

The back translation from connotative into denotative words and phrases: English-Indonesian translation

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Abstract - This study investigates the use of connotative words and phrases in the novel *Raumanen* and aims to translate them into their denotative equivalents. It further examines whether the translated (target) text retains the original meaning of the source text. Data were collected from the novel *Raumanen*, and the research employed a descriptive qualitative method. The steps included: (a) identifying connotative words and phrases in the source language, (b) re-translating them using denotative expressions, and (c) comparing the meanings between the original translator's version and the researchers' re-translation. The findings indicate that translating connotative expressions into denotative language often results in unnatural phrasing and ambiguous meaning in the target text.

Keywords: Connotative Meaning, Denotative Meaning, Translation

1. Introduction

Translation is defined as the process of converting the meaning of a written message from one language to another. Translation is commonly understood as transferring meaning from one language to another, with the resulting text typically expected to maintain equivalence with the original. Beyond this basic definition, translation also involves deriving a target text from a source—whether verbal or non-verbal—producing a new expression in a different language, medium, or semiotic system, while preserving a relevant similarity shaped by the intended purpose or *skopos* of the translation (Li, 2024); (Dam & Zethsen, 2024). It involves a clear and accurate rendering of content from one language into another, maintaining the essence of the original message (Iordan, 2021). Translation is a process of transferring meaning from one language (source language) to another language known as the target language (Catford, 1965); (Newmark P. , 1988). Translation can be defined as reproducing words, phrases, or sentences in the TL to convey the message of the SL. In doing translation, we convert the meaning of a written message (text) from one language to another. The translator should not only focus on the proper grammatical structure, but the main focus when translating text is the understanding of the readers who will see the text, so that they can understand exactly the message as in the SL (Nida & Taber, 1974). Translation should be as natural as possible; therefore, the best translation shouldn't sound like a translation. The book titled *Meaning-Based Translation*, provided a diagram regarding the process of translation. There are three steps in the translation process. Firstly, the translator should discover the meaning of the SL text. In other words, the translator analyzes it to gain an understanding from the perspective of semantics. Secondly, the translator transfers the meaning from SL to TL by choosing proper words so that the message is well conveyed. After that, the translation is reconstructed to the appropriate lexicon and grammar in the TL and its culture. Finally, the translation is done with a good result (Larson, 1984).

Translation Studies is an international, interdisciplinary academic field concerned with the theory and practice of translation and interpreting. It encompasses theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical approaches to develop principles to explain and anticipate the linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and ideological dynamics involved in translation across diverse sociocultural contexts. Originating from linguistics and comparative literature, the discipline has expanded to explore translation processes, outcomes, and agents through various cultural, historical, and social lenses, drawing on methods from multiple research fields (Oxford Bibliographies, 2021).

The role of translation in global communication is pivotal in fostering cross-cultural understanding by bridging linguistic and cultural divides. Translation is a fundamental pillar of global diplomacy and international relations, facilitating communication, resolving conflicts, and promoting mutual understanding across linguistic and cultural divides (Shahmerdanova, 2025). Similarly, Fois examines how translation in English Language Teaching (ELT) supports the development of intercultural competence, enhancing communicative skills and cultural awareness among language learners (Fois, 2020). Adil explores translation's role in communicative language teaching, noting its effectiveness in developing students' communicative abilities when tailored to proficiency levels (Adil, 2020). The advent of digital platforms has further transformed translation by facilitating multilingual communication and cross-cultural exchange, although challenges such as machine translation and social media have emerged (Achilov & Sodikova, 2024).

