

## Sexual Language Translation: The Perspective of Teaching Polite English

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### Abstract

Students of English language can benefit their learning from translating English novels which can be found easily everywhere. Since many of those novels contain sexual languages, students need to be exposed on how to deal with taboo, vulgar and harsh languages. This research investigated how to produce a good and qualified translation of taboo, vulgar and harsh languages from English into Indonesian without creating pornography. The quality examined was its accuracy, acceptability and readability of the translation. The method applied in this research was descriptive qualitative with the strategy of an embedded case study. The source of data was a novel by Sandra Brown and its translation. The research reveals that the students and/or translators should handle taboo, vulgar and harsh languages found in sexual languages by applying generalization, modulation, euphemism, reduction and deletion as the techniques to translate such languages, so they are able to use polite languages which do not violate norms and values.

**Keywords:** teaching English, sexual languages, translation quality, polite language

### A. Introduction

Teaching English through translation has been done by teachers for a long time. Many researchers have supported the idea that translation is a fun, motivating and enjoyable activity in language learning through several studies that they have conducted. Kern (1994)

conducted an interesting study by looking at the role of translating as a cognitive strategy in the L2 reading comprehension process. He found that the students often used translation or tended to translate to comprehend the text. This study is also supported by Carreres (2006) who gave questionnaires to students and came to a conclusion that they amazingly believe that translation exercises are useful for their language learning.

Teaching English by using translation is also beneficial from the perspective that it allows conscious learning, and control of the foreign language, and as a result, it reduces native language interference (Shiyab & Abdullateef, 2001). When using translation, students become active participants of the process; they are involved in the all activities, so that their learning becomes meaningful for them. The questions that should be asked when considering the role of translation in foreign language teaching include the types of translation, the function of the translation, for whom students translate, and which texts to choose. The text to translate should fit in the objective/s of learning, and the activities should also be adjusted to its need. When students need to learn to use polite language and deal with harsh or taboo language, they can be introduced to texts which contain sexual languages so they are able to understand how to cope with such problem.

The translation of romantic novels containing sexual languages in Indonesia has been a problem since the establishment of Law no. 44, 2008 about Pornography. The definition of pornography according to the law is “pictures, sketches, photos, writing, voice, sound, moving picture, animation, cartoons, conversation, gestures, or other communications shown in public with salacious content or sexual exploitation that violate the moral values of society.” The definition clearly states that all writings containing salacious content or sexual exploitation are strongly prohibited, and anyone violating it will be subject to criminal sanctions. In Indonesian Online Dictionary, pornography is defined as the depiction of erotic behaviour in paintings or writings to arouse sexual desire; any reading materials which are deliberately and solely written to arouse sexual desire.

In order not to violate this Law of Pornography, the translator often applies self-censorship. This self-censorship sometimes has caused a ‘translation loss’ because the message is not appropriately transferred. In dealing with sexual languages, the translator often generalizes, neutralizes, reduces, changes, or even deletes the translation units, and produces some pieces of translation which are not related to the text being translated. It might also be due to the cultural difference between the source text and the target text; what is appropriate in the source text might be inappropriate or even taboo in the target text. In translation, it is impossible to avoid ‘loss’, so the best thing for a translator to do is to minimize it (Armstrong, 2005). The translator might lose some parts of the message, but he/she has to minimize it. Moreover, Armstrong mentions a strategy called ‘compensation’ which means that a translator can lose some information in one part of the translation, but at the same time he/she will gain in another part; ‘loss and gain’ occurs in translation. This idea is also underlined by Venuti (1992) who explains that “a ratio of loss and gain inextricably occurs during translation process”.

