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THE ROAD LESS TAKEN: ON THE PROBLEMS OF POETRY TRANSLATION

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Abstract

Permasalahan yang dijumpai dalam penerjemahan puisi adalah permasalahan isi dan pesan serta nada dan asosiasi. Strategi yang bias diaplikasikan untuk menghadapi permasalahan isi dan pesan tersebut adalah mimesis, analogis, organis, dan penyimpangan dari James Holmes. Sedangkan untuk menjawab permasalahan nada dan asosiasi, penerjemah bisa menggunakan strategi yang diajukan oleh Andre Lefevere yang berujung kepada kemunculan penerjemahan fonemik, literal, metrical, prosais, rima, blank verse, dan interpretasi.

If (the translated poem) reads good it is good.

~Duke Ellington~

A. Introduction

Duke Ellington's statement reflects two points. The first is that to translate poetry, one has to create poetry in the end. Therefore, by prosody, the poetry is structurally maintained. It is in line with what Cheng Fangwu says concerning with poetry translation. Cheng says that translating poetry is translating a language into a second one because what is translated is poetry as a whole, so it is very important that the output of poetry translation should be poetry. This is an essential condition, and say, a sufficient condition¹ The necessity to birth poetic form in poetry translation roots from the fact that poetry, just like any other forms of literary works, possesses a

¹ lib.mnu.cn/WHDH-lbwh/SBLW/lbjysyypx/.../y8850250006.pdf

genuine structure which defines the literary work itself. Thus, as the duke suggests, the translated poem will read good if it follows the structure that defines the poem.

A question emerges regarding with what Duke Ellington says: is being good always structural? Contradictory to what is aforementioned, it does not always take structure to fruit a good read as structure itself is bond by a different set of rules. In poetry, languages define metres. Thus, to have similar metres between original poetry and its translated version is often not viable. Guy Bennet says it was not a poetic form that was carried over from one tradition to another, but rather the act of writing poetry itself. The concern was not to preserve an artifact, but an art; to focus not on a creation, but on recreation; not to deal so much with translation but with *transpoiesis*.² Transpoiesis is to recreate a work having similar associations in the target language.³ But, recreation triggers problems if the poetry is well versed as suggested by Okla Elliot:

the primary goal of translation is to recreate the effect of the original poem in the target language (the language into which you are translating). The problem, of course, is that if the poet did her work properly in the original (or source) language, then she made use of every available trick and tactic, thus making the job of recreating the poem almost impossible. This is why Umberto Eco calls translation “the art of failure.”⁴

Though poetry translation is the art of failure, still, it is translatable through the employment of recreation. An example of this recreation is the translation of a haiku which is recreated into a lay. A haiku is a Japanese poetry with seventeen syllables while a lay is medieval narrative poetry. The examples are as follows:

Furu ike ya (old pond)
Kawazu tobikomu (frogs leaped)
Mizu no oto (water sound)

By Anonymous

² *Translation of Poetry: Some Thoughts on Transpoiesis*. p.9. mindmadebooks.com

³ *ibid*

⁴ (2010). *The Art of Failure*. Poet’s Market 2010 Annual Edition.

There once was a curious frog
Who sat by a pond on a log
And, to see what resulted,
In the pond catapulted
With a water-noise heard round the bog.

Translated by Alfred H. Marks

The process of *transpoiesis* Marks does betrays the structure of the original poetry which is a haiku but the committed betrayal is acceptable as the lay Marks composes is good to read for it is in rhymes and open for singing.

Both aforementioned reflections from Duke Ellington's statement suggest that translating poetry is a task which invites some problems. This paper will discuss the problems encountered in poetry translation and the strategies to overcome them.

B. The Problems of Poetry Translation

The problems of poetry translation comprise two matters. The first is content and message and the second is sounds and associations.⁵ The discussion of the problems will be fused with the discussion of the strategies.

