

Cultural Equivalence and Humor: Analyzing the Translation Procedures in the Indonesian Version of *Matilda*

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ABSTRACT

This research analyses the translation procedures of humor in Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda* from English to Indonesian, focusing on how these procedures maintain or alter the humorous effect for child readers. Utilizing Peter Newmark's translation theory, particularly his concepts of translation methods and various translation procedures, the study employs a qualitative descriptive-comparative approach. The primary data source comprises the English original and the Indonesian translated version of *Matilda*. Findings indicate that the translator predominantly uses Literal Translation for universally visual and hyperbolic humor, while relying heavily on Adaptation, Cultural Equivalent, Compensation, and Expansion for wordplay, cultural references, or ambiguous humor. The analysis reveals a dynamic balance between communicative and semantic methods, generally succeeding in preserving Dahl's unique, often dark, humor for Indonesian child readers. Despite some instances of reduction, the core comedic effect is largely retained, highlighting the crucial role of adaptive procedures in ensuring cross-cultural humor transfer in children's literature.

Keywords: children's literature, equivalent, humor, translation procedures

INTRODUCTION

This chapter establishes the foundational framework of the research by outlining the context and motivations behind the study. It begins with a comprehensive background on the significance of translating children's literature and the inherent complexities of rendering humor across linguistic boundaries. Furthermore, this section defines the research questions, identifies the specific objectives, and clarifies the scope of the analysis. By delineating these elements, the introduction provides a clear trajectory for investigating the translation procedures employed in Roald Dahl's *Matilda* and their impact on the target audience.

Background of the Study

The translation of children's literature plays a pivotal role in shaping global perspectives and fostering literacy development among the younger generation. Through translated works, children are exposed not only to new narratives but also to diverse cultures, values, and worldviews from across the globe. This phenomenon, often described as a "cultural bridge," enables young readers to develop empathy and an appreciation for differences, thereby enriching their imagination beyond geographical and linguistic boundaries (Oittinen, 2000, p. 12). Beyond mere entertainment, translated children's literature serves as an essential educational tool, allowing children to engage with universal narratives while simultaneously understanding cultural specificities, which fosters cross-cultural competence from an early age (Lathey, 2015, p. 38).

However, the process of translating children's literature is far from a simple task; it presents a unique and complex set of challenges. Unlike adult literature, children's books cater to a specific and sensitive audience with distinct levels of comprehension, attention spans, and cognitive development. Translators must be adept at adjusting language and style to ensure the work remains engaging, accessible, and age-appropriate for the target readers, without compromising the story's essence or its original moral message

(Nord, 2018, p. 74). One of the most formidable challenges lies in translating humor, wordplay, and cultural references that are deeply embedded in the original language and context (Newmark, 1988, p. 106). Frequently, what is humorous or relevant in one culture may be incomprehensible or even offensive in another. Consequently, translators are required to be creative and adaptive, identifying equivalents that are not only linguistically accurate but also culturally and humorously effective for child readers in the target language (Baker, 2018, p. 231).

Given these complexities, research into how translators navigate such challenges has become highly relevant. Particularly in the context of Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda*, renowned for its inventive language and signature humor, an analysis of translation procedures is crucial. The core of this research lies in examining how Dahl's unique humor and nuances are "reanimated" in the Indonesian translation for young readers.

Research Questions

This study focuses on one of Roald Dahl's most iconic literary works. The novel *Matilda* was selected as the primary corpus due to its linguistic richness and unique humor, which are hallmarks of Dahl's writing style. To gain a profound understanding of how these elements are rendered into Indonesian and their subsequent impact on children's reading experiences, this research formulates two primary questions:

1. Which of Peter Newmark's translation procedures are dominantly employed in adapting Roald Dahl's humor in the novel *Matilda* from English into Indonesian?
2. How does the application of these procedures either maintain or alter the intended humorous effect for child readers?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents the theoretical and conceptual foundations that underpin this research. It begins with an exposition of the fundamental concepts of translation, followed by an in-depth exploration of Peter Newmark's translation theories and procedures, which serve as the primary analytical framework.

Basic Concepts of Translation

Translation, at its core, is the process of transferring a message from one language, referred to as the source language (SL) or source text (ST), into another language, known as the target language (TL) or target text (TT). This process transcends mere word-for-word replacement; it necessitates a profound understanding of the meaning, nuances, and cultural context of the ST to accurately and relevantly reproduce them within the TT (Newmark, 1988, p. 5). Consequently, a translator acts not only as a linguistic bridge but also as a cultural mediator, ensuring that the original message is effectively received and understood by an audience from a different linguistic background.