The end result of a translation is very much influenced by some translator's personal factors. Those factors include measurable and observable things such as scientific knowledge, as well as immeasurable things like intuition. The translation product is always different between one translator to the other. A translator also needs to consider several things, since translating is basically a decision making process under constraint such as space, time, quality of information, problem solving aptitude and so on (Darwish, 1999). A translator must consider all those aspects of constrain to make the best decision to produce a qualified translation. Toury (1999) also underlines that "it is always the translator herself or himself, as an autonomous individual, who decides how to behave, be that decision fully conscious or not. Whatever the degree of awareness, it is s/he who will also have to bear the consequences". The translator as a decision maker has to bear the consequences in making decision whether he/she is fully aware in making decision or not. Nida & Taber (1974) agree that since the process of finding the best equivalence occurs in the translator's mind, he/she might be influenced by his/her personal constrain in producing a good translation.

To reveal the quality of a translation, a researcher needs to investigate three (3) aspects, i.e. objective, genetic and affective in a translation. Those three aspects play a vital role in producing a qualified translation (Nababan, 2007). The objective aspect refers to the translation (text) which can be analyzed from its linguistic units. The weakness of analyzing the text is the subjectivity and speculation of the researcher. The genetic factor refers to the translator which covers the translator's background and the linguistics, cultural, and other competence needed to come up with a good translation. The last factor is the affective which refers to the target readers of the text. The translation will be considered as a good translation if the target readers can understand the message as accurately in TT as it is in ST. By analyzing these three aspects of translation, a researcher can produce an accurate, complete, and thorough evaluation of the quality of translation, and he/she can minimize the subjectivity or bias of a researcher.

This paper is aimed at investigating how the translation of sexual languages from English into Indonesian help students learn and use more polite languages both in English and Indonesian. By being able to differentiate rude, vulgar, taboo, neutral, polite words, students will also understand how to deal with them.

## **B. Literature Review**

A research about sexual languages used by homo sexual people in Oscar Wilde's novel shows that for Oscar Wilde the main effect of using sexual languages is to evoke expressions from the body, how those words can influence the body to cry, to be aroused (sexually), to be happy and/or sad, and so on (Sisko, 2004). The findings also show that Wilde used objects as a type of homosexual argot (some words or expressions used by a certain community to interact with each other, used as a private communication and identification), because at that time (1890) the homosexual people did not dare to express their sexuality by using verbal language. Those objects function as a means to bridge their sexual desire and to voice their desire silently through the objects. Although Sisko's research

also discusses sexual languages, the fundamental difference with this research lies on the object under study. Sisko's research deals with dialects and slangs related to sexual languages understood only by homosexual people, this research discusses the translation of sexual languages for heterosexual people, without considering any specific expressions applicable for specific society. This research also discusses words expressing male and female organs in relation to sexual intercourse between heterosexual people.

A research on pornography was conducted by Utami, Tarjana, & Subroto (2015) to achieve a doctorate degree in Sebelas Maret University in Solo, Indonesia. Her dissertation titled '*Makna Asosiatif Pornografi pada Iklan Produk Media Cetak: Kajian Pragmatik*' (Associative Meaning of Pornography in Printed Media advertising Products: A Pragmatic Study). Her sources of data included magazines, newspapers, tabloids, and other printed materials. She focused on the associative meaning of pornography in the advertisements of the following products: condoms, supplements, herbal medicines, 'chatting' friends, soaps, tires and vehicles, food and beverages, slippers, candies, bed and mattress, refrigerator, mouth freshener, beauty cream, room freshener, etc. The associative meaning of pornography is referred to touching to arouse sexual desire, sexual strength and power, satisfaction in having sex, and anything related to sex. While Utami's research discusses pragmatics of sexual languages in advertisements, this research discusses the translation of sexual languages in a novel and its quality. There are two (2) models for evaluating translation quality: (1) equivalence-based approaches (2) functional approaches written in an article 'Translation quality assessment' (Lauscher, 2000). The first approach focuses on the concepts of 'equivalence' which has been defined by many experts such as the definition of 'formal and dynamic equivalence', semantic and communicative equivalence (Newmark, 1988). The second approach, the functional approaches, is based on the assumption that translating is not solely determined by the source text, but also determined by other factors related to the culture in the target text (Lauscher, 2000). Moreover, evaluating translation is not easy, it "cannot and should not be values-free: to be useful, it must be based on criteria of goodness. Otherwise, all we do is describing defects and strong points in translation" (Williams, 2001).