To maintain the translation result sounds natural, a translator has to understand well both language structures, the source language text structure, and the target text structure. The change in the structure is mostly well-known as a shifting in translation (Ondok & Tambunsaribu, 2020). To retain the same meaning between the source text and the target text, a translator also has to comprehend the kind of text or the field of study of the text (Tambunsaribu, 2020). For example, a science study text is very different from a social studies text. In translating different kinds of text, a translator uses different techniques in the translation process. Tambunsaribu stated that in translating a Psychology textbook, he encountered several difficulties in finding the equivalent words in Bahasa Indonesia as his first language. Since it is hard for some people to understand other languages, they need the translation of any text they are reading to fulfill their understand of the foreign language text (Tambunsaribu G. , 2023). Some text sometimes contains idioms and figurative language, such as personification and metaphors, which are hard to understand if someone translates them literally (Sitanggang & Tambunsaribu, 2023). For instance, idioms cannot be translated literally because they have their whole meaning, not based on word-for-word translation. If we translate an idiom word-for-word, the target text will have an ambiguous meaning, or the meaning of the source text will be distorted in the target text (Galingging & Tambunsaribu, 2021). According to Newmark, semantic translation is employed as a way to translate a text in its connotations

to be more complex and detailed. From the point of view of linguistics and translation, semantic translation tends to transfer the meaning to convey an informative message (Newmark, 1981).

The different structure between the source language text (SLT) and the target language text (TLT) requires a translator to try as best he can to retain the best translation results. Thus, all the best efforts must be made by a translator to make sure that the target text does not sound unnatural because they tend to translate literally (without changing the structure of the target text), which leads to a misunderstanding of the text readers. According to (Munday, Pinto, & Blakesley, 2022), a translation shift is a linguistic change occurring in the translation of the source text to the target text. Catford introduced a translation shift, and he divided translation shift into two categories, namely level shift and category shift (Catford, 1965). A word or phrase may have more than one meaning. The actual meaning is called the denotative meaning, and the secondary meaning is called the connotative meaning. His study aims to help readers understand how semantic translation works in differentiating the translation of connotative meaning and the translation of denotative meaning. According to Leech, there are seven types of meanings. They are denotative meaning, connotative meaning, stylistic meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, and in the background, the authors need to argue collocative meaning and thematic meaning. Because of limitations, the researchers only analyze two meanings, which are denotative and connotative. Denotative meaning, which can be called conceptual meaning, is the exact meaning that is what people know in general because it refers to the first meaning. Connotative meaning is the meaning that impacts the readers because connotative meaning has an implied meaning that can be interpreted differently by every individual (Leech, 1981). Newmark stated that the semantic translation approach tends to make the meaning of a text more specific (Newmark, 1981). It helps the reader to understand the primary meaning rather than other kinds of meanings. As the research attempts to find a denotative meaning from the English version of *Raumanen*, which contains a connotative meaning, the researchers employed the semantic translation theory to find out the denotative meaning. In this research, the researchers want to present the translation result from connotative into denotative words and phrases. The researchers want the readers to see whether the translation result (the target text) still contains the same meaning as the source text.

There are many benefits in analyzing the translation of literary works such as novels and poems. The translators will have the importance of a holistic approach in analyzing novel translations, considering factors such as genetic, objective, and affective aspects. By examining the equivalence of meaning and style, translators can enhance their understanding of translation quality and its impact on readers (Masduki, 2020). The readers will find some challenges faced by translators when rendering novels, particularly issues related to figurative language and idiomatic expressions (Hartono, 2017). The readers will know the role of translation in bridging cultural gaps and promoting mutual understanding, emphasizing its importance in global discourse (Wang, 2020). The readers will know that both extratextual and intertextual factors aid translators in comprehending the source text's nuances. The readers will understand why it is crucial for producing accurate and culturally appropriate translations, thereby enhancing the reader's experience (Seresová & Breveníková, 2019). The translators will have some techniques that can enhance the translation's accuracy and readability, providing insights into effective translation practices (Poyungi, Nababan, & Santosa, 2021).