In practice, the relationship between the source and target texts constitutes the heart of translation analysis. The source text (ST) is the original material to be translated, carrying its own linguistic features, style, and cultural context. Conversely, the target text (TT) is the final product of the translation process, which has been adjusted to conform to the grammatical rules, lexical patterns, and cultural norms of the receiving language (Baker, 2018, p. 8). A systematic comparison between the ST and the TT allows researchers to identify the strategies, procedures, and choices made by the translator, thereby evaluating the effectiveness of the message transfer from one linguistic and cultural system to another.

In the realm of translation, the concept of equivalence plays a central role as a benchmark for successful message transfer. Simply put, equivalence refers to the parity or equality of meaning and effect between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) (Baker, 2018, p. 5). This implies that the translator's primary objective is to produce a TT that is as equivalent as possible to the ST in terms of information,

function, and aesthetics. The importance of equivalence lies in its ability to ensure that the original message is not distorted or lost during the translation process, allowing TT readers to gain an understanding and experience similar to those of ST readers.

Furthermore, equivalence is not a monolithic concept; it is multidimensional and can be viewed from various perspectives. Peter Newmark (1988, p. 47) distinguishes between semantic translation, which is more oriented toward loyalty to the lexical and grammatical meanings of the ST, and communicative translation, which focuses on producing an equivalent effect on the TT reader. In the context of translating humor in children's literature, for instance, achieving communicative equivalence often becomes the priority. A translator may need to adapt or even replace certain humorous elements to ensure they remain funny and relevant to a child audience in the target culture, even if this entails deviating from literal fidelity to the ST. Therefore, a precise understanding and application of the concept of equivalence are crucial for translators to produce works that are accurate, relevant, and effective.

Peter Newmark's Translation Theory

Peter Newmark (1988, p. 5) is one of the preeminent translation theorists whose concepts provide a vital framework for textual analysis. The core of his theoretical contribution lies in the dichotomy between communicative and semantic translation methods. Communicative translation is reader-oriented; it aims to produce an effect on the target reader as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original, often prioritizing fluency and cultural relevance over literal fidelity (Newmark, 1988, p. 47). In contrast, semantic translation is author-oriented, emphasizing loyalty to the original meaning and style of the source text, even if the result appears less natural to the target audience (Newmark, 1988, p. 46). In the context of translating humor in children's literature, the dilemma between these two methods is highly pertinent; translators must frequently choose between preserving the authenticity of the humor (semantic) or ensuring that the comedic element is easily understood by children (communicative).

To achieve these translation objectives, Newmark outlines various specific translation procedures applied at the micro-level (words and phrases). These procedures serve as the primary analytical tools in this research, particularly those relevant to the transfer of humor. These procedures include: Adaptation: The replacement of a source-culture element with a target-culture equivalent. Cultural Equivalent, replacing a cultural word in the ST with a target-culture word that occupies a similar space (Newmark, 1988, p. 82). Functional Equivalent, deculturizing a cultural word by using a culturally neutral term (p. 83). Modulation, a variation through a change of viewpoint or perspective. Compensation, offsetting a loss of meaning or effect in one part of the text by adding it in another part. Shift or Transposition, a change in the grammar from SL to TL (e.g., singular to plural or change in word class). Synonymy, using a TL near-equivalent when a precise one does not exist. Expansion, adding information to clarify meaning. Reduction, omitting redundant information. Paraphrase, an amplification or explanation of the meaning of a segment of the text (p. 90). Transference and Naturalization, the process of transferring an SL word to a TL text, or adapting it to the normal morphology of the TL. Couplets, the combination of two or more of the aforementioned procedures to handle a single translation problem. A profound understanding of these procedures is essential to deconstruct the translator's choices in the novel *Matilda* and their subsequent impact on the transfer of Dahl's unique humor.