Translation quality measurement should be repeatable, reproducible and objective (Schiaffino & Zearo, 2005). Repeatable means that the measurement should be able to use repeatedly and to produce similar result at any time. Reproducible means that if two or more evaluators use the same measurement, the result should also be similar. Objective means that the measurement should be bias free, free from the evaluator's personal opinion and subjectivity. An instrument to evaluate translation which is used to evaluate the accuracy, acceptability, and readability was proposed in 2012 (Nababan, 2012). The translation will be evaluated on its accuracy of transferring the message from SL; the acceptability in terms of grammatical rules in TL, and the readability of the text in TL.

In the field of teaching English, many experts still argue about the benefit of teaching English by using translation. However, some experts believe that translation is a

useful pedagogical tool when it is applied purposefully and imaginatively. “When integrated into daily classroom activities translation can help students develop and improve reading, speaking, writing skills, grammar and vocabulary. Translation in foreign language classes enhances better understanding of structures of the two languages and also strengthens students’ translation skills” (Dagiliene, 2012).

**C. Research Methodology**

This research is a qualitative descriptive research which describes completely and thoroughly all qualitative data taken from documents, and informants. The purpose of the qualitative research is “to discover answers to questions through the application of systematic procedures” (Berg, 2001). This idea is underlined by Mack et al. (2005) who state that “scientific research consists of an investigation that seeks answers to a question, systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question, collects evidence, produces findings that are not determined in advance, produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study”. This research is a study on the analysis of translation error, using qualitative approach to analyze translation work. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

**1. Subject**

This research uses a novel by Sandra Brown titled Ricochet (RCT), published by Pocket Books in 2006, and its translation titled Pantulan Gairah by Fahmy Yamani, published by PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2010.

**2. Instruments**

This research also involves 3 (three) examiners who have linguistics background of education and/or have some years of experience in translating to be able to evaluate the translation.

The instrument used is the scoring system shown in the following table:

**Table 1 Scoring**

No	ST	TT	techniques	Translation Quality			Sexual Language Type
				Accuracy	Acceptability	Read-ability	

After all the data are scored, they will be evaluated and ranged to reveal the quality of the translation and to show the best techniques which can produce the most accurate, acceptable and readable for the vulgar and taboo words found.

**3. Data Analysis**

The samples of data are taken from all words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs containing sexual languages. The data are also taken from in-depth interview with the translator to understand how and why he came up with such translation. “In-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individual’s personal histories, perspectives,

and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored” (Mack et al., 2005). The in-depth interview is a follow up of the semi structured questions given previously. These open ended questions are meant to reveal the translator’s background and other information needed for the research. The data are first collected from the novel. They are all words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs containing sexual languages. The next step is collecting the data from the interview with the translator. The next step is gathering the data from the experts by conduction focus group discussion. After all the data have been collected, the researcher will start analyzing and explaining them.

The data will be analyzed by using Spradley’s approach to interpretation, starting from classifying into the domain analyses, conducting taxonomic analyses and the last making componential analysis (Spradley, 1979). In the domain analysis the researcher will categorize each data into its own classification to get a whole and complete picture about everything to be discussed. In the taxonomic analysis, the researcher sorts by giving some codes to the data, to make it easier to discuss and to classify the sexual languages into five classifications: sex and sex acts, having sex, orgasm, female organs, and male organs. The next step is analyzing the techniques applied in the translation of sexual languages. The last step is conducting a componential analysis by examining the relation between one data with the other/s.