There are some reasons why this novel is a well-known and one of the best novels to read for readers. First, *Raumanen* is recognized as one of the finest literary works of 1975 by an Indonesian female author. The novel tells the story of a woman who becomes a victim of patriarchy, cultural expectations, and rigid social norms. Set in the early years of Indonesia's independence, it follows *Raumanen*, a law student and activist, who becomes emotionally involved with Monang—a man deeply bound by traditional values. Second, *Raumanen* is not merely a romance novel but a literary work that addresses issues of ethnicity, religion, and identity. The novel delves into the complexities of love and societal expectations, providing a nuanced portrayal of the challenges faced by the characters. *Raumanen* is a narrative novel that tells the readers about a brave and beautiful Minahasa woman who succumbs to Hamonangan, a Batak man known for his charm and eloquence. Third, this novel contained the issues of race and ethnicity that were prevalent in the 1970s and continue to persist in Indonesia. The novel addresses themes of free association and the consequences of cultural and familial expectations, which remain relevant today. Fourth, the *Raumanen* portrayed the archetypal Sumatra man from the 1960s. It provided a fresh perspective on norms, customs, and male cowardice. The novel depicted the relationships mirror those of the previous generation, offering a glimpse into the societal dynamics of that era in Indonesia.

In conclusion, *Raumanen* stands out as one of the most compelling and enduring novels in Indonesian literature due to its rich exploration of social, cultural, and gender issues. Through its

portrayal of a strong female protagonist and her struggles within a patriarchal society, the novel captures the complexities of love, identity, and tradition. Its themes of ethnicity, religion, and societal expectations remain deeply relevant to contemporary readers, offering both historical insight and emotional depth. The novel's multifaceted narrative and bold social commentary continue to resonate across generations, making *Raumanen* a powerful and essential read.

As the researchers mentioned in the background of the study, the research problems are a) what are the English connotative words and phrases found in *Raumanen*? and b) what is the effect on the translation result if the connotative words and phrases of the source language text (English) are translated using denotative words and phrases in the target text (Indonesian)? Due to the problems mentioned above, this research has two main purposes, namely a) to find out the English connotative words and phrases that the translator of *Raumanen* novel chose to use in his translation; and b) to find out whether the translation result (the target text) still contains the same meaning as the source text after the researchers translated the connotative into denotative words and phrases in the target text. This research is intended to enrich the readers' knowledge about denotative and connotative words and phrases used in the translation of a novel entitled *Raumanen*. For the students majoring in the translation field, this research is beneficial in enriching their knowledge on how to translate literary work using connotative words or phrases to attract the readers' interest. This research also gives deeper knowledge for translators to have better choices whether to choose connotative meaning or denotative meaning while they are translating any kind of literary work. The researchers analyzed the words and phrases containing connotative meaning in the *Raumanen* English version and transferred the connotative meaning into denotative meaning in Indonesian as the target text. *Raumanen* was written by Marianne Kantoppo, an Indonesian novelist. The novel talks about a Manado girl and a Batak guy who fall in love with each other, but the guy's parents do not support their relationship. This novel is translated from Indonesian into English by Isla Winarto. She is an Australian who graduated from the University of Sydney, majoring in Indonesian language and literature (Katoppo, 2015).

Back translation is a crucial quality assurance method in translation, offering numerous benefits that enhance the accuracy and effectiveness of the translation process. It helps ensure the translated text reflects the original meaning by identifying discrepancies, which is especially important in legal and medical translations (Salourou, 2024). A high-quality translation is one in which the message embodied in the source text is transferred completely into the target text, including denotation, connotation, nuance, and style, and the target text is written in the target language using correct grammar and word order, to produce a culturally appropriate text that, in most cases, reads as if originally written by a native speaker of the target language for readers in the target culture (Koby, Fields, Hague, Lommel, & Melby, 2014). Additionally, it validates the cultural appropriateness of the translation and ensures that cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions are preserved. Back translation also uncovers ambiguities, involves monolingual stakeholders in the validation process, and generates documentation for legal and regulatory compliance (Stoltz). Furthermore, it supports the evaluation of creative translations, enhances collaboration among translators, and mitigates risks in sensitive content. back translation is "a commonly used quality assessment tool in cross cultural research," involving (a) translating the original into the target language, (b) translating that version back into the source language, and (c) comparing back-translation with the original to ensure no discrepancies, as accuracy in the back translation reflects the quality of the forward translation (Coline et al., 2016).

