

## QUALITY ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION OF THE FIRST CHAPTER OF VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S LOLITA

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This article presents a result of translation quality analysis on the translation of Chapter One of Vladimir Nabokov's "Lolita". The result of the analysis shows that the translated text of *Lolita*, especially the first chapter, from English into Bahasa Indonesia by Anton Kurnia, still has some failures in delivering the message from its SL text (English). In one hand, the translator tries to maintain the delicacy of the wordplay used by the author, Vladimir Nabokov. On the other hand, the translator ignores the prominent function of the translation, which is to deliver the full message and to do so in such natural ways in the context of TL readers.

**Key Words:** translation quality, translation quality analysis, novel translation

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Lolita* is a world-famous novel written by Russian author, Vladimir Nabokov in 1955. Originally written in English, this novel is often considered as one of the three most influential novels in history. In penning the story, Vladimir uses numerous wordplay and delicate words that makes this novel not easy to be interpreted, though it has been translated into many languages, including Bahasa Indonesia. There are also dozens of allusions to Poe, Joyce, Flaubert, Shakespeare, Keats, Melville, and so on.

This novel tells about a thirty something widowed man of mixed European origins, initially named "Humbert Humbert". He was born in Paris in 1910 and fell obsessively and desperately in love with a twelve years old American girl, Dolores Haze (Lolita). We

are told, in the first paragraph on the "Foreword," that "Humbert Humbert" died of a coronary thrombosis on November 16, 1952, just before the start of his trial for murder. His memoir, "Lolita or The Confessions of a White Widowed Male" are actually being presented to us by John Ray, Jr. The novel is comprised of sixty-nine chapters. Although, at first glance, *Lolita* may seem to be the account of a pedophile and murderer, it is really a love story and a tragic one at that. This novel, however, is notable for its controversial subjects.

The writer mainly chooses to take the first chapter of this novel for in that part the opening story is lyrical and genius. As like fulfilling its role to captivate the reader on the first page, the first chapter is exquisitely succeeded. The use of words

show the extravagant passion of “Humbert Humbert” towards Lolita, instead of prose, the first chapter sounds more like poem. Therefore, the writer tries to annotate the translated version of Bahasa Indonesia that is converted by Anton Kurnia and published by Serambi Ilmu Semesta in 2008. On the translated version of Bahasa Indonesia, the writer found some rarely used words like *sulbi* or *boyak*. Aside from the word choice by the translator along the novel, the writer tries to annotate the translation product of chapter one using the translation assessment theory mainly from Mashadi Said (Universitas Guna-darma) and Juliane House who deals with Functional-Pragmatic Model of Translation Evaluation (Halidayan Approach).

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Translation is a process of delivering or transferring information and message from one language to another. In the process of doing the translation, however, there are many aspects that influencing the translator to lose the poignant meaning, to cause perplexity, and to cause the same effect upon the Target Language reader compared to the Source Language reader. Along with the numerous translation products from foreign literature, translation theory developed fast during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, starting with the theory of Nida, Catford, and other theoretician (Hariyanto, 2013). The equivalency of the language meaning therefore, needs to be maintained (House, 2001).

According to Mashadi Said (2002) in his paper *Menilai Terjemahan* published in *Jurnal Ilmiah Sastra Bahasa* vol. 7 no. 2 (Dec. 2002), the quality parameter of a translation product depends on its accuracy, properness, and clarity:

*“Berualitas tidaknya suatu terjemahan dapat ditentukan melalui tiga sudut pandang yaitu keakuratan, kejelasan, dan*

*kewajaran. Keakuratan berarti sejauhmana pesan dalam teks bahasa sumber (TBSu) disampaikan dengan benar dalam teks bahasa penerima (TBp). Kejelasan berarti sejauhmana pesan yang dikomunikasikan dalam teks bahasa penerima dapat dipahami dengan mudah pembaca sasaran. Makna yang ditangkap pembaca TBSu sama dengan makna yang ditangkap pembaca TBp. Kewajaran berarti sejauhmana pesan dikomunikasikan dalam bentuk yang lazim, sehingga pembaca teks bahasa penerima terkesan bahwa naskah yang dibacanya adalah naskah asli yang ditulis dalam bahasanya sendiri.”*

