

## ULASAN BUKU/BOOK REVIEW

*Bahasa Cina Bahasa Melayu: Kebolehterjemahan Budaya* by Goh Sang Seong.  
Pulau Pinang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2012, ix + 226 pp.

Studies on the translation of English to Malay have received considerable attention from Southeast Asian scholars. Among others, Asmah (1979), Ainon (1991), Tham (1990) published lengthy discussions on the subject. In comparison, studies on the translation of Mandarin to Malay are less robust. This book provides a timely explanation on techniques of translating linguistic-specific terms and cultural-specific references in Chinese into Malay.

The title of the book may be glossed as *Cultural Translatability from Mandarin to Malay*. The book is divided into four chapters preceded by a preface and a list containing abbreviations and symbols found in the text. There are two lists complementing the discussion at the end of the text, namely a bibliographic record and an index of terms and surnames.

Against the belief that direct translation of cultural references from one language to another is impossible due to the semantic and syntactic discrepancies of two distinct speech communities, the author illustrates that mediating culture between languages is possible by adopting sound techniques of translation. The relevant strategies in mapping cultural-specific references in Mandarin (tonal language) to Malay (agglutinating language) are indeed the strength of this book.

In the first chapter, the author surveys the development of translation from Mandarin to Malay in Malaysia. Mandarin-to-Malay translation had begun since 1889 and interestingly enough, the Malay variety at that time was Bazaar Malay. The target audience for the translated works was immigrant Chinese who had married the local Malays who are also known as the *Baba Peranakan*. The author reports that popular Chinese fictions, with themes associated with the fantasy world, history of Chinese kingdoms, romance, and sword fighting duals, are common resources for translation. In his survey, the author introduces the notion of isomorph (*isomorf*) referring to the translatability of any term of reference of the source language with a term of reference of the target language arriving at mutual intelligibility. Ideally, a translator is required to produce a natural understanding of the source reference through the target language via a selection of translating processes to attain isomorphic translation, as it were.

In Chapter Two, data derived from the classical Mandarin text *Yi Bai Er Shi Hui De Shui Hu I-II* (Shi, 1969) and the Malay translation *Hikayat Pinggir Air* (Lim, 2001) are compared and evaluated in terms of translatability. A total of 1228 cultural-specific phrases in Mandarin are scrutinised in the analysis. These data are classified into ecological culture terms, material cultural terms, social cultural terms, organisational-custom-activity-procedure-conceptual cultural terms, and symbolic and practical cultural terms. The translation of a social

cultural Mandarin term such as *jin fa ren* [净发人], for example, as *tukang cukur* in Malay is deemed accurate according to the author. By invoking a componential analysis framework, the author claims that *tukang cukur* corresponds to the source reference aptly in terms of semantics.

Offering a second thought, the reviewer finds *tukang cukur* less specific as *tukang cukur* denotes a person who is skillful in shaving. The term may refer to a barber who is skillful in shaving the moustache or beard. However, the Mandarin term 净发人 refers to a person who handles the hair on the head as indicated by the second Chinese character, i.e., hair. It is more apt to add the word *kepala* (head) to *tukang cukur*, i.e., *tukang cukur kepala* (a person who is skillful in shaving one's head). In other words, it is important for a translator to differentiate *tukang cukur* (a person who is skillful in shaving including the face as it is the case of Indian barbers) from *tukang cukur kepala* (a person who is skillful in head shaving), and select the latter as the better counterpart in translating the Mandarin term.

The focus of Chapter Three is on the techniques of translation that are applicable to the data identified in Chapter Two. The range of translation techniques are based on the various strategies of translation outlined in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (1998). There are eleven strategies mentioned in this chapter, namely literal translation, synonym, explanation, functional transfer, loan translating, addition, loan word, transliteration, footnote, couplet and triplet (p. 150). The author finds the functional transfer technique to 雌雄宝剑 resulting in *dua bilah pedang sakti* (two magical swords) in Malay. This is an example of under-translation not least important details of these two magical swords including the origins and identities of the sword makers (the swords are symbolically associated with a married couple in the ancient time) are excluded. A footnote providing the historical link in the Malay translation is recommended as a cognitive aid (p. 168).

In the concluding remarks of Chapter Four, the author informs that translating specific terms in Mandarin requires a global perspective on the translator's part. Adhering to a global standpoint would ensure a better translation of each cultural-specific reference that oscillates between the high and low degrees of translatability. The nitty-gritty of technical evaluations in translating Chinese cultural terms and Mandarin syntactic structures to Malay, tabled in the text, are not highlighted in this review. Suffice it to say that readers of this book will be more critical in selecting certain translating techniques in the course of mediating Mandarin cultural-specific terms into the Malay counterparts.

## REFERENCES

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