a western, Woodrich (2016a) has sufficient cultural capital to consider what kind of title is suitable for foreign readers. The knowledge that has long been internalized in the form of his habitus enables him to see the importance of English subtitles for the novel.

#### 3.2. Translator's Strategy on the Cultural Terms

As explained earlier, as an Indonesian novel *Jatisaba* is considered peculiar for it is full of *Banyumasan* cultural expressions, such as names of foods, plants, animals, dances, social practices, etc. In the original version, the writer uses dozens of footnotes to accommodate the readers in understanding those cultural expressions. The same strategy is also applied by Woodrich (2016b) to overcome the gap between the source culture and the target readers. Based on his article, he claims that the use of footnotes was considered sufficient and appropriate to clarify the cultural practice described in the novel. In fact, according to him, the English-language edition of *Jatisaba* has 108 footnotes, including the 75 footnotes found in the original edition. He further adds that "The vast majority of these footnotes are only a single sentence in length and used to provide a basic understanding of a subject." (Woodrich, 2016b, p. 5)

Concerning the footnotes, the translator tries to make every explanation as simple as possible. Based on the

interview, the translator has two basic reasons for this issue: (1) He believes that a lot of readers are not interested in reading footnotes and (2) Even if some others are, they must be reluctant to read such long and complex notes. To deal with this problem, the translator claims that he utilized a technique that had been developed during his active time writing in English Wikipedia. The technique was by assuming that the target readers would be the common people – who lacked knowledge of Indonesian culture – so that he tried to summarize every important explanation and communicate it with a simple and understandable language. This can be seen in two cultural terms – *Barzanzi* and *Cina Boi* – that are not given footnotes in the ST but they are sequentially given footnotes in the TT by the translator as follow.

<sup>45</sup> A panegyric on the Prophet Muhammad, written by Al-Barzanji in the 18th century and beloved by Sunni Muslims throughout the world.

<sup>6</sup> A traditional game in which two teams compete with a tennis ball and a stack of tiles, spread on the ground. The first team to arrange their tiles while avoiding their opponent's ball wins." (Akmal, 2016, p. 7).

For the Indonesian (especially Javanese) readers, those two terms are familiar, but the situation is different for the western readers. This is the basic reason why the translator decided to give footnotes on those cultural terms for he was obliged to bring the TT readers to understand the ST culture. This is related to Haroon's (2019) study on the use of footnotes in the literary text. She argues that footnotes are given for words that contain cultural information. It functions to support readers' understanding of the translated text by giving some specific information, yet not the translator's personal opinion. As a cultural mediator, Chris has shown the two processes that Liddicoat terms as translating '*for self*' and '*for others*'.

However, the translator also tried hard to minimize the use of footnotes in some expressions for he believes that the footnote is somehow distractive to a certain extent. As an English native speaker, he believes that the referent for some terms such as '*cincau*' and '*sate*' is recognized by foreign readers. That is why the translator translated them into 'grass jelly' and 'satay' to reduce the use of footnotes. Besides, he also eliminated a footnote that he thought inefficient for the translation. The case happens in the translation of the term "*galengan*" (Akmal, 2012, p. 1) in ST – meaning the soil road that becomes borders of the rice field where the farmers usually walk – in which it is given a footnote in the Indonesian version, but it is translated into "embankment" (Akmal, 2016, p. 1) in TT without any footnote. The translator testifies that it was not imperative if he must keep such an original cultural term because with or without the word *galengan*, it will not influence the flow of the story for it is just a set piece of a scene.

Thus, the translator just translated it with a word considered equivalent to the original text.

### **3.3. Translator's Cultural Capital**

As a cultural mediator, the translator of *Jatisaba* seems able to mediate the intention of the writer to introduce the Javanese *Banyumasan* culture and the need of the target readers to understand the text being read. There are two basic reasons for the translator to be able to do so: (1) He is an English native speaker who came from and now is living in Canada and (2) He lived approximately ten years in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, for studying Indonesian literature from undergraduate until post-graduate level. Besides, he also has produced dozens of academic papers and has been a translator since 2011.

That condition implies a long process of formal education and relatively sufficient translating experiences. In this context, his mastery of Indonesian and English is supported by his understanding of Indonesian literature and culture, especially Javanese culture for he lived among the Javanese community. The cultural capital possessed by the translator is proven significant for succeeding in his role as a cultural mediator in the translation of *Jatisaba*. An influential factor that enables a translator to transfer every detail of ST's cultural nuances in front of the TT readers.

### **3.4. Probability of Translator's Visibility**

The probability of the translator's visibility is supported by the foreignization mode applied to the translated version of the novel as Venuti (as cited in Munday, 2016) believes that foreignization aims to make the translator visible. In accordance, the translator's strategy in the translation of *Jatisaba* potentially increases the visibility of the translator. Despite his name is mentioned in the book cover, the way he keeps the authenticity of *Jatisaba* – that is full of cultural expressions – potentially can bring the readers toward where the writer from along with her cultural identity and eventually make them realize that the text that they read is the work of translation.

Needless to say, the use of footnotes to explain every cultural term in the book. It can show the translator's background of knowledge upon the source text he has translated, just like what Kinkley did toward Congwen's work based on Xu's study. Although most of them were translated from the existing footnotes in the original novel, yet the foreign readers most likely unable to notice that since they can only access the translated one, not the original one.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, four major implications must be highlighted from this present study as follows. *First*, the translator of *Jatisaba* strategized to catch the readers' attention by adding a nonsensical sub-title to cover the strangeness of its untranslatable title. This shows that a para text is crucial for a translated work. *Second*, there are two ways to treat cultural expressions in translation as demonstrated by Chris Woodrich: using footnotes if no equivalence is found and translating it if there is equivalence as long as it does not distract the flow and nature of the story. *Third*, cultural capital is influential to enable a translator to fulfill the role of the cultural mediator in translation practice. *Fourth*, the foreignization mode of translation can increase the probability of the translator's visibility for it can make the readers realize what they read is a translated work.

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