2. Method

The present study employed a descriptive qualitative method, which emphasizes the analysis of textual data to explore meaning without relying on numerical representation (Creswell, 1994). The source of the data was the bilingual versions (Indonesian and English) of the novel *Raumanen*, with the Indonesian version serving as the source text (SL) and the English translation by Isla Winarto as the target text (TL1). Additionally, a back-translation conducted by the researchers (TL2) was used for comparison. To collect the data, the researchers systematically selected 34 Indonesian words and phrases from the original novel that contained connotative meanings. These were then compared to their English translations in TL1 and further translated into denotative meanings by the researchers themselves in TL2. The data analysis involved a comparative semantic analysis between the SL, TL1, and TL2, focusing on how connotative expressions were rendered in the English version and how the literal, denotative back-translations influenced meaning. Through this process, the study revealed that while the original translator maintained connotative richness, the researchers' denotative back-translations often led to awkward or ambiguous meanings, highlighting the importance of semantic equivalence and cultural

nuance in literary translation. The researchers focused on identifying and interpreting connotative and denotative meanings of words and phrases found in the English translation of the Indonesian novel *Raumanen*. Data were collected from the original novel and analyzed through three main steps: selecting Indonesian words and phrases with connotative meanings, comparing them with their English equivalents, and translating them into their denotative meanings for comparison. This study specifically examines only two types of meanings—connotative and denotative—excluding other semantic categories such as stylistic, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic meanings (Leech, 1981). Unlike previous studies by Hartina (Hartina, 2017) and Novitasari (Novitasari, 2018), which also analyzed connotative and denotative meanings but did not incorporate back-translation, this research includes a back-translation component to highlight shifts in meaning and naturalness between translations. The denotative translations were carried out by the researchers themselves to better analyze the semantic differences and translation effects.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

There are 34 Indonesian words and phrases containing connotations found in the original novel (Bahasa Indonesia). No translation words or phrases use denotative meaning in the translation version (English). In the *Raumanen* English version translated by Isla Winarto, the 34 words and phrases containing connotative were translated into connotative meaning. Below, the researchers will explain the 15 points containing connotations in the English version (translated by Isla Winarto), and it also shows the denotative meaning in the back translation (translated by the researchers).

Table 1. Data Containing Connotative Meaning and its Back-Translation into Denotative Meaning

No.	SL (Indonesian)	TL (English) Translated by Isla Winarto	TL (English) Translated by the Researchers
1	<i>Tugas apa yang akan diberikannya kepada pemuda yang berdiri di mukanya?</i> (Chapter 32/ Paragraph 2/ Line 8)	What task would she set for the young student standing in front of her? (Chapter 24/ Paragraph 6/ Line 21)	What task would she set for the young student standing on her face?
2	<i>Dan ia agak kesal karena gadis yang berkulit langsep itu begitu mahal dengan tanda tangannya.</i> (Chapter 33/ Paragraph 1/ Line 2)	And he was annoyed as it had been very difficult to obtain the signature of this fair-skinned young woman. (Chapter 25/ Paragraph 4/ Line 16)	And he was annoyed as this fair-skinned young woman and her expensive signature.
3	<i>Orang Tuamu begitu luas pandangannya, begitu lapang hatinya.</i> (Chapter 39/ Paragraph 1/ Line 8)	Your parents are so broad-minded and so open-hearted. (Chapter 30/ Paragraph 3/ Line 11)	Your parents are so broad-sighted and so open-hearted.
4	<i>Aku merasa mendapat durian runtuh.</i> (Chapter 40 / Paragraph 2/ Line 9)	I thought I'd struck the jackpot. (Chapter 31/ Paragraph 2/ Line 4)	I thought I'd get a fallen durian.
5	<i>Dan dalam hati kecilnya hingga kini selalu dibanggakannya bahwa ia, Raumanen Rumokoi, luput menjadi mangsa dari keliaran Monang itu.</i> (Chapter 42/ Paragraph 1/ Line 2)	And deep within her, she had felt a sense of pride that she, <i>Raumanen</i> Rumokoi, had managed to avoid becoming a prey of Monang's wild ways. (Chapter 32/ Paragraph 3/ Line 15)	And inside her tiny heart, she had felt a sense of pride that she, <i>Raumanen</i> Rumokoi, had managed to avoid becoming prey of Monang's wild ways.
6	<i>Direbahkannya rajanya.</i> (Chapter 43/ Paragraph 1/ Line 2)	He knocked his king down. (Chapter 33/ Paragraph 4/ Line 13)	He laid his king down.

