

Translation of 'Memoirs of a Geisha': Analysis and Insights on Cultural Perspective

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Abstract—'Memoirs of a geisha' is an astonishing novel by Arthur Golden. The story revolves around a geisha, named Nitta Sayuri or formerly known as Sakamoto Chiyo. This English written novel unlocks the hidden world of Japanese's complex rituals and the text is translated into 32 languages. This article opts to analyses the translation of Japanese's cultural words, e.g. ecology, metaphor, taboo word, etc. into Malay language. Newmark (1998)'s definition and categories of culture are used throughout this article to analyse the novel. Findings indicate that changes do occur due to cultural differences between the two languages. And the cultural translation procedures can be classified into three categories; (i) borrowing or transference procedure, (ii) adaptation between two cultural word, and (iii) description of the cultural word.

Index Terms—Culture, cultural word, translation procedure.

I. INTRODUCTION

We have to acknowledge that the translations of 'Memoirs of a Geisha' novel contribute a great deal towards spreading the knowledge of Japanese' culture and all kinds of information contained in the novel. By being translated into 32 different languages, this breathtaking and remarkable novel offers a lot more than simply an exotic fable. And very often it functions as a historical document, a religious text, a literary text, etc. Thus, this article explores whether there exist similarities and connections between Malay and Japanese cultures. This article also analyses the differences between both texts, in terms of cultural differences.

Arthur Golden's novel 'Memoirs of a Geisha' is written in English language and used as the source text (ST). While the translated version (TT) which is known as *Kenang-kenangan Seorang Geisha* is written in Malay language. Although some of the translation versions prove to be very good, there are some examples that can be used as evidence of the problems faced by the translators. As mentioned by Newmark (1988), there will always be a translation problem unless there is cultural overlap between the source (SL) and the target language (TL). Besides the obstacle of transferring thoughts in the SL into the TL as exactly as possible, the problems were also caused by differences in values and thoughts, lack of information, inadequate translation, etc.

II. TRANSLATING CULTURAL WORDS

Literary translation is more than simply changing words

Manuscript received August 27, 2012; revised November 20, 2012.

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from one language to another; it involves the intricate task of translating cultural words. Newmark (1988:94) 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'. Meanwhile Shuttleworth & Cowie (1997:35) define cultural translation as 'a term used informally to refer to types of translation which function as a tool for cross-cultural research, or indeed to any translation which is sensitive to cultural as well as linguistic factors'. To be able to successfully translate a literary text, translators need to overcome the cultural words. Newmark explains that most cultural words are easy to identify, since they are associated with a particular language and cannot be translated literally. This is due to the fact that literal translation would distort the meaning, and translators need to respect all foreign countries and their cultures. Adapting Nida, Newmark (1988:95) divides cultural categories as follows:

- Ecology
- Material culture (artefacts) - food, clothes, places name and transportations
- Social culture - leisure and work
- Organisations, customs, ideas - political and social, religious, artistic
- Gestures and habits (often described in non-cultural language)

It would seem fairly evident that a creative literary translator must possess good cultural knowledge in order to ideally render the meaning into the TL. Once again, according Newmark (1988), translation procedures are available in translating literary text. Transference is a translation procedure that offers local colour and atmosphere towards the target reader, however transference does not communicate, and it emphasises the SL culture and excludes the message. For example, Japanese's cloth 'kimono' is translated as kimono in Malay language. Target reader, especially the Malay native speaker will find difficulties in understanding the shape, colour, size, etc. of a kimono. Nevertheless, usually the following are normally transferred in translation: geographical and topographical names; titles of untranslated literary works, plays, films; names of all living and dead people; names of periodicals and newspapers; names of private companies and institutions; street names, addresses, etc. (Newmark, 1988:82).

In addition, Nord (1997:1) also mentions about translating literary text from functionalist approach. The word 'functionalist' means focusing on the function or functions of texts and translations. Nord (1997) highlights seven features that act as agents of literary communication and the communicative situation in which literary text occurs. And the seven features are: (i) the sender/ author - usually the author is a person known as a writer of the literary text, (ii)

intention - all sorts of intentions that guide a literary production, (iii) receivers - literary texts are primarily addressed to receivers who have specific expectations conditioned by their literary experience, (iv) medium - literary texts are mostly transmitted in writing, (v) place, time and motive - convey the culture-specific features of the source and the target situations, (vi) the message - literary language assumed to have a particular connotative, expressive or aesthetic meaning, then the burden is on the translator to preserve the message, and (vii) effect or function - literary text has a specific value of its own, affecting between writer and reader.