#### D. Findings

After conducting a thorough analysis of the data, the researcher found that they were classified into five (5) classifications of sexual language types as follows:

**Table 2 Classification of Sexual Languages**

No	Sexual Languages	Total	Percentage
1	Sex and sex acts	69	49,64%
2	Having sex	35	25,18%
3	Orgasm	15	10,80%
4	Female organs	11	7,91%
5	Male organs	9	6,47%
	TOTAL	139	100%

The result shows that the classification of sex and sex acts is in the first rank, comprising of 49,64%, and followed by having sex and orgasm. The descriptions of both male and female organs are in the bottom two. Sex and sex acts are dominated by the verbs which involve sexual foreplaying such as kissing, touching, caressing, nibbling, licking, sucking, etc., with their equivalences such as *mencium*, *menyentub*, *membelai*, *menjilat*, *mengisap*, etc. These verbs are in accordance with nouns such as lips, mouth, breasts, nipple, bottoms, buttocks, tummy, belly, etc., and their equivalences such as *bibir*, *mulut*, *payudara*, *puncak payudara*, *putting*, *bokong*, *perut*, etc. The classification of having sex mostly uses verbs such as bury deep, make love, push apart the thighs, to be inside her, thrust into her, have sex, etc., and the equivalences such as *berada di dalam*, *bercinta*, *membuka paha*, *menghunjamkan*

*diri*, etc. The orgasm is dominated with verbs such as come, empty himself, shatter with pleasure, and their equivalences such as *mencapai kenikmatan*, *mencapai klimaks*, *meledak penuh kepuasan*, etc. It also uses nouns such as climax, orgasm, pleasure, and their equivalences such as *orgasme*, *kenikmatan*, etc. The male and female organs mostly use nouns referring to the vital organs such as cock, penis, butt cheeks, crevice, erection, nipple, pubic hair, and the equivalences such as *kelelakian*, *kejantanan*, *puncak payudara*, *pinggul*, *rambut lembut*, etc.

The table also shows that this novel does not merely depict sexuality, or sexual activities because the dominant words used are mostly verbs indicating fore-playing. The translation also shows the softening or deleting harsh languages so the result is acceptable in the target language. Based on the table and the analysis, this novel can be classified as a romantic novel not an erotic one.

Based on the classification of the sexual languages, each and every data is scored for its quality, and the result is presented in the table below:

**Table 3 Translation Quality**

Units (RCT)	Accu-racy	Accept-ability	Read-ability	Overall
Words	2.5	2.83	2.83	
Phrases	2.5	2.79	2.79	
Clauses	2.75	2.96	2.96	
Senten-ces	2.62	2.89	2.89	
Average	2.59	2.87	2.87	2.78

The data are divided into units of linguistics of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. The data are evaluated on their accuracy, acceptability and readability. The table shows that the scores for accuracy are the lowest for all units of linguistics. The average score for accuracy is 2.59 which means that the translation is less accurate. Linguistics units of words and phrases get only 2.5, while clauses get the highest score of 2.75. The scores for acceptability and readability are good; each gets 2.87. The score proves that the translator decided to put the acceptability and readability ahead of the accuracy. Acceptability and readability mean that the translation is acceptable in all aspects such as linguistics, culture and norms in the target language. Readability means that all words, phrases, sentences and terminologies used are familiar for the target readers. Sexual languages are subject to producing obscenity, taboo and pornography, which is the reason the translator was not too concerned about the accuracy of his translation. He was careful not to produce vulgar language, and obscenity in the translation, so the result is acceptable in the target language.

An example of the translation which has low scores for all aspects is the SL phrase 'the tip of his cock' which uses a vulgar word to indicate male sexual organ. The translator omitted this phrase or in Koponen's term 'omitted concept', which means the omission of some linguistics units (Koponen, 2010). The above phrase was not translated so consequently the message is fully distorted. The translator could have chosen the phrase '*ujung kejantannya*' or '*ujung senjatanya*' to transfer the message without violating the standard

norms and values in the TL. Both phrases mean and show the male sexual organ but they are euphemized so they are not considered vulgar or taboo anymore.