7	<i>Zaman sekarang seorang wanita sebaiknya dapat berdiri sendiri.</i> (Chapter 43/ Paragraph 2/ Line 7)	These days women should be independent. (Chapter 33/ Paragraph 5/ Line 18)	These days, women should stand alone.
8	<i>Kalau tidak tunduk pada hukum adat, mereka takkan dianggap.</i> (Chapter 44/ Paragraph 3/ Line 13)	If they did not adhere to customary law, they would be considered outcasts. (Chapter 34/ Paragraph 7/ Line 28)	If they did not bend down to customary law, they would be considered outcasts.
9	<i>Namun, Manen, yang memang selalu senang menghadiri pesta-pesta itu, tak pernah berdansa.</i> (Chapter 52/ Paragraph 1/ Line 3)	But Manen, who'd always liked going to those parties, never danced. (Chapter 40/ Paragraph 1/ Line 3)	But Manen, who was always happy going to those parties, never danced.
10	<i>Akan tetapi, kadang-kadang Manen terpaksa menelan perkataannya yang begitu gegabah.</i> (Chapter 53/ Paragraph 8/ Line 26)	Occasionally, however, Manen had to eat her rash words. (Chapter 41/ Paragraph 4/ Line 11)	Occasionally, however, Manen had to swallow her rash words.
11	<i>Keke, pacarmu itu sudah sinting!</i> (Chapter 54/ Paragraph 2/ Line 7)	Keke, your boyfriend's mad! (Chapter 41/ Paragraph 5/ Line 17)	Keke, your boyfriend's crazy!
12	<i>Sedangkan si tolol yang baru pulang dari Rusia rupanya lupa daratan ketika dibawanya Ewa ke Pantai Merak pada bulan purnama.</i> (Chapter 59/ Paragraph 5/ Line 17)	That stupid guy who'd just returned from Rusia lost his sense when he took Ewa to Merak beach during the full moon. (Chapter 45/ Paragraph 6/ Line 24)	That stupid guy who'd just returned from Rusia forgot the land when he took Ewa to Merak beach during the full moon
13	<i>Sebetulnya Manen menjadi mangsa yang begitu empuk bagi Monang.</i> (Chapter 60/ Paragraph 1/ Line 1)	Manen was actually easy prey for Monang. (Chapter 46/ Paragraph 1/ Line 1)	Manen was soft prey for Monang.
14	<i>Tempo apa tanggal mainnya?</i> (Chapter 63/ Paragraph 4/ Line 22)	So when's the big day? (Chapter 48/ Paragraph 6/ Line 25)	So, when's the date to play?
15	<i>Adik-adik Monang, Miri dan Ria, mengawasi semua itu dengan mata besar, heran.</i> (Chapter 64/ Paragraph 2/ Line 4)	Monang's sisters, Miri and Ria, watch this scene, bright-eyed with amazement. (Chapter 48/ Paragraph 8/ Line 28)	Monang's sisters, Miri and Ria, watch this scene, big-eyed with amazement.

The data presented in this study highlights the nuanced use of connotative language in *Raumanen* and the complexities involved in translating such expressions. The analysis reveals that the English version translated by Isla Winarto maintains the connotative meanings from the original Indonesian text, demonstrating a deliberate effort to preserve the novel's emotive and cultural depth. However, the back-translations into denotative meanings conducted by the researchers show how the literal interpretation of these expressions can lead to awkward, ambiguous, or less impactful renderings. This comparison underscores the importance of understanding cultural context and figurative language in literary translation, reinforcing the idea that a faithful translation goes beyond linguistic accuracy to convey tone, emotion, and intent. Ultimately, the findings illustrate that analyzing the translation of connotative expressions is essential in evaluating the quality and effectiveness of literary translations.