1. Content and Message

Content deals with the forms of poetry. In the world of poetry, there are many types of poetry forms one can find. Based on Gary Hess, there are 55 types of poetry forms.⁶ The rhymes, metrical lines, shapes, and patterns distinguish one form from others. These forms hold a significant degree of importance to which a translator is obliged to heed. To deal with the

⁵ Connolly, David. (2001). *Poetry Translation*. Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation edited by Mona Baker. Routledge: London. p.174

⁶ 55 Types of Poetry Translation. http://www.poemofquotes.com/articles/poetry_forms.php

difficulties of poetry translation focusing on the forms, James Holmes proposes four strategies.⁷

They are:

- (a) Mimetic, where the original form is retained
- (b) Analogical, where a culturally corresponding form is used
- (c) Organic, where the semantic material is allowed to ‘take on its own unique poetic shape as the translation develops’.
- (d) Deviant or extraneous, where the form adopted is in no way implicit in either the form or content of the original

Mimetic strategy would seem impossible for rhymed poems as exact equivalence is hard to find in the prosody system between two languages but, for unrhymed poems as free verse, it might work. The example for this is a poem by Toeti Heraty by the title *Post Scriptum* translated by Ulrich Kratz and Carole Satyamurti:

Post Scriptum

Ingin aku tulis

sajak porno sehingga

kata mentah tidak diubah

jadi indah, pokoknya

tidak perlu kiasan lagi

misalnya payudara jadi bukit,

tubuh wanita = alam hangat

Post Scriptum

I want to write

an erotic poem

in which raw words, unadorned,

become beautiful

where metaphors are unnecessary

and breasts, for instance,

do not become hills

nor a woman's body a sultry landscape

senggama = pelukan yang paling akrab nor intercourse 'the most intimate embrace'.

yang sudah jelas	It's quite clear
tulis sajak itu	this poem is written in the space
antara menyingkap dan sembunyi	between exposure and concealment
antara munafik dan jatidiri.	between hypocrisy and true feeling.

Generally Kratz and Satyamurti retained the original form of the poem though on few parts, they could not escape from the diction limitation to fully mirror the poem on its original form as in the stand alone 'do not become hills' and 'kata mentah tidak diubah, indah pokoknya' which is in rhyme.

The second strategy is analogical strategy. In this strategy, the translator tends to domesticate the original poem; adjusted with the culture of the target readers without losing the original meaning in the attempts. The example is the translation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 by M. Shodiq Mustika.

SONNET 29

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to **one more rich in hope**,
Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising

From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

SONETA 29

*Kala tersipu di depan manusia dan Fortuna,
sendirian aku terlunta-lunta berair mata.
Percuma kuraungi langit nan tunarungu,
maka **kucermi** wajahku, kuomeli tapak tanganku.
Oh, andai aku **raja sejuta satria**,
yang mendamba raut muka ini-itu,
yang tak mungkin kuhirup walau mulutku meliur.
Namun, saat kutatap cermin dengan sebelah mata,
mendadak sontak terpampang dikau, lalu wajahku,
bagai cengkerama mencuat di masa rehat.
Dari bumi merekah, syahdu nyanyiku di pintu surga,
berkat memuat memori cinta berair madu,
tak sudi kutukar wajah aku dengan raut muka raja.*

Mustafa Shodiq converts the sonnet structural form into a triple poem format in Bahasa Indonesia. The decision might have been backgrounded by the facts that sonnets are not as much as popular as triplets or quatrains in Indonesia. Besides converting the form, Mustafa Shodiq also makes some cultural adjustments. Sonnet 29 generally talks about a man who blames his incapability to accomplish what he needs to accomplish. He feels jealous also because another man can do what he cannot. In the source version, the blaming and the jealousy are expressed through self-contemplation as seen in *look upon myself and curse my fate, Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, desiring this man's art and that man's scope*. This self-contemplation is inner in nature. But, when Mustafa translated the sonnet, all of those expressions reflect outer nature of the man. He uses the expressions as *maka kucermi wajahku, kuomeli tapak tanganku. Oh, andai aku raja sejuta satria, Namun, saat kutatap cermin dengan sebelah mata, tak sudi kutukar wajah aku dengan raut muka raja* which reflect that what makes the man unable to

accomplish what he needs to accomplish is dealing with his physical attires. This reason is not visible in the original poem.