The translation quality is resulted from the use of certain techniques applied by the translator. The techniques were carefully chosen by the translator to avoid producing pornography. The overall techniques used by the translator are presented in the following table:

**Table 4 Translation Techniques Applied**

Techniques	Linguistics Units				Total
	words	Phrases	Clauses	Sentences	
Exp	-	20	11	26	57
EE	4	46	13	24	87
Mod	-	3	3	8	14
Red	-	6	3	6	15
Gen	2	11	4	5	22
Euph	-	1	-	1	1
DC	1	5	2	3	11
Add	-	1	-	-	1
Part	-	-	-	-	-
Del	1	8	-	4	13
Tran	-	1	-	2	3
Var	-	-	4	8	12
PB	-	-	2	1	3
Impl	-	-	-	-	-
Lit	-	1	-	-	1
Tot	8	103	42	87	240

Table 4 shows us that the dominant technique used in translating sexual languages is established equivalent. Established equivalent is a technique which provides the closest natural equivalence between the SL and the TL. The application of this technique will make the translation sound easy and natural in the TL. Even though the dominant technique applied is established equivalent, it is only 36.25% of the total techniques applied, or one third of the whole techniques. It is not surprising that the result is the low score of the accuracy.

The combination of modulation, reduction, generalization, discursive creation, and deletion has proved that the translator preferred to change, reduce, generalize, find new terms, or completely delete the words which he considered vulgar, or obscene. This combination takes 31.25% of all the data, so it is about one third of the whole data. The intriguing thing about all the techniques used is the least use of euphemism to replace vulgar and obscene words. The translator only used this technique once, despite the option to soften down the harsh language found. The translator also used addition and literal once, it also proved that he disliked softening down the vulgar language, but at the same time he disliked giving additional information and translating literally. The explicitation technique was applied mostly on personal pronoun and possessive pronoun, replacing unclear references of the nouns to avoid confusion on who does what, since there is no specific



term for he/she, him/her. The translator changed the pronouns into the names of the characters. This application of the technique surely can avoid confusion about who does a certain activity, but on the other hand, it tends to repeat the name/names of the characters too many times. One thing which excelled from the translator is his consistency in using 'dia' as the equivalent of 'she' and 'ia' as the equivalent of 'he', even though Indonesian language does not make a difference between he/she.

An example of the use of one of the techniques is the translation of the word 'fuck' which was translated into '*tidur dengan lelaki*' which literally means sleeping with a man. This word is categorized into taboo word, which means to have a sexual intercourse. The word was translated into a phrase which literally means 'sleep with a man', and in the TL the phrase refers to having sex. The translator applied euphemism technique in this data which proves to be very effective to convey the message from the SL without transferring the obscenity too. This is the best example of transferring the sexual language without producing pornography into the TL.

Another example is the case of the word 'nipple' which was not translated in TL. This word is classified into male/female sexual organ because this organ can also arouse sexual desire. The translator chose not to translate it, so the message for the whole sentence was distorted. Actually there are some options for the equivalence of this word which will not provoke pornography. The options may cover some phrases such as '*puncak payudara*', or '*ujung payudara*'. Those phrases refer to nipple but not in a vulgar or taboo way, so they are still accepted in TL. Those examples underline the possible close equivalences of some taboo words, which can be applied without distorting information, and at the same time is not violating norms and values of TL.

Since the dominant technique used is established equivalent, the expected score for quality should be high. It is proven by the overall score for quality 2.78 which is classified as a good translation. This result is a bit surprising since the laws in Indonesia state that pornography is strictly prohibited in public domain, sex and sexual related activities belong to the private domain. This research revealed an interesting fact that the established equivalent techniques used are mostly for translating sex and sex acts, or fore-playing activities, such as the phrase 'pushed his tongue inside' which was translated into '*mendorong lidahnya masuk*'. The data in sex and sex acts are not considered vulgar or taboo, so they were not necessarily disguised, covered or deleted. The classification of having sex and male/female organs on the other hand used modulation, generalization, reduction, and even deletion. The data are considered taboo and vulgar, so they were disguised, or deleted, because if they were translated by using established equivalent, the result would violate norms, values, laws and regulations, as stated in Lestari (2013) and (Lee & Ngai, 2012) that sexuality may not be revealed in public.

