

Translation strategies for slang expressions in the novel *Eleanor & Park*

Naya Adluna¹

¹State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta
Jalan Ir. H. Djuanda Ciputat, Tangerang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify the strategies used in translating slang expressions based on their functions in the novel Eleanor & Park, ensuring that the translation maintains meaning equivalence. The corpus consists of the English and Indonesian versions of Eleanor & Park, a novel by Rainbow Rowell, first published in February 2013 by St. Martin's Press. This study employs a qualitative method, drawing on Elisa Mattiello's framework for slang expression types, Karolina Butkuvienė and Lolita Petrulionė's theories on slang translation strategies, and Peter Newmark's concept of meaning equivalence to achieve the research objectives. Data were collected through comprehensive reading and note-taking. The findings reveal that three slang translation strategies were applied in the translation process, with stylistic compensation being the most frequently used. Specifically, 10 instances of stylistic compensation, 3 instances of softening, and 2 instances of literal translation were identified. Additionally, the translator employed both semantic and communicative translation to achieve meaning equivalence. However, some translations failed to achieve any equivalent meaning, leading to a potential loss of the original intent. Ultimately, the study highlights the necessity of selecting appropriate slang translation strategies based on context, target audience, and the translator's approach to conveying meaning effectively.

Keywords: *slang translation, meaning equivalence, translation strategies, stylistic compensation, slang expressions, Eleanor & Park, literary translation*

INTRODUCTION

Translation is a method for converting an original written text (referred to as the source text) into an original written text (referred to as the target language) (Munday, 2001). In other word, translation is reproducing a source language's (SL) into a target language (TL). Translation contributes to understanding other languages, and it can be viewed from two different levels: first, as a process, and second, as a result. This shows that translation is also referred as a wide perspective study. This study views "sense" as a translator's involvement to not only reproducing the target language as in the first sense, but also to emphasize the second sense which can involve culture and experience (Hatim & Munday, 2004). Meanwhile, according to Tigana & Wahyuningsih (2022), the ability to assess the source language to fit precisely without sounding or appearing odd is also necessary for this. Activities involving translation are expanding quickly in the modern era. The fast development of technology and other civilizations has an influence on language usage. Currently, words from the normal language are not used as frequently as slangs. It could also encourage more linguists to do extensive research and use their findings to study slang.

Slang includes a variety of corpora, focuses, approaches, and concepts. Current study shows popularity on studying song lyrics and movie subtitles as a corpus in slang translation research. The qualitative method is used in both comparative and descriptive research. Two most popular interest areas in slang translation research are the categorization of slang and its translation techniques. Various theories such as from Patridge & Bloomfield (1954) as well as, Allan & Burridge (2006) are among the most used to categorize slangs. Either it is a formal language or vernacular language such as slangs, translators need to get the “sense” and go to the two processes of translation as both a process and result to produce a good translation, specifically in the case of slang translation.

According to Yinhua (2011), equivalence is a translation result which contains the maintenance of context and meaning of the original language. By paying attention to equivalence, the result can be coherent and maintain the original message that the source text intends to convey. One of the prominent theories about equivalence in translation is from Nida (1974) who stated that equivalence can be divided into two types, namely formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. The dynamic equivalence is the most suitable for slang translation. Dynamic equivalence is a result of translation technique which entails the “formal” substitution of a word or phrase from the SL to the TL (Nida, 1974; Hatim & Munday, 2004). It is also known as “structural correspondence”.

As a part of vernacular languages, slang expressions are often found in daily conversation. Therefore, it is easiest to find this kind of expression in a young-adult novel and hence, this study used a young-adult novel entitled “Eleanor & Park” written by Rainbow Rowell in 2012. The novel tells the story of two young people who are looking for their identity and in between they fell in love at the first sight. This novel is a best-selling young-adult novel in Indonesia. This study used this novel since various emotions and feelings of the characters are expressed by slangs and the data will be abundant for this study.