Humor in Children's Literature

Humor targeting a young audience possesses distinct characteristics that differentiate it from adult humor, which directly influences the translation process. Generally, children's humor tends to be more direct, visual, and concrete, frequently involving slapstick, character folly, or physically absurd situations. Wordplay (puns), rhymes, and onomatopoeia are also highly popular among children due to their phonetically amusing and interactive nature. However, these linguistic elements, particularly puns, present significant challenges for translators because their meaning is deeply tied to the structure and sound of the

source language. This often makes finding an equivalent in the target language difficult, if not impossible, without sacrificing the original comedic effect (Delabatista, 1996, p. 127).

In children's literature, humor functions not merely as an entertaining element but also serves significant educational and therapeutic roles. As a source of amusement, humor captures children's attention, making the reading experience more enjoyable and engaging, thereby enhancing their overall interest in reading (Hunt, 2006, p. 84). Furthermore, humor can serve as an effective pedagogical tool. It assists children in comprehending complex concepts or difficult situations in a lighter, more digestible manner, for example, by diffusing tension in suspenseful narratives or subtly conveying social criticism (McGhee, 1979, p. 112). Additionally, through humor, children's literature can teach conflict resolution and empathy, while encouraging critical thinking as children learn to identify incongruities or irony within a story (Nodelman, 1996, p. 96). Thus, humor is not merely an embellishment; it is an integral component that enriches the reading experience at various levels and supports children's holistic development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the approach and procedures employed in this study to address the research questions formulated previously.

Research Approach and Design

This study utilizes a qualitative approach with a descriptive-comparative design. A qualitative approach was selected as it allows the researcher to explore and understand the phenomenon of humor translation in depth, focusing on the nuances and interpretation of meaning rather than numerical measurement (Creswell, 2014, p. 4).

Data Sources

The primary data source for this research is the novel *Matilda*, examined in two linguistic versions: the English version as the source text (ST) and the Indonesian version as the target text (TT).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The procedures for data collection and analysis in this study are conducted systematically through several stages:

1. Reading: A comprehensive reading of both the English (ST) and Indonesian (TT) versions of *Matilda*.
2. Identification: Identifying and documenting segments containing humorous elements.
3. Parallel Comparison: Conducting a side-by-side comparison between humorous instances in the ST and their corresponding equivalents in the TT.
4. Analysis: Analyzing each comparison using Peter Newmark's framework of translation procedures.
5. Evaluation: Evaluating whether the humor remains effective and relevant for the target child audience.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the comparative analysis of Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda* in its English version (source text) and Indonesian version (target text). The analysis is categorized based on the prominent types of humor found in *Matilda*.

Hyperbole and Grotesque/Humorous Character Descriptions

This category encompasses humor arising from the exaggerated portrayal of physical traits or character dispositions, often with a repulsive or absurd touch to emphasize villainy or eccentricity.

1. Source Text (ST): "The parents looked upon Matilda in particular as nothing more than a scab." (Dahl, 1988, p. 6)

Target Text (TT): "*Matilda ini oleh ayah dan ibunya tidak dianggap sama sekali, atau paling-paling dianggap seperti ketombe.*"

Analysis: In this data, humor emerges from a dark hyperbolic description. Dahl depicts Matilda's parents viewing her as "nothing more than a scab," a harsh and degrading metaphor. The translator employs Adaptation and Cultural Equivalent by replacing 'scab' with '*ketombe*' (dandruff). This choice successfully preserves the degrading and repulsive intent of Dahl's original prose but utilizes a term that is more familiar and culturally relevant for Indonesian child readers. The humor remains communicative because the visualized object is universally understood as something undesirable.

2. Source Text (ST): "Mr. Wormwood was a small ratty-looking man whose front teeth stuck out underneath a thin ratty moustache." (Dahl, 1988, p. 17)

Target Text (TT): "*Mr. Wormwood bertubuh kecil, dengan wajah lancip seperti tikus, lengkap dengan gigi-gigi depan yang mancung dan kumis tipis yang jarang-jarang tumbuhnya.*"

Analysis: Here, Dahl's verbal humor stems from the repetitive use of the adjective "ratty." The translator utilizes Expansion and Modulation by elaborating "ratty moustache" into "*kumis tipis yang jarang-jarang tumbuhnya*" (thin moustache that grows sparsely). While this procedure maintains the humor of the exaggerated physical caricature, it loses the punchy nuance of Dahl's singular adjective. The translator prioritizes a communicative effect so that Indonesian children can immediately grasp the comical and sleazy nature of the character.

Sarcasm and Irony

This category includes humor arising from statements or situations that contrast with the actual intent, often delivered with a mocking or indirectly critical tone.