Lee & Ngai (2012) agreed that sex and activities related to sex should be private, so their existence in public should be 'disguised/hidden'. In translation, this is conducted through the application of translation techniques, as seen in the example of a phrase 'pulsing,

adolescent lust' which referred to the male sexual organ. The phrase was translated into '*benda asing yang berdenyut-denyut*' (back translation: a pulsating unfamiliar/strange thing). The techniques applied in this translation are established equivalent for 'pulsing', and discursive creation for 'adolescent lust'. The translator tried to avoid transferring the word 'lust' which was considered too vulgar, so he created a new phrase and changed it into something totally new and unrelated to sexual organ. In doing so, he still kept the suggestive relation to sex and highlighted the sexual inexperience of the female character.

## **E. Discussion**

After conducting a thorough analysis, the researcher found that Sandra Brown mostly described both male and female sexual organs in words. It means that in the level of words, the sexual languages cannot represent all classifications and sub classifications. Sexual languages in the level of words are very limited and specific; they are not able to reveal the eroticism in its multi-faceted face. The writer needed broader units of linguistics, such as phrases, clauses and sentences to be able to build a livelier context of eroticism.

This research is able to classify sexual languages in broader units of linguistics. Trent's research showed that most data are in words and phrases and they are classified into 'References to having sex, References to sex and sex acts, References to orgasm, dan References to male anatomy, References to female anatomy' (Trent, 2009). Another research also showed sexual languages in words and phrases (Utami et al., 2015), while Fattah's research classified sexual languages into sexual relations, private parts, dan sexual habits (Fattah, 2014). Based on the description, it can be seen that Trent should have described sexual languages into broader linguistics units, while Fattah's classification is too broad, it can be put into a more specific classification.

Based on the classification of sexual languages, EFL students can identify which words, phrases, clauses, and sentences should be handled with care. Even though students should learn a foreign language, it does not mean that they should adopt its culture without considering its appropriateness especially when it is not suitable with Indonesian culture. Teaching is educating and also building students' character, and character building is a pivotal issue not only about learning language but also about the face of nation which is facing so many problems lately, particularly about moral problems (Islami, 2016). This is also supported by Lie who believed that educators play a very important role in identity formation because students can be confused in facing different norms and values found in the two languages (Lie, 2017). When dealing with sexual languages, vulgar and taboo words, a teacher needs to emphasize Indonesian culture which will not allow the students to use them freely.

A research about teaching by using translation reveals that many intermediate or advanced students can avoid using mental translation from SL and think directly in English, while students in basic levels tend to translate word for word of English texts to learn English more quickly, and to lower their affective filter of learning a foreign language (Al-Musawi, 2014). That research underlines the usefulness of this analysis in helping students

understand vulgar and taboo words as well as sexual languages they encounter in their learning of foreign language. The translation proposed can function as filter to absorb the proper and/or improper words to study, since translation involves cultural mediation which plays an important role to communicate effectively (Leonardi, 2009).

## **F. Conclusion**

One prominent aspect in this research is due to the existence of cultural untranslatability cases in translating sensual languages that the translator chooses to delete some data which actually are not linguistically problematic. The cultural untranslatability cases cover translation of sexual intercourse description which is too explicit and details which may violate norms, religions, and laws when translated using the established equivalent or literal translation technique. According to the researcher, a translator should be able to use euphemism technique to deliver meanings well although it is less accurate. In facing cultural untranslatability cases, a translator frequently applies self-censorship that he/she tends to reduce or even delete the data.

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that students can benefit a lot from the translation of taboo and vulgar languages. They can make good use of the euphemism technique of translation which changes the tone from strong into a softer language. When they encounter sexual taboo words, they will learn how to soften them down, so they are not misled into producing and using harsh words which can violate the norms and values.

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