In the end, this study aims to explore the translation process in slang expressions by analyzing the strategies used. The analysis will be examined by using theories from Karolina Butkuvienė & Lolita Petrulionė regarding slang translation strategies. Furthermore, to find out how the strategies result in a proper equivalence, Peter Newmark’s equivalent theory will be used.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This part will explain similarities and difference between the present study and previous research. The similarities are found on the recurring theme of the previous research and present study, which is a slang analysis. On the other hand, the differences

are apparent in the research objectives. As the other previous study mostly focus on categorizing slangs and slangs on movies, this study identifies the slang expressions on young-adult novel by utilizing translation strategies, including evaluating the equivalence of slang expressions in the translation process.

SLANG TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

Main theories used in this study is translation strategies by Butkuvienė & Petrulionė (2010). According to them, there are three slang translation techniques used to help the translators to translate slangs. They are literal translation, stylistic compensation, and softening.

Literal Translation

Literal translation occurs when words from the source language (SL) are translated directly into the target language (TL). This process is also known as word-for-word translation. According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), literal translation is a straightforward conversion of the source text (ST) into the target text (TT) that is grammatically and idiomatically appropriate, with the translator's main responsibility being to ensure that the linguistic features of the ST are adhered to. However, literal translation is often used when the SL and TL languages are related or when the cultures are similar or closely aligned.

SL : This place like a hell!

TL : *Tempat ini seperti neraka!*

In this example, the translation employs a literal strategy. In the SL, the word "hell" doesn't refer to the literal afterlife meaning of "neraka" but carries a hidden, figurative meaning. The translator in the TL retains the literal meaning of "hell" to preserve the slang tone in the SL, allowing the reader to grasp the essence of the original message.

Stylistic Compensation

Harvey (1995) claims that stylistic compensation involves restoring the effect of the source text in the target text by using techniques specific to the target language. It is possible to use slang in the TT to create a similar effect to that of the ST. If this is not feasible, the translator can opt for an alternative solution. This strategy is often employed to address issues of translation loss and to produce an effect in the TT that mirrors the ST.

SL : I'll be late, it's raining cats and dogs

TL : *Aku akan sedikit terlambat, hujannya deras sekali*

The SL expression "raining cats and dogs" does not have a direct equivalent in the TL. Therefore, the translator preserves the effect and meaning by translating it as "*hujannya deras sekali*," which conveys the same idea of heavy rain, even though the original idiomatic expression does not have a close match in the TL.

Softening

The goal of softening is to make the target text more appealing and acceptable to the reader by using language that sounds natural and culturally appropriate. When slang terms have offensive connotations or when their direct translation would be inappropriate, the softening technique is used to reduce the harshness or vulgarity. In such cases, a different word with a more suitable connotation is chosen. This technique is particularly helpful when translating words like sex or profanity, which are often considered taboo in the target language.

SL : Shut up, bitch!

TL : *Diam kamu, Wanita penghibur!*

This example illustrates a softening strategy in which the harshness of the SL is reduced in the translation to the TL. The word "bitch," which literally means "*jalang*" in Indonesian, is softened by translating it as "*wanita penghibur*." While both terms have similar meanings, "*wanita penghibur*" is less offensive and avoids the vulgarity of "*jalang*."

TRANSLATION EQUIVALENCES

In terms of translation equivalence, it is often discussed in semantic versus communicative translation. Particularly when translation discusses about first sense as in the formality in the TL, and second sense in terms of cultural and social contexts in the TL. Semantic translation differs from *faithful translation* in that it places greater emphasis on the aesthetic value of the source language (SL) text—specifically, its natural flow and beauty. This approach allows for compromises in meaning where necessary to avoid disrupting assonance, wordplay, or repetition in the final translation. Additionally, semantic translation may render less culturally significant words using culturally neutral or functional terms rather than cultural equivalents. For instance, *une nonne repassant un corporal* may be translated as *a nun ironing a corporal cloth*. It may also make minor adjustments to accommodate the target audience.

The key distinction between *faithful* and *semantic* translation lies in their approach to fidelity. Faithful translation is rigid and uncompromising, whereas

semantic translation is more flexible, allowing for creative exceptions and the translator's intuitive empathy with the original text.