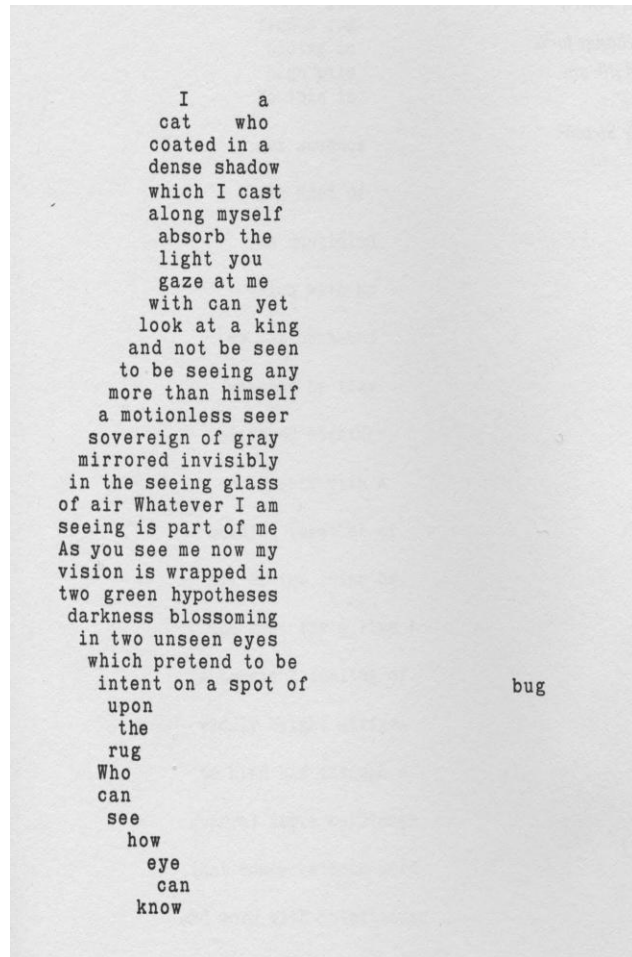
The third strategy is organic form. This strategy emphasizes on obtaining the overall meaning of the source poem first. Then, let the process of translation move onward based on the obtained meaning. One of the poems the strategy fits to apply is an encrypted poem. By encrypted poem means that the poem conveys secret message written within the lines which can be revealed through word arrangements. The example of such poem is acrostic. In acrostic, the message is conveyed on the first letter of each line. The following is an example by Allison:

Does anyone realize all the
Ridiculous things
Actors and actresses
Must endure before hearing the
Aplause?

The above acrostic is about drama. The topic is captured from the initial letter from each line. If this poem is translated, what comes to the translator's mind should be the mead on which the translator has to stand that is the initial letters D-R-A-M-A. The translator, after holding the ground of the initial letters, moves to create each letter a line which might flee from the original lines. If created, the above poem might look as follow in Bahasa Indonesia:

Dapatkah kamu memahami galau dan
Resahnya hati para
Aktor and aktris yang
Memainkan peran
Agar memperoleh tepukan?

Deviant or extraneous is the last strategy. This strategy aims at developing a new form which is completely different from the source poetry. This strategy is applicable for poems which do not display their meanings through their words only but also their shapes; poems with shapes. These kinds of poems are called shape or concrete and diamante poems. The following is the example of shape poetry by John Hollander, *Kitty and Bug*:



When translators attempt to translate the above poem, they have to create the same object as seen from the source poem also, in this case, it is a cat. Transferring the object triggers challenges because the translators have to consider the following aspects:

1) The size of the object

The size of an object is meaningful as it symbolizes certain values the author attempts to deliver

2) The likeness of the object

There is a blueprint for every object but to fill the blueprint with words is not natural as in shape poems, the words display a picture not a picture filled with words.

Due to the necessity to create a similar object, the task to translate a shape poem sparks a certain degree of difficulties. Word length is different from one language to another. Thus, it will trigger the emergence of a different size.

The difficulty does not end up in the structural matters of the poems only but also the culture in which the poem is intended for. The above poem by Hollander tries to describe a cat which is the symbol of witchcraft yet royal also; two contradictory symbols in a single object. In the western countries, this symbol is accepted; cat was considered the embodiment of witch during the Dark Age but after renaissance came, people took cats as the symbol of royalty and high estate. Therefore, to translate blatantly *Kitty and Bug* in any target language, Bahasa Indonesia for instance, would be troublesome. To erase the difficulty, the strategy taken is to create a completely new form which still conveys the intended message of the original poem.

2. Sound and Associations

Sound deals with metrical lines, rhyme, and rhythm while associations deal with figurative language. As sound defines what poetry is, when translating poetry, translators should take into account how to deal with the sound problems which cover metrical lines, rhyme, and rhythm. The problem dealing with sound which, in the world of poetry, is called

as prosody is mainly around whether a good poetry translation is judged from the ability to cover all elements of prosody or not. The answer is no.