As Toury (1995) in Munday (2001:112) points out, translations occupy a position in the social and literary systems of the target culture, hence determines the translation strategies that are employed. Incorporating a description of the product and role of sociocultural system, Toury (1995) proposes three-phase methodology as follows: (i) situate text within the target culture, according to its significance or acceptability, (ii) compare ST and TT for shifts, identify relationships between both segments, and generalize the underlying translation concept, and (iii) draw implications for decision-making in future translating. In brief, translation scholars have different approaches or strategies in translating cultural words, however only Newmark's approach and translation procedure will be used extensively in analysing the translation of cultural words in 'Memoirs of a Geisha' novel.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

All cultural word available and differences that occur between 'Memoirs of a Geisha' novel and the translated text are compiled. The data are analysed according to subtopics as follow:

A. Translation of Ecology

According Newmark (1988:96), ecology or geographical features can normally be distinguished from other cultural terms, because they are usually value-free, politically and commercially. In ST, Mount Fuji is well-known as one of the famous mountain in Japan. Such transparent equivalent poses no problems in understanding to the target reader. Therefore, translator renders 'Fuji' word into TT by using transference procedure. In addition, the 'mount' word has equivalence in Malay language and translated as gunung. Thus, the ST function is achieved when target readers receive the message about Japan ecology word, or Mount Fuji is a specific mountain that can only be found in Japan. Other than that, 'cherry tree' is a type of flora that is associated with Japan. Translator opts to use pohon sakura as the word equivalent in order to translate the cultural ecology word. This action is wiser than using literal translation, which is pokok ceri. Target readers or Malay native speaker might be misled because of the cultural barrier, and assume cherry as a type of fruit while sakura word is more acquainted with Japan world and carry the cultural connotation.

B. Translation of Material Culture

The translation of material culture, however, is more

challenging. Newmark (1988: 97) states that food is the most sensitive cultural word in material culture category. Almost all food in ST is synonym with Japanese's custom and represent an important expression of national culture. Except the word 'tea' that is well-known throughout the world, almost every food name in ST marks the Japanese culture, for example 'nukapan' is a Japanese word that refers to a dish made by frying rice bran in wheat flour. Translator borrows the 'nukapan' word into TT by using transference procedure in order to preserve the meaning. Target readers are informed about the particular dish from explanation in TT. The same approach is used when translator translates 'ponzu sauce' as sos ponzu, sake as sake, and miso soup as sup miso in Malay language. However, all the food that have equivalence in Malay language are translated as follows: grilled salted sea bass (ikan siakap masin salai), pickles (jeruk), rice ball sprinkled with sesame seeds (bebola nasi yang ditaburi bijan), rice cracker (keropok beras), and sweet-rice cake (lempeng pulut manis).

Second category in material culture is cloth. Usually all the national costumes that are distinctive do not need to be translated. For example, Japanese's clothes such as kimono, obi, koshimaki and tabi are borrowed into Malay language. In order to achieve a functional text and render the meaning, translator also translates the explanation or context of these words into TT. Places name is the third category in material culture. Basically, many language communities have a typical house that remains 'untranslated'. In the novel, 'okiya' is a place where geishas live, and translator simply borrows the Japanese cultural word into TT. By doing so, target readers are informed that geisha lives in a particular place that is known as okiya in Japan. The last category in material culture is transportation. Since Malaysia and Japan country share almost the same mode of transportation, the culture barrier is decreased. Thus, translator gives the word equivalent in Malay language without any footnote or explanation, for example: horse-drawn wagon (*kereta kuda*), cart (*pedati*), and rickshaw (*beca*).

C. Translation of Social Culture

The obvious cultural words that denote leisure activities in Japan are sports and games (Newmark, 1988). In this category, there is more than one translation approach. First, the translator opts to retain the 'sumo' word in ST into TT through transference procedure, because sumo is a famous sport and associated with Japan country. Even the target reader will get the idea of sumo's image and origin. The next example is 'game of go' which is a Japanese chess. Translator chooses to use two translation equivalent, that is permainan go and catur Jepun. Both translations preserve the meaning; however the latter manage to achieve the functional effect. Target readers, which are Malay native speakers, are easier to understand the word catur rather than permainan go. Even the 'go' word sounds foreign and can be mistaken as 'pergi' (literal translation from English word).

