

# Translation of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's "Inem": Enhancement of Local-Global Communication

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## Abstract

*Translation of a literary work requires the balance between staying faithful to the essence of the original work while creating an artistic, unique, and distinctive piece of work in the translated language so as to evoke the same feelings and responses as the source language. Examining a number of translation strategy used in the translation of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's short story "Inem" into English, this study shows that the translation product is to be applauded for two reasons. First, transnational translation of Pram's work, that is rich in local culture, can connect and define both Indonesian and English cultures better in order to enhance global-local connectedness. Secondly, thanks to the translator, the (recreated) work becomes accessible to readers interested in learning each other's language and culture.*

**Keywords:** *literary translation, local cultures, global-local connectedness*

## Introduction

The essence of translation is the equivalent representation of the source language to the target language, in terms of stylistics, references, and linguistic features. Literary translation however involves more complex and harder tasks than other translation categories. A literary translator must render the novelist's thoughts, styles, expressions, and tones without adding, replacing or taking anything away from the source language to the target language. Translation, says Adewuni, should be seen as an attempt to guess the mind of an author correctly (2006). Literary translation thus requires some certain meta-skill to firstly feel for and understand the novelist's innate thoughts. Care must be taken to translate any emotion or impression of the author as to yield the same effects when expressed in words of some other languages. In the words of Charles Batteux (1713-1780) in his main work published in 1777, *Principles of*

*Literature*, "the translator is master of nothing, he must bend with the infinite suppleness to all the variations he finds in his author" (cited in Lefevere, 1992: 117). Batteux's conviction is that taste is as important as genius of the two languages. For this French theoretician of literature and the arts, it is the preservation of the original text's stylistic features that should be pursued first. Copying a beautiful painting in his opinion need more time, effort and diligence than creating one.

Bearing in mind that translated literature is often diffused and distorted; Lefevere later (2012) opines that World Literature is a refraction rather than reflection of the original work, hence gaining recognition mainly through misunderstandings and misconceptions. Following Lefevere's remark, it is important that literary translation function both communicatively and stylishly. As said elsewhere, there is asymmetry of East-West power-relations and the hegemony of

English as global language that makes translation of literary works never simple but often laden with differing ideologies (Dewi, 2017). Literary translation into English every so often ignores minor languages including Indonesian. Not surprisingly, the translations of literature from minor language to another minor language are mostly from English.

The wealth of research on literary translation from Indonesian into English has shown that numerous translation strategies need to be employed to achieve satisfactory results (e.g. Putranti, 2015; Kaparang & Putranti, 2017; Tirtayasa & Setiajid, 2018; Darta, 2018), thanks to such magnum opus of translation theory from Eugene Nida, Peter Newmark, John Catford and Mildred Larson, to the more recent theorists like Mona Baker and André Lefevere. Putranti (2015) claims that the use of synonymy is needed to compensate for the absence of literal translation, given the different idiomatic expressions in English and Indonesia. Kaparang & Putranti (2017) further maintain that Newmarkian strategy of communicative translation is important in translating one Indonesian novel with a lot of metaphors into English. Departing from Catfordian linguistic theory of shift at the micro-level, Tirtayasa & Setiajid (2018) have also proven that pragmatic and stylistic consideration is useful in translating one Indonesian poem which is contextually rich and layered in meaning. Darta (2018), likewise, examines the politeness strategy used in the translation of one Indonesian novel to unravel the power-relation therein.

While the aforementioned studies remain useful references, this present study pays attention more to the cultural implications of transnational translation of literature. It is a preliminary analysis on a number of passages taken from one selected Indonesian short story by Pramoedya Ananta Toer entitled "Inem". Pram's works are rich with local cultures. Sunarto and others (2017) argue that it is important to introduce local languages and cultures along with their wisdom widely not only at the national but also international level to enhance national and global mobility. Therefore, the data source is Pram's short story "Inem" which is

one of Pram's early works along with 10 other short stories compiled in his *Cerita dari Blora*, firstly published in 1950 by. "Inem" is translated into English by Willem Samuels a.k.a. John McGlynn and published by Hyperion in 2004. "Inem" is a story about early marriage set in a poor area inhabited by people with different social levels that becomes the setting of the story.

## Theoretical Concepts

Literary translation should reflect the depth and meaning of one literary work in one language while preserving its style, pace, and rhythms in the target language. Scrutiny of the links between the thought of the novelist and that of the translator is important since literary translation cannot be of literal translation, but interpretative one. It is always easy for literature readers to understand such cultural aspects as customs, practices, and traditions represented in literature written in their own language. A translator therefore has to deliver the knowledge to a reader outside the country who perhaps not familiar with the source language, to say nothing of the cultural peculiarities of it.