Mason and Hatim make a good point on the above argument. They say that translations can be judged according to what the translator set out to achieve, instead of some notional criterion of what qualifies as a good translation of poetry.⁸ It suggests that instead of trying to embrace all elements of prosody and attempt to seek for their prosody-responding equivalence, the translators should focus on an element of prosody which they deem as the key of the poem. Thus, the implication is that there will be some strategies which end up in the emergence of the types of translation in translating poetry based on what prosodical elements the translators decide to take. Andre Levfevere proposes seven strategies dealing with poetry translation which touch sound and associations. They are phonemic translation, literal translation, metrical translation, prose translation, rhymed translation, blank verse translation and interpretation.⁹

1) Phonemic Translation

Sound plays significant roles in poetry as it distinguishes poetry from the other two literary works. Sound and meaning are one thing in any language. While reproducing the meaning, sound quite often is simultaneously reproduced.¹⁰ If the translators focus on the sound or rhythm of the poem, then, the translators perform what so called as phonemic translation. This translation might occur on the poems which have specific words which will lose their distinguished sound if translated. Lefevere comes to the conclusion that although this works moderately well in the translation of onomatopoeia, the overall result is clumsy and

⁸ (1990). *Discourse and the Translator*. Longman Group. UK. p.15.

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Aiwei, Shi. *Translatability and Poetic Translation-2 Part 1*. Translatum Journal Issue 5.

often devoid of sense altogether.¹¹ The example is *Fithos Lusec Wecos Vinosec* by Nobuo Uematsu. The following is the complete lines:

Fithos lusec wecos vinosec
Fithos lusec wecos vinosec
Fithos lusec wecos vinosec
Fithos lusec wecos vinosec

Excitate vos e somno, liberi mei
Cunaw non sunt
Esxcitate vos e somno, liberi fatali
Somnus non eat.

Surgite
Inventite hortum veritatis

Ardente veritate
Urite mala mundi
Ardente veritate

Incendite tenebras mundi

Valete, liberi
Diebus fatalibus

Fithos lusec wecos vinosec
Fithos lusec wecos vinosec
Fithos lusec wecos vinosec
Fithos lusec wecos vinosec

And the translated lines are as follows:

Fithos lusec wecos vinosec
Fithos lusec wecos vinosec
Fithos lusec wecos vinosec
Fithos lusec wecos vinosec

Arise from your sleep, my children
Your cradles shall no longer exist
Arise from your sleep, children of Fate

¹¹ Bassnet, Susan. (2002). *Translation Studies*. Routledge. London: UK. p.87.

Abandon your cradles

Arise

Discover the garden of Truth

Brilliant truth

Burn the heavens of evil

Burning truth

Set ablaze the heavens of darkness

Prevail, children

Fated day

Fithos lusec wecos vinosec

Fithos lusec wecos vinosec

Fithos lusec wecos vinosec

Fithos lusec wecos vinosec

The line *fithos lusec wecos vinosec* is an anagram which is translatable into *succession of witches* but due to the dependency the work has on the line, it is preserved as the original one. The ‘of sense’ impact seen from the example is the strange composition of *fithos lusec wecos vinosec* which only sounds like a Latin but not a Latin.

2) Literal Translation

To translate poetry literally is what most poetry translators do as, to some extent, the message is able to be compromised. The compromising ability literal translation has is from the fact that it compromises with the ideal: looser renditions that replace individual SL words with individual TL where possible, and cling as closely as possible to the SL word order in the TL.¹² The following is an example of literal translation in poetry. The work is from Toeti Heraty translated by Ulrich Kratz and Carole Satyamurti.

¹² Robinson, Douglas. (2001). *Literal Translation*. Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation edited by Mona Baker. Routledge: London. p.127

Lukisan Wanita 1938

Lukisan lengkap dengan cita rasa
giwang, gelang, untaian kuning-hijau
selendang, menyembunyikan kehamilan.

kehamilan maut yang nanti menjemput
luput diredam
kehamilan hidup yang nanti merenggut
goresan dendam
gejolak dan kemelut keprihatinan
gagal direkam

pada sapuan dan garis wajah yang
menyerah, pada alur sejarah

Lukisan dengan sapuan akhir
yang cemerlang, kelengkapan wajah
diperoleh dari bingkai kenangan

Toeti Heraty, *Juli 1989*

A Woman's Portrait 1938

The painting conveys her exquisite taste:
ear studs, bracelets, green and yellow selendang;
the sash conceals her pregnancy.