Nida and Taber (1982:13) quoted in Said (2002) argue that in order to maintain the accuracy of the message, a translator can change the grammatical structure of the sentence in the SL text: *“... makna harus diutamakan karena isi pesanlah yang terpenting. ... Ini berarti bahwa penyimpangan tertentu yang agak radikal dari struktur formal tidak saja dibolehkan, tetapi bahkan mungkin sangat diperlukan.”*

Among several ways in examining the product of translation, that are written on Said paper *“Menilai Terjemahan”* the writer mostly uses the feature of ‘back translation’ to examine the accuracy, properness, and clarity aspect of the TL text. For this is a simple method that can directly examine precision of the TL text. Meanwhile according to Juliane House (2001), who use Halidayan approach in her way of assessing translation product, the process of translation must consider language or text through register (Field, Tenor, Mode) and its genre:

*“The assessment model (House 1997) is based on Hallidayan systemic-functional theory, but also draws eclectically on Prague school ideas, speech act theory pragmatics, discourse analysis and corpus-based distinctions between*

spoken and written language. It provides for the analysis and comparison of an original and its translation on three different levels: the levels of Language/Text, Register (Field, Mode and Tenor) and Genre." (p. 247)

One paramount thing in translating text, according to House is the properness or naturalness of language in the TL text. It is the difficult task that needs to be accomplished by every translator in order to produce an excellent translation that is well received by the TL reader. To do so, one must have the adept skill and vast knowledge of the language and culture of both SL and TL text:

"Over and above its role as a concept constitutive of translation, "equivalence" is the fundamental criterion of translation quality. In an attempt to make "a case for linguistics in translation theory," Ivir expresses the inherent relativity of the equivalence relation very well: "Equivalence is...relative and not absolute,...it emerges from the context of situation as defined by the interplay of (many different factors) and has no existence outside that context, and in particular it is not stipulated in advance by an algorithm for the conversion of linguistic units of L1 into linguistic units of L2" (1996: 155)." (p. 247)

## ANALYSIS

In every word choice of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, it is notable that the author put brilliant effort in describing his main character, "Humbert Humbert," as a luscious and passionate toward Lolita. The main character is not just in love but also deeply in lust. This message that delicately appears on its writing style and language, however, shall be maintained when one tries to translate this novel into the Target

Language due to the equivalence aspect of translation (House, 2011).

To apply the translation assessment theory upon the analysis of *Lolita's* first chapter, the writer initially discusses the ideational, interpersonal and textual aspects of this novel. According to House (2011), a translator must consider the functional approach (field, tenor and mode) of the text s/he dealing with. As it is written on the foreword, this novel is a memoir of "Humbert Humbert", more precisely it is a confession of him as a murderer. The first chapter of this novel is written by "Humbert Humbert" to be read by the juries of the court, while the form of his message is written. Furthermore, the translation analysis regarding to the theory of Said (2002) that deals with accuracy, properness, and clarity, upon some prominent issues on the first chapter will be discussed subsequently.

In the first paragraph of the first chapter, even speaking Lolita's name is a sensual experience for "Humbert Humbert". It is the alliteration of a literal trip of his tongue through his mouth:

### Source Language (English):

"Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta."

### Target Language (Bahasa):

"*Lolita, cahaya hidupku, api sulbiku. Dosaku, sukma. Lolita: ujung lidah mengeja tiga suku kata, menyentuh langit-langit mulut, dan pada kali ketiga menyentuh gigi. Lo. Li. Ta*".