Second category of social culture is work; but this particular example is not a cultural word. Dresser is a universal work and does not associate with certain community. Researchers intend to use this example to demonstrate the application of naturalisation and descriptive

equivalence procedures:

ST: So I bathed and dressed, and walked over ... a dresser in the Pontocho district.

TT: Aku pun mandi dan bersiap-siap mengenakan pakaian lalu berjalan kaki menuju ... seorang dreser (pembantu perubatan) di daerah Pontocho.

In this example, translator translates the 'dresser' word into dreser in TL by using naturalisation procedure. This procedure adapts the SL word first to the normal pronunciation, then to the normal morphology of the TL. Plus, translator also uses descriptive equivalence procedure by inserting the explanation pembantu perubatan in bracket. Both procedures are used to deliver the message, thus rendering the meaning towards target reader.

D. Translation of Organisations, Customs, Ideas

As Newmark (1988) points out, political and social life of a country is reflected in its institutional terms. In this context, title of a head of state, such as Department Head (Ketua Jabatan), Vice President (Timbalan Presiden), Chairman (Tuan Pengerusi), and Emperor (Maharaja) are easily translated. Newmark adds when a public body has a transparent name, the translation depends on the setting or medium; in official documents, and in serious publication such as textbooks, the title is transferred. Where appropriate, it is literally translated. For example, 'Japan Coastal Seafood Company' is literally translated into Syarikat Makanan Laut Pesisir Jepun and translator modifies the word order according to Malay language grammar. The same rules apply when the translator translates 'Iwamura Electric Company' into Syarikat Elektrik Iwamura.

Next example is religious category. Newmark (1998) asserts that language of the other world religions tend to be transferred when it becomes of TL interest. For example, words such as Buddha, Amida, and sutra are transferred into Malay language. Buddha religion is common in Malaysia and some of the religious words have equivalence in Malay language, such as Buddhist altar (mazbah), and Buddha of the Western Paradise (Buddha Syurga Barat). Lastly is artistic category. Translation of artistic terms referring to movements, processes and organisations generally depends on the putative knowledge of the readership (Newmark, 1988:102). In addition, artistic terms tend to transference when they are regarded as cultural features and to naturalisation if their universality is accepted. For example, Japan's music instruments (shamisen, tsutsumi, okawa, taiko), and a form of singing (nagauta) are transferred. However, the name of dances that Geishas perform is literally translated to give the target reader information, for example 'The Morning Sun on the Waves' is translated as Mentari Pagi di Sudut Ombak and 'A Courtier Returns to His Wife' is translated as Pegawai Istana Pulang ke Pangkuan Isteri.

E. Translation of Gestures and Habits

For the last category, Newmark (1988) explains that there is a distinction between description and function of gestures and habits in some cultures. For example, in this particular novel, geisha always bow when they greet people, to express sorry, to show respect, etc. In addition, even the levels of bowing, such as slightly bow or bow lower indicate certain

connotation in Japan culture. But the gesture is not common in target reader's culture. People in Malaysia do not bow as much as Japanese people. Therefore, translator gives the translation equivalent as tunduk and preserves the message by translating every context, so that target reader will understand the Japanese' gestures and habits.

F. Translation of Language Use and Usage

Newmark's (1988:94) definition of culture mentions about 'a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression', and this definition suggests that culture can be identified from language use and usage. Therefore, next subtopics discuss the cultural elements in terms of translating taboo words and metaphor.

G. Translation of Taboo Word

Taboo words usually refer to word that is socially unacceptable, and usually used to show disgust, anger, or words that have sexual connotation. In Malay world, Abdullah & Ainon (2001:146-148) classify taboo words into four categories, which are sex (seks), shit (najis), death (kematian), and disaster (malapetaka). Nevertheless, different cultures have different perspectives on words that can be considered as taboo words or accepted as a neutral word. Some of taboo words in the novel are as follows:

ST: It wasn't a very good bathing dress, because it sagged at her chest whenever she bent over, and one of the boys would scream, "Look! You can see Mount Fuji!"

TT: Baju tersebut tidak begitu cocok sebagai baju mandi. Setiap kali dia tunduk, akan ternampaklah dadanya, dan salah seorang kanak-kanak lelaki akan menjerit, "Tengok! Boleh nampak Gunung Fuji!"