Source Text (ST): "To tell the truth, I doubt they would have noticed had she crawled into the house with a broken leg." (Dahl, 1988, p. 7)

Target Text (TT): "*Bahkan jika anak perempuan mereka itu merangkak pulang dengan kaki yang patah, mereka mungkin tetap saja tidak melihatnya.*"

Analysis: The humor is derived from a sarcastic hyperbole illustrating the extreme indifference of the parents. The translator employs Literal Translation combined with slight Modulation and Transposition. This procedure successfully maintains the humorous effect of the hyperbole and sarcasm. The image of a child crawling home with a broken leg being ignored is an absurdly funny situation, and the humor remains communicative as it is universally comprehensible.

Wordplay and Verbal Misunderstandings

This category focuses on humor arising from linguistic structures, lexical ambiguity, or intentional misunderstandings.

Source Text (ST): "Mrs D, Mrs I, Mrs FFI / Mrs C, Mrs U, Mrs LTY. / That spells difficulty." ... "How perfectly ridiculous!" snorted the Trunchbull. "Why are all these women married?" (Dahl, 1988, p. 120)

Target Text (TT): "*Mrs. D, Mrs. I, Mrs. FFI / Mrs. C, Mrs. U, Mrs. LTY / Mereka merupakan kesulitan; "Benar-benar konyol!" dengus Sang Trunchbull. "Kenapa mereka disebut Mrs. atau Nyonya? Kenapa mereka semua menikah?"*

Analysis: The humor arises from clever wordplay and Miss Trunchbull's misunderstanding of the mnemonic. The translator uses Compensation and Expansion by adding a narrative explanation to ensure Indonesian readers understand the linguistic basis of the joke. This procedure successfully preserves the comedic effect despite significant adjustments, as the primary humor shifts to the Trunchbull's ridiculous reaction.

Absurd Imagery and Audiovisual Details

This category covers humor derived from unique comparisons, distinct sounds, or slightly eccentric details.

Source Text (ST): "There was a loud squelching noise similar to that made by a hippopotamus when lowering its foot into the mud on the banks of the Limpopo River" (Dahl, 1988, p. 85).

Target Text (TT): "*Seperti bunyi yang terdengar jika seekor kuda nil memasukkan kakinya ke dalam lumpur di tepi Sungai Limpopo.*"

Analysis: The humor stems from onomatopoeia and a highly specific, absurd simile. The translator employs Reduction and Modulation. This procedure slightly alters the humorous effect because the omission of the onomatopoeia "squelching" reduces the multi-sensorial impact. While the simile remains funny, the distinctiveness of Dahl's humor is somewhat diminished.

Discussion

The in-depth analysis of humor in Matilda reveals that the translator employs a diverse range of Peter Newmark's procedures to render Roald Dahl's wit. Literal Translation emerges as the dominant procedure for humor relying on visual hyperbole and universal metaphors. This procedure is effective because the strength of the humor lies in vivid imagery that is easily understood across cultures.

However, for more complex humor tied to wordplay or cultural references (e.g., the "scab/ketombe" adaptation), the translator consistently utilizes more adaptive procedures. Compensation and Expansion are crucial for replicating lost verbal jokes, while Cultural Equivalent is vital for re-contextualizing unfamiliar references. This pattern reflects a dynamic balance between Newmark's communicative and semantic methods. The translator tends to prioritize the communicative method when adaptation is necessary to ensure the humor reaches the child audience, even if it means deviating from the original semantic form. Overall, the application of these procedures successfully maintains the majority of Roald Dahl's humorous effects for Indonesian child readers, underscoring the importance of adaptive strategies in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the dominant translation procedures by Peter Newmark employed in transferring Roald Dahl's humor in the novel Matilda from English into Indonesian. The findings reveal that the translator primarily utilizes Literal Translation for visual hyperbole and universal metaphors, while employing Adaptation, Cultural Equivalent, Compensation, and Expansion for humor more deeply embedded in wordplay or cultural references.

The application of these procedures demonstrates a dynamic balance between communicative and semantic methods, which generally succeeds in maintaining the intended humorous effect of Dahl's wit.

Although some reductions in detail occur, the essence of Dahl's unique and dark humor is largely preserved. This underscores the vital role of adaptive strategies in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps to ensure the effective transfer of humor within children's literature.

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