From this first paragraph, the writer argues that there are some words that are inaccurate. For example, In the TL the translator uses "*api sulbi*" for "fire of my loins". *Sulbi* comes from Arabic language which means coccyx. According to

Merriam Webster Dictionary (henceforth MWD) coccyx means “a small bone that articulates with the sacrum and that usually consists of four fused vertebrae which form the terminus of the spinal column in humans and tailless apes.” While loins mean “a: the upper and lower abdominal regions and the region about the hips; b: the pubic region, the reproductive organs” (MWD). In other words, *sulbi* refers to the bone while ‘loin’ literally refer to the sexual organ, therefore, it refers to passion or lust. For this reason, the use of *sulbi* to convert ‘loin’ is inaccurate. Hence, the writer proposes the use of word *hasrat*, meaning ‘passion’ or ‘lust’ to translate the word ‘loin’ (see table: annotated translation).

The next issue from the first paragraph is the depiction of Lolita’s name. The translated version however, loses the intricate aspect that the character wants to express through his description of the process mentioning the name of the one he loves passionately. The translator uses the phrase “...mengeja tiga suku kata..”, if we apply back translation to assess this issue, the meaning will be “...spelling three syllables...” which do not occur in the SL text. The whole process of spelling the name Lolita however, tells the reader something more than just the process of mentioning someone’s name. The author wants to emphasize that even in spelling Lolita’s name, “Humbert Humbert” is aroused.

In the Bahasa Indonesia version the sentences are translated into “...ujung lidah mengeja tiga suku kata, menyentuh langit-langit mulut, dan pada kali ketiga menyentuh gigi.” The phrase ‘taking a trip’ is changed into ‘mengeja tiga suku kata’ or ‘spelling three syllables’ which eliminate the adventurous sense of the action. Hence, the writer suggests the use of word ‘berkelana’ or ‘to wander’ for the phrase ‘taking a trip’.

So, the suggestion can be written as follow.

Suggested revised target text:

*Lolita, cahaya hidupku, api yang membakar hasratku. Dosaku, sukma. Lolii-ta: ujung lidahku berkelana menelusuri bagian bawah mulutku dengan tiga sentuhan mengeja namanya, pada sentuhan ketiga, naik menyentuh deretan gigiku. Lo.Lii. ta.*

In the second paragraph, there is one prominent issue on the use of words in the translated version that will be annotated.

*Source Language (English):*

“She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita.”

*Target Language (Bahasa):*

*“Dia adalah Lo yang biasa-biasa saja di pagi hari, setinggi seratus lima puluh senti, mengenakan sebelah kaus kaki. Dia adalah Lola saat mengenakan celana panjang longgar. Dia adalah Dolly di sekolah. Dia adalah Dolores pada data isian bertitik-titik. Namun dalam pelukanku dia adalah Lolita.”*

The sentence ‘She was Dolores on the dotted line’ is literally translated into ‘*Dia adalah Dolores pada data isian bertitik-titik*’. While the phrase ‘on the dotted line’ in English idiomatic expression that refers to official name on the legal documents, to translate it literally will be perplexing for the reader. Due to properness and clarity aspects of translation for the target reader, the writer proposes the use of ‘*dokumen resmi*’ to transfer the phrase ‘on the dotted line’. The suggestion can be written as follow.

Suggested revised target text:

*Dia adalah Lo. Lo yang tampak sederhana di pagi hari, dengan tingginya seratus lima puluh senti, mengenakan kaus kaki sebelah. Dia adalah Lola, saat mengenakan celana panjang longgar. Saat di sekolah, dia adalah Dolly. Dalam dokumen resmi dia adalah Dolores. Namun dalam pelukanku dia selalu menjadi Lolita.*

In the third paragraph, there are two issues to be discussed. The first one relies on the first sentence:

*Source Language (English):*

"Did she have a precursor? She did, indeed she did. In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. In a pryncedom by the sea. Oh when? About as many years before Lolita was born as my age was that summer. You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style."