Here is the analysis of the fifteen data points above.

Data 1

SL: "Tugas apa yang akan diberikannya kepada pemuda yang berdiri *di mukanya*?"

TL1 (Connotation): "What task would she set for the young student standing **in front of her**?"

TL2 (Denotation): "What task would she set for the young student standing **on her face**?"

The phrase '*di mukanya*' contains a connotative meaning, which is 'in front of.' It's because the speaker talked about someone who was standing in front of her and would get a task. For that reason, the English translation of '*di mukanya*' is 'in front of her.' The phrase '*di mukanya*' has a denotative meaning, which is 'on someone's face' in English. The preposition *on* shows that something is on top of another thing. In this case, the young student was standing 'on her face'. She didn't give the task on her face, therefore, the translator didn't choose the phrase 'on her face' as the translation of '*di mukanya*.' The target text in TL2 does not sound natural in English, and the meaning is ambiguous.

Data 2

SL: "*Dan ia agak kesal karena gadis yang berkulit langsep itu begitu mahal dengan tanda tangannya.*"

TL1 (Connotation): "And he was annoyed as **it had been very difficult to obtain the signature** of this fair-skinned young woman."

TL2 (Denotation): "And he was annoyed as this fair-skinned young woman and her **expensive signature.**"

Looking at the connotative meaning, she believed that getting her signature needed more effort. The translator translated the Indonesian phrase "*begitu mahal dengan tanda tangannya*" into the English sentence as the translation 'It had been very difficult to obtain the signature.' The meaning is still the same, even though the translator did not use the same words. In denotative meaning, this phrase contains the meaning of charging a high price to get her signature. The girl who believed her signature was expensive would not give her signature unless she was paid a high price. It is how denotative meaning works, the words look the same in real situations, thus the translator didn't translate it into a phrase that contains denotative meaning. The target text in TL2 does not sound natural in English, and the meaning is ambiguous.

Data 3

SL: "*Orang Tuamu begitu luas pandangannya, begitu lapang hatinya.*"

TL1 (Connotation): "Your parents are so **broad-minded** and so **open-hearted.**"

TL2 (Denotation): "Your parents are so **broad-sighted** and so **open-hearted.**"

The researchers found a phrase containing a connotative meaning in this data. The phrase "*luas pandangannya*" is an Indonesian phrase that means the parents have a mind to accept the opinions, beliefs, and behavior of other people. In English, it would be 'broad-minded' in terms of connotative meaning. In terms of denotative meaning, the Indonesian phrase "*luas pandangannya*" if translated to English, would be 'broad-sighted'. The word "*pandangan*" means sight in English. The suffix "*nya*" in the phrase "*pandangannya*" refers to a possessive pronoun of the parents. The translator seemed to agree with the translation of "*pandangan*" as minded instead of sighted. The word "*broad-sighted*" in TL2 does not sound natural in English, and the meaning is ambiguous.

Data 4

SL: "*Aku merasa mendapat durian runtuh.*"

TL1 (Connotation): "I thought I'd **struck the jackpot.**"

TL2 (Denotation): "I thought I'd get **a fallen durian.**"

The phrase "*durian runtuh*" contains a connotative meaning which means to get an unexpected luck. While in English it would be 'to strike the jackpot'. As a connotative meaning needs adjustment between the words and their meanings, the translator chose the phrase 'to strike the jackpot' for its meaning is close to the Indonesian phrase "*durian runtuh*". On the other hand, the phrase also contains a denotative meaning which in English would be 'a fallen durian'. It is because the word "*runtuh*" means to fall in English, and "*durian*" is also an English word. Overall, the English translation of '*durian runtuh*' in terms of the denotative meaning is 'a fallen durian'. The translator believed that the SL wasn't about the real durian, so she didn't choose the phrase 'a fallen durian.' The translation result in the TL2 does not sound natural in English, and the meaning is distorted.