In semantic translation, one challenge is that serious imaginative literature is typically read by individuals rather than a broad readership. While the reader is not entirely disregarded, the translator's primary goal is to convey the effect the SL text has on them personally—to empathize with the author—rather than catering to an assumed audience. The more universal the text (e.g., *To be or not to be*), the easier it is to achieve an equivalent effect, as the themes transcend cultural boundaries. However, metalingual sound effects, which the translator seeks to reproduce, are unlikely to impact the target language (TL) reader in the same way due to differences in phonetic systems. Compensation may be possible, but ultimately, the reader's reaction is more individual than cultural or universal.

By contrast, communicative translation seeks to convey the precise contextual meaning of the original in a way that makes both content and language easily accessible and comprehensible to the readership. Because communicative translation is tailored to the reader's level of language and knowledge, it is more likely to achieve an equivalent effect than semantic translation, which operates at the writer's level. Additionally, a text written a hundred years ago may be more impactful for modern readers when translated, as the simplifications inherent in the translation process may make it more digestible than the original. This phenomenon is reflected in the idea of *unser (our) Shakespeare*, referring to how educated Germans once engaged with his works in translation.

Semantic and communicative translation handle certain linguistic elements in similar ways. Both approaches translate stock and dead metaphors, conventional collocations, technical terms, slang, colloquialisms, standard notices, phatic expressions, and ordinary language in a comparable manner. However, in expressive texts, unique syntactic structures, unusual collocations, metaphors, novel word usages, and neologisms are closely—if not literally—preserved. In contrast, in informative and vocative texts, such elements are typically normalized or toned down, except in cases such as striking advertisements.

Cultural elements are also treated differently depending on the type of text. In expressive texts, cultural references are generally left intact; in informative texts, they are retained but explained using culturally neutral terms; and in vocative texts, they are often replaced with cultural equivalents. If a passage is poorly written or contains factual or moral inaccuracies, semantic translation preserves these flaws while the translator may add a commentary if necessary. In communicative translation, however, such passages should be corrected.

Jean Delisle categorizes expressive texts as *sacred*, while informative and vocative texts are considered *anonymous*, as the author's identity is less significant. There are, of course, gray areas in this classification, as with any aspect of translation.

Equivalent effect is a crucial intuitive principle in translation, though it is difficult to test empirically. While formal research on this concept may not be practical, it is valuable in discussions—particularly in the realm of *skill* (as opposed to *truth*, *art*, or *taste*) in language. For instance, in translating *I haven't the foggiest idea* (*aucune idée*), which German equivalent would best capture the intended effect? *Keine blasse Ahnung*, *Nicht die geringste Ahnung*, or *Ich habe keinen blassen Schimmer davon*? Translation is ultimately a matter of interpretation rather than rigid rules. Too often, translations are treated as fixed "fair copies" or ideal models dictated by teachers. In reality, even a simple sentence like *The gorgeous girl walked gingerly through the closet* could be translated in a dozen different ways by a dozen different experts across various languages.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative assessment of translation strategies used in rendering slang expressions. It starts the analysis by analysing the translation of slang and evaluates the translation outcomes in *Eleanor & Park*, a novel by Rainbow Rowell.

Using a qualitative approach, this research aims to provide a rich and detailed understanding of the challenges involved in translating slang expressions. By analyzing a corpus of translated texts alongside the source text, this study seeks to offer a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the translation process, highlighting the difficulties translators face in achieving equivalence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides three samples that offer a comprehensive and nuance perspective on the translation process, highlighting the challenges translators face in achieving equivalence.

Datum 1

SL : Tomorrow he was going to bring Skinny Puppy or the Misfits. Or maybe he'd make a special bus tape with as much screaming and **wailing** on it as possible.

TL : *Besok dia akan membawa skinny puppy atau misfits. Atau mungkin dia akan membuat rekaman khusus untuk diputar diatas bus dengan lagu yang berisi sebanyak mungkin teriakan dan **jeritan**.*

Context : Park wants to bring a rock music tape to play on the school bus to drown out the voices of his classmates, whose conversations he finds irritating.