Postcolonial translation seems to be fitting for such purpose. To mention but two, Lefevere (1992) and Tymoczko (1999) offer translation theory in postcolonial context. They argue that translation is often framed, Eurocentric and ideologically manipulated. The translation of non-Western texts into English for global audience is loaded with Orientalist thinking. They suggest that not only should translation articulate the voice and stance of the translator, it should also make room for its relevance to the target audience. Next, it was Edwin Gentzler (2008: 5) who emphasizes that translation is not a secondary process of transporting ideas across borders, but instead "primary, primordial and proactive process that continually introduces new ideas, forms or expressions, and pathways for change into cultures". Thus, translation has to comply with (1) recognition of the global context; (2) values and perspectives exchanges and (3) cross-border and cultural understanding articulation. Dewi has claimed that translation

involves interdisciplinary, interlingual, and intercultural activity (2016: 69). Translation should function as a negotiation channel to maintain distinct national identities in global cultural context. The essence of postcolonial translation lies on this inevitable global-local cultural border-crossing (Dewi 2018).

To become a literary translator therefore requires an acquired taste, fortitude, and aptitude. It is not an exaggeration to say that literary translators are but unsung heroes for their names sometimes gain little recognition. The translators remain anonymous, while the author whose work(s) they translated becomes famous. Excepting for Gregory Rabassa the American literary translator from Spanish and Portuguese to English known for translating Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and his other works, for instance, very few translators make name for themselves. Nobody cares for the translator of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (Samuelsson-Brown 2010: 5). If it was not for the works of the late Listiana Srisanti, the first few series of Harry Potter would not be available in Indonesian version for thousands of fans of J. K. Rowling's books in the country. Other examples abound, but it is sufficient for now to say that literary translation has its own theory-practice link in reading, interpreting, and composing a new creation – all have been the tasks handled very well by notable literary translators.

To translate literary text, the first of the three translation categories (interpreting, scientific/ technical, commercial/business translation) by Samuelsson-Brown (2010) is useful. Some of the criteria in interpretive translation to meet include: a sense of language, cultural knowledge about the subject of translation, an understanding of a similar work and creative writing skills. The translation of literary works puts more importance on the meaning. Therefore, the translator must be adept when moving from one creative style to another. Samuelsson-Brown then asserts that qualities matter more than qualifications, while listing a number of requirements for a literary translator based on the Translators Associations of the Society of Authors (2010: 5-6). The *first* requirement is the translator's passion. Not only should a

translator have a feeling for the language, s/he should be fascinated with it. The translator should therefore has an intimate knowledge of the source language (SL) and of the regional culture and literature, to say nothing of some reasonable knowledge of subjects dealt with in the work. *Secondly*, the translator should be familiar with other works by the author being translated. The *third* qualification is the hardest, i.e. "the translator must be a skilled and creative writer in the target language and nearly always will be a native speaker of it." (Samuelsson-Brown 2010: 5). As it is, the translator should be able to move from style to style when translating different works. *Fourthly*, the original work's meaning is still the goal to achieve by the translator instead of the accurate rendering of words for words. *Finally*, in order to produce a translated piece that reads well, the translator should be capable of echoing the tone and style of the original work.

### Absence of Address Terms

The English version of the story, using the same title "Inem", appears in *All That is Gone* that comprises of 7 other early short stories by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. The translator needs no introduction because he is a John H. McGlynn, an American editor and translator whose Indonesian language is of near-native category with supreme interests in Indonesian literature. This graduate of Indonesian Literature Department at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor is one of the architects of the Lontar Foundation that promotes Indonesian literature and culture internationally by translating major works in Indonesian literature. Having lived in Jakarta since early 1980s, McGlynn is hailed as "the Indonesian country editor" for *Manoa*, a literary journal published by the University of Hawaii while serving as editor to other prominent literary journals pertaining to Indonesian literature. Under the name Willem Samuels, McGlynn also translated Pram's *The Fugitive*, *The Mute Soliloquy*, *The Girl from the Coast* and many more.

Despite his flawless translation of "Inem", the translator's technique of omission and/or addition of honorifics and interjection is

worth discussing. To begin with how the characters address each other in both versions, several address terms used in the original work either disappear or domesticate in the translated version. Honorific is defined by Nordquist as “a conventional word, title, or grammatical form that signals respect, politeness, or social deference” (<https://www.thoughtco.com/honorific-definition-and-examples-1690936>). The courtesy title for the child narrator in “Inem” is non-existent, thus:

*ST: “Gus Muk, aku akan dikawinkan!”*  
(Toer, 1994: 39)  
*TT: “I’m going to be married!”*  
(Toer, 2004: 31)