Data 5

SL: "*Dan dalam hati kecilnya hingga kini selalu dibanggakannya bahwa ia, Raumanen Rumokoi, lupa menjadi mangsa dari keliaran Monang itu.*"

TL1 (Connotation): “And **deep within her**, she had felt a sense of pride that she, *Raumanen Rumokoi*, had managed to avoid becoming a prey of Monang’s wild ways.”

TL2 (Denotation): “And **inside her tiny heart**, she had felt a sense of pride that she, *Raumanen Rumokoi*, had managed to avoid becoming a prey of Monang’s wild ways.”

The phrase “*dalam hati kecilnya*” contains a connotative meaning, and it can be defined as what she feels. The connotative meaning of the English translation of “*dalam hati kecilnya*” is ‘deep within her.’ It’s because she considers something which only she can understand; therefore, the translator chose ‘deep within her’ when translating “*dalam hati kecilnya*”. While in denotative meaning, ‘*dalam hati kecilnya*’ in English would be ‘inside her tiny heart.’ The word inside is used as the preposition of where her tiny heart is. ‘Heart’ as a noun refers to her internal organ, and the word “tiny” represents the size of her heart. The translator did not choose that phrase in terms of denotative meaning because it was not about the real heart. The phrase “tiny heart” in English (in TL2) is not natural, and the meaning is ambiguous.

Data 6

SL: “*Direbakkannya rajanya.*”

TL1 (Connotation): “He **knocked** his king **down**.”

TL2 (Denotation): “He **laid** his king **down**.”

The word “*direbahkan*” comes from the root “*rebah*” which in English, in terms of connotative meaning, is ‘to knock down.’ In the context of the story, it was about beating someone when playing chess. For that reason, the translator translated the word “*direbahkan*” into the phrasal verb ‘knocked down’ due to getting beaten in chess. In terms of denotative meaning, “*direbahkan*” would be to do an action of laying the king down. The English word for “*rebah*” is to lay down and when it is changed to simple past, it would be ‘laid down’. It is the primary meaning, the exact meaning of what people would see in a real situation, but the translator didn’t translate the phrase like that because it would sound unnatural. The phrasal verb “lay down” for a human being is unnatural in English. The translation result has an ambiguous meaning for native English speakers.

Data 7

SL: “*Zaman sekarang seorang wanita sebaiknya dapat berdiri sendiri.*”

TL1 (Connotation): “These days women should be **independent**.”

TL2 (Denotation): “These days women should **stand alone**.”

The Indonesian phrase “*berdiri sendiri*” contains a connotative meaning which means being free to do things without help from others. From the definition, the English translation would be ‘independent.’ In the conversation of the story women are hoped not to depend on other people but be independent. The phrase “*berdiri sendiri*”, however, has a denotative meaning which in English is ‘to stand alone’. As the researchers break down the phrase into words, it would be two words. The word ‘*berdiri*’ is translated into English as “stand” and ‘*sendiri*’ as “alone.” The translator assumed in the story that there is not one standing alone; therefore, she didn’t translate the phrase into “*berdiri sendiri*”.

Data 8

SL: “*Kalau tidak tunduk pada hukum adat, mereka takkan dianggap.*”

TL1 (Connotation): “If they did not **adhere** to customary law, they would be considered outcasts

TL2 (Denotation): “If they did not **bend down** to customary law, they would be considered outcasts.”

The Indonesian word “*tunduk*” in terms of connotative meaning would be ‘adhere’ when translated into English. In the story, the conversation was about obeying customary law; however, the author used the word “*tunduk*” which also has a denotative meaning. Therefore, the translator chose the word ‘adhere’ to translate the Indonesian word “*tunduk*”. The denotative meaning of “*tunduk*” would be ‘bend down’ in English. It is a phrasal verb that refers to the position of someone bending their legs while the head gets to a lower (Oxford Bibliographies, 2021). The target text in TL2 does not sound natural in English, and the meaning is ambiguous. The phrase “bend down” is not for the physical stuff, according to the target text, but the phrase is for the action to obey the rules.