One morning, a boy named Park was on the school shuttle bus, feeling annoyed by the atmosphere. Steve and his friends were engaged in loud, nonsensical chatter, which frustrated him. Before getting his driver's license in November, he considered bringing a tape filled with rock music to play on the bus to block out their voices. To reduce the noise, Park also turned up the volume on his headphones.

In this context, Park is in a bad mood. Hearing Steve and his friends' chatter makes him feel even worse, so he contemplates playing loud rock music to drown them out. The phrase "*wailing*" literally derives from "*wail*," which means "to cry out loudly" or "*to express sorrow audibly*." However, in this passage, "*wailing*" is used in a slang sense to mean "screaming" or "*shrieking*," particularly in the context of rock music.

The translation of "*wailing*" as "*jeritan*" falls under **stylistic compensation**, a strategy that involves making adjustments in the target language (TL) to convey a similar effect as in the source language (SL). While "*wailing*" conveys a deep, sorrowful crying sound in English, "*jeritan*" (screams/shrieks) is more commonly associated with loud, high-pitched sounds in Indonesian, particularly in musical contexts. The translator's choice of "*jeritan*" instead of a more literal equivalent preserves the dramatic tone of the passage and ensures that the reader experiences the intended emotional intensity.

From the perspective of **semantic translation**, the translator prioritizes capturing the nuances, emotions, and stylistic elements of the original text rather than adhering strictly to a literal translation. This approach allows for slight modifications to preserve the aesthetic and emotional impact of the passage. For example, proper nouns such as the band names "*Skinny Puppy*" and "*Misfits*" remain unchanged, as they carry cultural significance. Additionally, the terms "*screaming*" and "*wailing*" are translated in a way that maintains the raw intensity of the original text, ensuring that the emotional weight of the passage remains intact.

Overall, the translation in **Datum 1** demonstrates **equivalence** between the SL and TL. While the core meaning is successfully conveyed, certain nuances—particularly in the translation of "*wailing*"—reflect the translator's adaptation to ensure cultural and emotional resonance for the target audience.

Datum 2

SL : The girl started moving toward the back of the bus. Right into the belly of the beast. God, Park thought, stop. Turn around. He could feel Steve and Mikey licking their **chops** as she got closer. He tried again to look away.

TL : *Gadis itu mulai berjalan menuju bagian belakang bus. Tepat masuk ke dalam perut Binatang buas. Tuhan, pikir Park, berhentilah. Berbalik. Dia bisa merasakan Steve dan Mikey menantikan saat-saat itu dengan **senang hati** begitu gadis itu berjalan mendekat. Park mencoba lagi untuk berpaling.*

Context : The scene takes place on a school bus, where Eleanor, a new student, is looking for a seat. At the start of the school year, students already have their assigned seats, and no one wants to share, especially with someone new and different-looking like Eleanor.

Eleanor stands out. She isn't just new—she is big and awkward, with wild red hair and an unconventional style. She wears a plaid men's shirt, multiple necklaces, and scarves wrapped around her wrists, creating an eccentric look. To Park, she resembles a scarecrow or one of the troubled dolls his mother keeps on her dresser—something fragile, unlikely to survive in a harsh environment.

This passage reflects Park's anxiety and apprehension as he anticipates the hostile reception Eleanor might receive from Steve and Mikey. The phrase "*right into the belly of the beast*" is a **metaphor** emphasizing that Eleanor is walking into a difficult or dangerous situation. Meanwhile, "*licking their chops*" is an **idiomatic expression** that conveys eager anticipation, often with a predatory connotation.

In the target language (TL), "*right into the belly of the beast*" is translated as "*tepat masuk ke dalam perut Binatang buas.*" The translator retains the metaphor, likely because it is understandable in both languages. However, the phrase "*licking their chops*" is translated as "*menantikan saat-saat itu dengan senang hati,*" which shifts the predatory nuance into a more neutral expression of anticipation. While this translation removes some of the original intensity, it remains within the realm of **communicative equivalence**, making the text more accessible to the target audience.