Here the term “Gus” before the proper name “Muk”, that is also Pramoedya’s own childhood nickname, shows that Inem locates herself in a lower position than her young master with whose family she lives. Culturally speaking, “Gus”, a short for “Raden Bagus” is commonly used to call someone’s son. In general Islamic boarding schools in Java, the name is given to the son of a school chaplain of the Islamic boarding school or “kiyai” (See, e.g. Zakiyah, 2018). Despite the fact that the term “kiyai” itself in the history of Javanese culture has many meanings, i.e. all Islamic scholars or religious teachers at Islamic boarding schools, the son of a respected teacher, as in the case of Pram’s father, is bestowed with “Gus” out of respect. It is worth noting that the terms “kiyai” and “Gus” had long been a tradition before Nahdlatul Ulama was established in 1928 – the most famous one being K. H. Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur (Mahfud, 2010).

The English version of “Inem” never really mentions the name of the narrator. Conversely, readers of the Indonesian text need not to wonder what the name of the child story-teller is, as it is mentioned again thus:

*ST: “Tujuh belas? Bapak si Mamuk baru kawin dengan aku waktu dia berumur tigapuluh tahun.”* (Toer, 1994: 43)  
*TT: “Seventeen! My husband was thirty when he married me.”* (Toer, 2004: 36)

Social class difference is therefore not seen in the English translation of “Inem”, whereas the original short story clearly displays the disparity of thoughts between the narrator’s mother and Inem’s mother. Inem was presumably a real figure who lived in the house of Pram’s family (Hatley, 1980), and Muk’s mother in the short story was inspired by Pram’s own mother.

As mentioned elsewhere, Pram’s works reflect anti-feudalistic attitudes (Dewi, 2018a). The conversation between the two women of different social strata is naturally left in the translation as if they were equals, as shown by the following passage quoted at length.

The day that Inem’s mother came to call, Inem was in the kitchen, heating water. When mother went to greet her visitor, I tagged along as they convened to the sitting room, where they arranged themselves on a low wooden daybed.

*It was Inem’s mother who opened the conversation: “Ma’am, I’ve come to ask to take Inem home.”*  
*“But why? Isn’t it better for her here?” my mother inquired. “You don’t have to pay anything for her to stay here, and she’s learning how to cook.”*  
*“I know that, ma’am, but I plan for her to get married after the harvest is in.”*  
*“Married?!” My mother was shocked.*  
*“Yes, ma’am. She’s old enough – all of eight now,” Inem’s mother said in affirmation.*  
*[...]*  
*“We’re not rich people, ma’am, and the way I see it, she’s already too old. Asih, as you know, she had her daughter married off when she was two years younger.”*  
(Toer, 2004: 34)

To compare with the original,

*Waktu emak si Inem menemui ibu, Inem sedang memasak di dapur. Aku turut menemui emaknya. Dan tamu itu, ibu dan aku duduk di bale berwarna merah.*  
*“Ndoro”, kata emak si Inem, “aku datang untuk meminta si Inem”*  
*“Mengapa si Inem diminta? Bukankah lebih baik kalau dia ada di sini? Engkau*

*tak perlu mengongkosi dan dia bisa belajar masak.*

*"Tapi, ndoro, habis panen ini aku bermaksud menikahkan dia."*

*"Ha?" seru ibu kaget. "Dinikahkan?"*

*"Ya, ndoro. Dia sudah perawan sekarang – sudah berumur delapan tahun," kata emak si Inem.*

*[...]*

*"Kami bukan dari golongan priyayi, ndoro. Aku pikir dia sudah ketuaan setahun", kata mbok Inem, "Si Asih itu mengawinkan anaknya dua tahun lebih muda dari anakku." (Toer, 1994: 41)*

translation of the above passage is clearly another creation. Inem's mother in the English version comes across as confidence and affirmed. The kampong woman shows no hesitation to talk to a person of higher status. The use of "ma'am" to address the narrator's mother is equal to the word "bu" or "ibu", hence does not convey subordinate tone as in the term "ndoro".

The translator is also consistent in recounting in English the persona of ibu Muk he recreates. The narrator's mother appears to give up on mbok Inem's adamant intention to marry off her daughter. It is worthy of note that Muk's mother switched the use of "engkau" into "mbok Inem" near the end of their conversation. In Indonesian culture, addressing people by name is more polite than calling someone "kamu", "engkau" or even "anda" and "saudara". Since such sensitivity is uncommon in English, the translator recreates the statement. To express a feeling such as doubt, surprise, or anger in English, interjection "well" is useful. The translation of the following statement by Muk's mother is nicely put as follows.

*TT: "Well, if you've made up your mind to marry Inem off, I can only hope that she'll get a husband who takes good care of her. [...]" (Toer, 2004: 36)*

*ST: "Kalau sudah jadi kehendak mbok Inem untuk mengawinkannya, ya, moga-moga Inem mendapat laki yang baik yang dapat mengurusnya. [...]" (Toer, 1994: 43)*

Here, the replacement of the word "mbok Inem" to "you" is in accordance to the English

idiomatic expression. At the same time, the translator maintains the democratic tone of the conversation.