This example of taboo word can be categorized in the sex category. In ST, 'Mount Fuji' word does not literally refer to one of the famous mountain in Japan. From the context, which is 'because it sagged at her chest whenever she bent over' clause, ST readers are notified that Mount Fuji refers to woman's bosom. In order to render the meaning, translator chooses to retain the ecology cultural word (Mount Fuji) into TT. The message and function is achievable since target reader can refer the meaning from context. Plus, Gunung Fuji word is neutral and less sexual connotation than 'bosom'. This word is normalized in the translation so as not to violate the norms of the target language. In this case, a cultural translator must have a widespread knowledge in ST and TT.

ST: Do you understand? We call this 'mizuage.'

TT: Faham? Kita panggil ini 'mizuage'. (mahkota perawanan - penterjemah)

Firstly, this example also shows application of taboo word in sex category. The second matter to discuss is the translation of 'Mizuage' word. Mizuage is a Japanese word and there are a lot of confusions on the actual meaning of this particular word. In this context, it refers to virginity, and translator tends to borrow the word into TT in order to maintain the ambiguity. The overall effect is that, the cultural word is ambiguous to target reader due to the cultural barrier between Malaysia and Japan country. Therefore, translator explains the word meaning by adding words mahkota perawanan and penterjemah in bracket, for the sake of clarity. A bracket is used because explanatory notes or footnotes can

be rather intrusive, and therefore, their uses are minimized as much as possible or integrated into the body of the text.

ST: He's irritating, and he acts like a pig.

TT: Dia menjengkelkan. Dia berkelakuan seperti binatang.

In this context, speaker expresses his annoyance by referring to someone as a 'pig'. In ST, author tends to use animal as a source of comparison in figurative language. By looking at the textual environment of this word, however, we find that the author skillfully conveys a negative attitude by infusing it with unpleasant connotation. Moreover, in TT's culture it is also impolite to refer someone as a pig. In target culture, word 'pig' or babi is synonym with something dirty or untidy behaviour, thus an untidy person always compared with a pig (Abdullah & Ainon, 2001). In TT, translator replaces the taboo word with binatang word which is more neutral in meaning. The ST function is achievable since in Malaysian context, word binatang may refer to ill-behaved person and have negative connotation.

H. Translation of Metaphor

It is not an easy task to transplant a text in one culture into another. Particularly demanding from the translator's point of view is the use of culturally specific metaphors. According Newmark (1988:104), metaphor can be single (one word) or extended (a collocation, an idiom, a sentence, a proverb, etc.) Analyses indicate that both ST and TT contain ample usage of metaphor, and the following examples illustrate this point:

ST: Compared to Mitsubishi, we were like a sparrow watching a lion.

TT: Kami sama seperti menangkuk di air yang keruh jika dibandingkan dengan Mitsubishi.

A profound knowledge is necessary for the translation of metaphor, which is a product of the specific traditions and mentality in one's country. In this example, translator opts to use cultural equivalent for the translation of metaphor. In other words, translator conveys the meaning of extended words (like a sparrow watching a lion) and gives the closest cultural equivalent in TT. To give the closest approximation of metaphor in the SL, therefore, it is necessary to use bahasa kiasan, which is the closest equivalence in Malay cultural knowledge. Translator translates the metaphor as seperti menangkuk di air yang keruh in Malay language, thus preserving the usage of metaphor in ST.

ST: "You, growing up in a dump like Yoroido. That's like making a tea in a bucket!"

TT: "Awak, membesar di tempat yang membosankan seperti Yoroido? Itu sama seperti membancuh teh di dalam baldi atau memuatkan intan di dalam perahu papan!"

This example demonstrates that translator opts to use cultural equivalence for the translation of metaphor. Metaphor 'like making a tea in a bucket' is not common among target reader; therefore translator retains the original metaphor, in order to inform the reader about metaphor in ST. These Japanese metaphors give a certain density to the language and need to be explicated in the translation to bring forth the richness of the ST. Translator also uses addition procedure by adding clause atau memuatkan intan di dalam perahu papan to give additional information towards target reader. Addition procedure is used to inform Malay native

speaker about the original meaning of these metaphor.

ST: Her reputation is certainly at stake...

TT: Reputasi dirinya ibarat telur di hujung tanduk...

On the other hand, this example demonstrates that there is more than one option in translating literary text. In ST, author did not use any metaphor in the sentence; however, translator uses metaphor in TT as equivalence towards the ST. It can be concluded that translator may choose to use metaphor as a translation equivalent in order to convey the meaning and add literary style in TT. And here the choice of the translator is commendable.