This shift can be categorized as **stylistic compensation**, where the translator modifies an expression to maintain fluency and acceptability in the target language. The choice of "*senang hati*" gives a less threatening tone, shifting the focus from a predatory image to a more general sense of eagerness. This may reflect cultural considerations, ensuring the passage remains natural and engaging for readers while minimizing potentially unsettling imagery.

In this communicative translation, the metaphor "*belly of the beast*" is preserved in the TL, maintaining its impact. However, "*licking their chops*" is softened to "*getting more excited,*" making the connotation less aggressive while still conveying anticipation. Despite these modifications, the translation maintains the urgency of the scene and Park's internal struggle through carefully chosen words. The adjustments

balance fidelity to the original text with readability, ensuring the emotional stakes remain clear and impactful.

The translation of Datum 2 demonstrates equivalence, successfully retaining the core meaning while adapting the tone and imagery to align with cultural and linguistic norms in the target language.

Datum 3

SL : “Hey,” Tina said “**Bozo**,” Steve started laughing. His friends fell in a few seconds behind him. “You can’t sit there,” Tina said. “That’s Mikayla’s seat.”

TL : “Hei.” kata Tina “*badut*,” Steve mulai tertawa. Teman-temannya ikut tertawa beberapa detik setelahnya. “Kau tidak boleh duduk disitu,” kata Tina. “Itu kursi Mikayla.”

Context : This scene takes place on the school bus, where Eleanor is searching for a seat. Since her arrival, she has been a frequent target of bullying. Despite the torment, she chooses not to tell her mother about what happens at school.

Tina, Steve’s girlfriend, is well known among the students, and it is widely acknowledged that Steve and his friends are notorious for bullying. As Eleanor looks for a seat, she spots an empty one across from Park. Feeling relieved, she rushes toward it.

However, Tina suddenly exclaims, “Hey.” Eleanor ignores her and keeps walking, but Tina calls out again, “Hey,” followed by, “Bozo.” At this, Steve and his friends burst into laughter, mocking Eleanor. Tina continues to berate her, insisting that she cannot sit there because it belongs to Mikayla. At that moment, the bus driver, frustrated with the commotion, yells from the front, telling Eleanor to sit down so the bus can start moving. He then turns to Tina and tells her to stop, but Tina dismisses him, acting as if it is none of his business.

The dialogue in this scene highlights the hostile and bullying behavior that Eleanor faces from Tina, Steve, and their group. The use of “Bozo”, a slang term meaning clown or someone foolish, is meant to humiliate Eleanor in front of the other students. Steve’s laughter, along with that of his friends, reinforces the group’s collective bullying behavior.

In English, “Bozo” is a slang insult used to describe someone as stupid or ridiculous, drawing from the image of a clown—often perceived as silly or laughable. The Indonesian equivalent, “Badut”, carries a similar meaning, referring to a clown figure known for acting foolish to entertain others.

In this case, the translation is fairly direct, preserving the core meaning of the insult. Since “*badut*” conveys the same derisive nuance in the target language, this can be categorized as **Literal Translation**—where the translator maintains the original term’s meaning without altering the context or tone.

In this **communicative translation**, “*Bozo*” is replaced with “*Badut*” to retain the mocking tone while ensuring that the insult remains familiar and understandable to the Indonesian audience. This strategy helps preserve the informal and demeaning nature of the dialogue while making it more accessible to readers.

Additionally, Tina’s command and explanation about the seat are translated in a clear and straightforward manner, ensuring that the tension of the scene is effectively conveyed. While the playful yet cruel tone of the original text is maintained, the language has been slightly adjusted to enhance readability and relatability, ensuring that Indonesian readers can fully grasp the social dynamics at play.

Overall, the translation of Datum 3 demonstrates **equivalence**, successfully maintaining both meaning and tone through a mix of literal and communicative translation strategies. The choice to translate “*Bozo*” as “*Badut*” ensures cultural relevance while preserving the emotional and narrative impact of the scene.

CONCLUSION

In the translation process, it is essential for the translator to accurately convey the meaning of the source language (SL) into the target language (TL), considering both semantic and pragmatic aspects, as outlined in Eugene Nida’s systematic approach. Nida emphasizes the importance of analyzing the deep structure of the SL before transferring and restructuring it in the TL, following the three stages of analysis, transfer, and restructuring.