### Reconstruction as Translation

A discussion on strategy must focus on the translator's attempt to restructure the sentences in ST that may be not idiomatic when translated word-for-word in TT. It would seem that McGlynn, being an avid reader of Indonesian Literature including Pram's works, takes the voice and stance of the author as postulated by Lefevere and Tymoczko above. It is the translator's comprehensive knowledge and understanding of Indonesian culture that has given him confidence in reconstructing Pram's work to suit English ears as in, for example, *Cerita Calon Arang* into *The King, the Priest and the Witch* (Darta, 2018). What follows is the ways in which McGlynn used restructuring as a handy strategy in the English version of "Inem".

First, the use of active sentences in English for the Indonesian sentences works very well throughout the translation product. The example is as follows.

*TT: "It sure will," she agreed. "They'll buy me all these beautiful new clothes. And I'll get to wear a bride's dress and have flowers in my hair and powder, mascara, and eye shadow. I'm going to like that!" (Toer, 2004: 32)*

*ST: "Alangkah senang. Tentu saja! Nanti aku dibelikan pakaian bagus-bagus. Nanti aku didandani pakaian pengantin, dibungai, dibedaki, disipati dan dicelaki. Alangkah senang!" (Toer, 1994: 39)*

Here, the translator employs Catfordian level shift; and it results in the changing of the tone. Two declarative sentences ["Alangkah senang. Tentu saja!"] are rebuilt into becoming one single direct speech ["It sure will", she agreed] to emphasize the speaker's eagerness. Tone change is important to create a particular impact in TT the way it is similarly sensed in ST (Tirtayasa & Setiajidi, 2018: 205).

The second type of reconstruction includes structure shift, i.e. a change in grammatical structure between passive voice in ST and active voice in TT (in Munday, 2013). The use of prefix “di” in ST for all passive verbs is reconstructed in active verbs in TT to some degree of success. In Indonesian, “disipati” means to apply an eye lid, characteristic of Javanese bridal make-up. The use of an eye lid is aimed at accentuating the eye, correcting the shape of the eye, and giving the impression of eyelash thickness. What appears in TT, i.e. “mascara, and eye shadow” is a free translation to carry the same meaning. Next, the word “dicelaki” meaning blackening of the eyebrows and part of the pattern-drawn forehead is however omitted in TT. Reconstruction is a useful learning of each other’s language for a non-native speaker of English and of Indonesian alike.

Thirdly, the translator is aware of the need to reconstruct the original text to fulfill the communicative function in translation. Here, as often the case in translating other Indonesian literary works, sense is indeed thing of significance in order to maintain both literariness (Tirtayasa & Setiajid, 2018) and naturalness (Putranti, 2015; Kaparang & Putranti, 2018). Cultural words in “Inem” are left not translated, hence another evident of recreation as a strategy in translation. They are *kebaya* the hip-length buttoned blouse (Toer, 2004: 39); *kain* expensive length of batik from Solo (Toer, 2004: 39); *wayang kulit* performance (Toer, 2004: 40); *gamelan* orchestra, female *tayuban* dancers (Toer, 2004: 40). It appears that the explanation that follows each word is sufficient to carry the message to the readers who are not familiar with Indonesian and its local culture. In so doing, the translator has accomplished his noble undertaking to build global-local connectivity through transnational translation earlier said by Gentzler (2008) and Dewi (2018).

## Conclusion

Translation of a literary work requires the balance between staying faithful to the original work and creating an artistic, unique, and distinctive piece of work so as to evoke

the same feelings and responses as the original. Literary translation is a precise, careful, and thoughtful reading followed subsequently by an equally precise, careful, and thoughtful (re)writing of the literary work. Unlike other technical writing, literary translation carries the weight of communicative and aesthetic purposes.

This study has shown that the translation of Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s “Inem” is an attempt to create another text to carry the egalitarian stance of the author. To achieve this end, the translator reconstructs some parts of the source text to fit in with understanding of the target text reader. The omission of honorifics is a noticeable skill used by the notable translator.

By way of reflection, if it is true that reading literature is reading (other) people and reading ourselves, literary translation product examined in this study truly brings the Indonesian readers to appreciate more about local culture now shared globally via translation. It is translation that allows such pride of local and national language, literature, and culture to travel worldwide, thanks to the translators –John McGlynn being one of them– who are frequently left invisible. When Charles Batteux quoted in the beginning of this article talks about the “master of nothing” of a translator, he talks instead about the translator’s possession of everything: arts, genius and diplomacy.

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