The death she is carrying can't be disguised.
The life she carries will grasp and cling on.
Yearning, restlessness and the turmoil of fear
are not recorded in the brush-strokes,
pencil outline of a face
surrendering to the flow of history.

The painting, with its final brilliant gesture,
only fully reveals this face
when it is framed by memory.

July 1989

3) Metrical Translation

Metrical lines root from the existence of syllables. Therefore, the first concern regarding with metrical translation is the seeking of representative syllables in the target language. Such translation seems hard to do but it exists. Lefevere concludes that, like literal translation, this method concentrates on one aspect of the SL text at the expense of the text as a whole.¹³ The following is lyric from Kanako Oda's *Moonlight Densetsu* translated by anonymous.

Gomen ne sunao ja nakute Yume no naka nara ieru Shikou kairo wa shotto sunzen Ima sugu aitai yo	Maaf ku tak pernah berterus terang Bukan ku tak mempercayaimu Namun sebelum ku ganti rupa Ingin aku menemuimu
Nakitaku naru you-na Moonlight Denwa mo dekinai Midnight Datte junjou dou shiyoun Hatto wa mangekyou	Ku kan bermandi cahaya bulan Yang cemerlang di malam yang cerah Memang telah lama ku rasakan Ingin menolong yang lemah
Tsuki no hikari ni michibikare Nandomo meguri-au Seiza no matataki kazoe Uranau koi no yukue Onaji kuni ni umareta no	Tiba-tiba keajaiban terjadi Kekuatan muncul di diri Untuk melawan semua kejahatan Kekuatanku harus digunakan Menegakkan segala kebenaran
mirakuru romansu Shinjite-iru no	Ini keajaiban alam Aku mempercayainya
Mirakuru romansu	Ini keajaiban alam

Most of the lines in the Japanese version are composed of ten syllables. Strikingly, the translated version is dominantly packed by ten syllable lines. It denotes that the translator emphasizes on the transfer of metrical line.

¹³ Bassnet, Susan. (2002). *Translation Studies*. Routledge. London: UK. p.87.

4) Prose Translation

Some poems are hard to understand though they have been translated. Thus, to change the form from poetry to prose is expected to play a significant role in sparking comprehension from the readers. Here Lefevere concludes that distortion of the sense, communicative value and syntax of the SL text results from this method, although not to the same extent as with the literal or metrical types of translation.¹⁴ The example of this kind of translation is *Beowulf*, the oldest English literary work in Old English. The ancient ballad is translated into the form of prose by Howe and Donaldson.

5) Rhymed Translation

Rhymed translation refers to the attempt the translators have in sparking rhymes in the translated version of a poem. It is where the translator 'enters into a double bondage' of metre and rhyme.¹⁵ The above example from *Moonlight Densetsu* can also be categorized as rhymed translation as rhymes dominate the lines.

6) Blank verse translation

Blank verse deals with specific rhyme and metrical lines; it is unrhymed and in iambic pentameter. The example for this is Francesco Maria Molza's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

¹⁴ Bassnet, Susan. (2002). *Translation Studies*. Routledge. London: UK. p.87.

¹⁵ Lefevere in Bassnet, Susan. (2002). *Translation Studies*. Routledge. London: UK. p.87.

7) Interpretation

Interpretation lets the translators freely change the form of the original poetry. Interpretation shares similar traits with that of deviant or extraneous strategy by Holmes. Under this heading, Lefevere discusses what he calls *versions* where the substance of the SL text is retained but the form is changed, and *imitations* where the translator produces a poem of his own which has ‘only title and point of departure, if those, in common with the source text.’¹⁶

C. Conclusion

The problems found in poetry translation involve content and message and sound and associations. To deal with the problems, the translators might take proposed strategies by James Holmes or Andre Levefere. Holmes proposes mimetic, analogical, organic, and deviant or extraneous strategies while Levefere proposes phonemic translation, literal translation, metrical translation, prose translation, rhymed translation, blank verse translation and interpretation.

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¹⁶ ibid

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