Slang, a distinct and dynamic form of language often used within specific social groups, presents unique challenges in translation due to its informal, expressive, and context-dependent nature. Translating slang effectively requires various strategies, including literal translation, stylistic compensation, and softening, to balance meaning accuracy while preserving cultural context.

Furthermore, achieving translation equivalence, as discussed by Peter Newmark, involves striking a balance between semantic translation (which focuses on retaining meaning) and communicative translation (which prioritizes readability and naturalness in the TL). The translator must carefully navigate between fidelity to the source text and producing a natural, culturally relevant translation that resonates with the target audience.

In conclusion, this study classified slang expressions based on the collected data, analyzed the translation strategies applied, and examined how the translator achieved meaning equivalence. The findings provide valuable insights into the translator's approach to conveying the nuances of slang, highlighting both the challenges and the methods used to ensure accurate and culturally appropriate translations. These examples illustrate broader translation trends in handling informal language, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities of slang translation.

REFERENCES

- Allan, K., & Burridge, K. (2006). *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Butkuvienė, K., & Petrulionė, L. (2010). *Translation Peculiarities of Slang*. *Studies About Languages*, 16.
- Finegan, E., & Rickford, J. (2004). *Language in the USA: Themes for the twenty-first century*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hatim, B., & Munday, J. (2004). *Translation: An Advanced Resource Book* (First Edition). Routledge.
- House, J. (2015). *Translation Quality Assessment Past and Present*. Routledge
- Inriani, A., & Lubis, S. (2021). The Translation of Slang Words in 'To All the Boys I've Loved Before' Movie". *Journal of English Language Pedagogy*, 6(2), 10-19.
- Matiello, E. (2008). *An Introduction to English Slang* (Vol.02). Polimetrica.
- Munday, J. (2001). *Introducing Translation Studies* (First Edition). Routledge.
- Munday, J. (2016). *Introducing Translation Studies* (Fourth Edition). Routledge.
- Nida, A. E. (1974). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: Brill for United Bible Societies.
- Patridge, E. (1954). *Slang To-Day and Yesterday*. Lund Humphries.
- Reza, M., & Ezzati, A. (2022). *Investigating translation quality assessment on movie subtitling: Overt and Covert analysis based on House's TQA model*. *Rumeli De Dil ve Edebiyat Arastirmalari Dergisi*.
- Stenstrom, A.-B., & Jargensen, A. (2009). *Youngspeak in a Multilingual Perspective* (A. Fetzer, Ed.; Vol. 184). John Benjamins Publishing Company
- Tigana, R., & Wahyuningsih, S. (2022). "A Translation Analysis of the Slang Words in the Master of None: Season 1 Tv Series Subtitles from English to Indonesia". *Journal Bahasa Asing LIA*, 03(01).
- Yinhua, Xiang. "Equivalence in Translation: Features and Necessity". *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 1, No. 10 (2011): 169.
- Selviana. (2021). *An Analysis of Slang Words Used in "Toy Story 4" Movie Script*. State Islamic University Raden Intan Lampung.
- POOC. (2021, November 23). *Arti Kecep Bahasa Gaul Serta Contohnya*. POOC. Org. <https://www.pooc.org/kecep-artinya/>

- Yuniarti, U. (2008). *An Analysis of Slang Language in “Malibu’s Most Wanted” Movie*. State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah.
- Wang, L. (2020). Analysis of the characteristics and Translation Skills of American Slang in the Big Bang Theory. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 10(10), 1248. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1010.09>
- Sinaga, Y. K., Herman, H., & Tannuary, A. (2022). Discovering the Pattern of Pop Song Artist’s Word Formation Processes for Slangs. *Elysa : Journal of English Language Studies*, 4(2), 157-167. <https://doi.org/10.31849/elsya.v4i2.6337>
- Spears, R. A., & NTC Publishing Group. (2000). NTC’S dictionary of American slang and colloquial expressions. NTC Pub. Group.