*Target Language (Bahasa):*

"Apakah dia memang seorang titisan? Ya, pasti. Kenyataannya, tak bakal ada Lolita sama sekali jika aku tak pernah jatuh cinta kepada seorang gadis belia pada suatu musim panas di sebuah puri di tepi laut. Oh, kapankah? Bertahun-tahun sebelum Lolita dilahirkan pada musim panas itu. Ah, kalian selalu bisa mengandalkan seorang pembunuh untuk menulis prosa yang indah."

The translated version of the first sentence 'Did she have a precursor?' into 'Apakah dia memang seorang titisan?' is rather inaccurate and unclear. In back translation, the sentence becomes 'Is she a reincarnation?' In fact, the author writing style is trying to hold the truth that the main character is going to reveal. It is not clear at first to what precursor the main character refers to. However, the next

sentence explains that the precursor here refers to someone that he used to love in the past. Hence, the focus of the sentences is that special person in the past, whose identity is still unveiled. To translate it into 'Is she a reincarnation?' will shift the focus to Lolita itself, therefore the writer proposes the use of sentence 'Apakah dia pernah dilahirkan dalam wujud orang lain sebelumnya?' or in English it means 'Had she she ever born before?' to maintain the focus of the sentence in the SL text.

Still from the third paragraph, the next sentence that is going to be annotated is the sentence '...About as many years before Lolita was born as my age was that summer' which is translated into '...Bertahun-tahun sebelum Lolita dilahirkan pada musim panas itu.' The sentence, however, is ambiguous in the TL text. In back translation the sentence will become 'Years before Lolita was born that summer'. By the omission of the words 'my age' in the TL text, the message is not successfully transferred. The writer, therefore, proposes to provide the detail meaning in that sentence: 'Kira-kira bertahun-tahun yang lalu, sebelum Lolita berusia sama denganku pada saat peristiwa musim panas itu terjadi.' The suggestion can be written as follow.

Suggested revised target text:

*Apakah dia pernah dilahirkan dalam wujud orang lain sebelumnya? Ya, sudah pasti. Kenyataannya, Lolita tak akan pernah ada jika aku tak pernah jatuh cinta kepada seorang gadis belia pada suatu musim panas di sebuah puri di tepi laut. Oh, kapankah itu? Kira-kira bertahun-tahun yang lalu, sebelum Lolita berusia sama denganku pada saat peristiwa musim panas itu terjadi. Percayalah, seorang pembunuh selalu bisa diandalkan untuk menulis sebuah prosa yang indah.*

In the last paragraph of chapter one, the last sentence will be discussed:

*Source Language (English):*

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, exhibit number one is what the seraphs, the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs, envied. Look at this tangle of thorns."

*Target Language (Bahasa):*

"Para anggota sidang juri yang terhormat, yang mula-mula akan kutunjukkan adalah apa yang dicemburui oleh para malaikat-malaikat bersayap yang telah salah mengerti itu. Sudilah melihat selaksa sulur duri yang rumit membelit ini."

In the last sentence of the TL text, it is obvious that the translator tries to maintain the characteristic of the author in using the wordplay in its SL text. However, the sentence '*Sudilah melihat selaksa sulur duri yang rumit membelit ini*' does not sound quite natural in the TL text. The last sentence is actually the opening of the detail story that the main character is going to reveal, therefore the writer suggests to use clearer message in the TL text: "*Marilah kita lihat jalinan kisah dari duri-duri yang membelit ini.*"

The suggestion can be written as follow.

Suggested revised target text:

*Para anggota sidang juri yang terhormat, pertunjukan yang mula-mula akan kuperlihatkan adalah mengenai hal yang telah dicemburui oleh para malaikat-malaikat bersayap yang salah mengerti itu. Marilah kita lihat jalinan kisah dari duri-duri yang membelit ini.*

## CONCLUSION

The translated text of *Lolita*, especially the first chapter, to Bahasa Indonesia by Anton Kurnia, still have some failures in delivering the message from its SL text (English). In one hand, the translator tries to maintain the delicacy of the wordplay used by the author, Vladimir Nabokov, but in the other hand the translator ignores the prominent function of the translation, which is to deliver the full message and to do so in such natural ways in the context of TL readers.

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