Another point is that analyses also indicate that author always uses comparison as a type of figurative language throughout the text. Comparison is made within a few categories, in order to add style and aesthetic for the literary text. Moreover, translator also uses the same approach by retaining the usage of figurative language in TT. Some of the examples are categorises as follows:

- Comparing human with animal: He was red and shiny like a snapper, though the day hadn't grown hot yet. (Walaupun hari masih belum panas lagi, mukanya merah dan berkilat seperti ikan jenahak.), He had soft black hair, like a cat's (Rambutnya yang hitam lembut seperti bulu kucing), his cheekbones were shiny hillocks, like the crisp skin of a grilled fish. (tulang pipinya tinggi dan bercahaya; seperti kulit garing ikan panggang.), I almost felt sick the first time she unfastened her robe and pulled it down from her shoulders, because the skin there and on her neck was bumpy and yellow like an uncooked chicken's. (Aku berasa mual kerana bahu dan lehernya berbonggol-bonggol dan berwarna kuning seperti kulit ayam yang tidak dimasak.), you and that fat cow (kau dan si lembu gemuk itu), "Adopting Hatsumomo," I said, "would be like releasing the tiger from its cage." ("Mengambil Hatsumomo sebagai anak angkat." Kataku, "ibarat melepaskan seekor harimau dari kurungannya."), her eyes were as oily as a piece of old, smelly fish (matanya berminyak seperti seekor ikan lama, yang busuk), and He grunted like a pig (Dia mendengus seperti babi)
- Comparing human with vegetable/ plant: when the steam had risen from our pale skin as if we were two pieces of boiled radish (Pabila wap air naik dari permukaan kulit kami yang pucat seolah-olah kami ini dua keping lobak rebus.), She packed the tobacco with her little finger, stained the burnt orange color of a roasted yam (jari kecilnya yang kotor berwarna jingga terbakar seperti keladi panggang), "I think it must be a weed. Look how tall it is!" ("Aku rasa ini tentu sebatang rumpai. Tengoklah betapa tingginya dia!"), "Every time I look at his face, I think of a sweet potato that has blistered in the fire." ("Setiap kali aku memandangi wajahnya, aku terbayangkan keledak yang melepuh dalam api."), and just as seaweed is naturally soggy, you see, but turns brittle as it dries, my mother was giving up more and more of her essence. (Seperti rumpai laut yang semula jadinya lembap, namun menjadi rapuh apabila kering, ibuku sedang kehilangan semakin banyak intipati dirinya.)

- Comparing human with object: Mr. Bekku led us by our elbows again, as if we were a couple of buckets he was bringing back from the well. (En. Bekku memegang siku kami seperti tadi dan membimbing kami seolah-olah kami ini dua buah baldi yang dibawanyapulang dari perigi.) and “You... Her eyes ...they’re the color of a mirror!” (“Kamu... Matanya...matanya berwarna seperti cermin!”).
- Comparing object with object: And the contrast with her friend Korin was like comparing a rock along the roadside with a jewel. (Perbandingan dengan kawannya Korin adalah seperti membandingkan seketul batu di tepi jalan dengan sebiji permata.)

IV. CONCLUSION

Analyses justify that cultural words can be categorises into Newmark’s (1988) five cultural categories that is ecology, material culture, social culture, organisations, customs, ideas, and gestures and habits. Cultural elements can also be identified by analyzing the language usage. In addition, translator utilized several translation procedures in order to render the ST cultural meaning into TT. These translation procedures can be divided into three categories; (i) borrowing (transference), (ii) adaptation between two cultural word (naturalization and modification), and (iii) description of the cultural word (addition and descriptive equivalence). However, researchers do not assert that one procedure is superior to the others. It depends on the situation.

In addition, certain limit applies in translating the cultural words. This is due to the fact that translator needs to deliver the effect and message, and at the same time preserve the stylistic feature of ST. The best choice for the translator is the version that minimises the differences, and choose the one that would convey the message closest to the SL. Thus certain cultural words are borrowed into TT in order to maintain the stylistic of ST. Translator also applies addition procedure in certain cultural words so the TT manage to

achieve the functional purpose, which is target readers able to learn Japanese’s word and culture in their native language. Hopefully this analysis of translation approach and procedure shed some light on some of the translation and cultural issues that might be encountered in literary translation in general, and from English into Malay language in particular.

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