Data 9

SL: “*Namun, Manen, yang memang selalu **senang** menghadiri pesta-pesta itu, tak pernah berdansa.*”

TL1 (Connotation): “But Manen, who’d always **liked** going to those parties, never danced.”

TL2 (Denotation): “But Manen, who was always **happy** going to those parties, never danced.”

The word “*senang*” contains a connotative meaning which in English would be ‘liked’ in past participle form. In the story, Manen said that Manen liked going to parties using the word “*senang*.” For that reason, the translator interpreted the Indonesian word “*senang*” as the English word ‘liked.’ The denotative meaning of “*senang*” is the feeling or emotion of joy (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, 2025). When translated to English, the word “*senang*” would become ‘happy.’ It refers to the logical content in which “*senang*” is always translated to ‘happy.’ The translator assumed they were not happy about it, but they were into it. In this case, TL1 and TL2 have the same meaning. The difference is only for word class.

Data 10

SL: “*Akan tetapi, kadang-kadang Manen terpaksa **menelan perkataannya yang begitu gegabah.***”

TL1 (Connotation): “Occasionally, however, Manen had to **eat her rash words.**”

TL2 (Denotation): “Occasionally, however, Manen had to **swallow her rash words.**”

The Indonesian verb phrase “*menelan perkataannya*” in this context of the story is that Manen admitted what she said was wrong and inappropriate. Therefore, it contains a connotative meaning, which in English would be ‘eat her rash words.’ The word eat doesn’t mean its literal meaning, which is consuming food but it means the action of admission of the rash words. In this case, the words “eat” and “swallow” in English have the same meaning. Thus, the translation result of both TL1 and TL2 retain the meaning of the source text.

Data 11

SL: “*Keke, pacarmu itu sudah **sinting!***”

TL1 (Connotation): “Keke, your boyfriend’s **mad!**”

TL2 (Denotation): “Keke, your boyfriend’s **crazy!**”

The English word ‘mad’ contains a connotative meaning which is someone who loses logical thinking but is still the same. In terms of denotative meaning the Indonesian word “*sinting*” would be translated ‘crazy’ in English. This word is used to describe someone who is mentally ill and needs psychiatric treatment. In addition, the word mad also has a denotative meaning which in other words is angry. However, the translator saw no one who was mentally ill in the story. In this case, the English words “mad” and “crazy” have the same meaning. Both the TL1 and TL2 have the same meaning and the same word class.

Data 12

SL: “*Sedangkan si tolol yang baru pulang dari Rusia rupanya **lupa daratan** ketika dibawanya Ewa ke Pantai Merak pada bulan purnama.*”

TL1 (Connotation): “That stupid guy who’d just returned from Rusia **lost his sense** when he took Ewa to Merak beach during the full moon.”

TL2 (Denotation): “That stupid guy who’d just returned from Rusia **forgot the land** when he took Ewa to Merak beach during the full moon.”

The Indonesian verb phrase “*lupa daratan*” contains a negative connotation. It means to do something without any sense therefore the translator translated it to English ‘lost his sense’. It’s because in the story the guy took Ewa to Merak beach after that an accident happened, and Ewa was forced to get married. The denotative meaning of “*lupa daratan*” is the act of not remembering the surface earth other than sea. The translator might believe the denotative meaning translation would sound unnatural, so she didn’t translate it into the denotative meaning phrase.

Data 13

SL: “*Sebetulnya Manen menjadi mangsa yang begitu **empuk** bagi Monang.*”

TL1 (Connotation): “Manen was actually **easy** prey for Monang.”

TL2 (Denotation): “Manen was actually **soft** prey for Monang.”

The word “*empuk*” contains a connotative meaning which describes achieving without a lot of effort needed. For that reason, the translator translated the Indonesian word “*empuk*” to the English word ‘easy’. In the story, it is the fact that Manen is really easy to fall for Monang. While the denotative meaning of the word “*empuk*” is a thing that can easily change shape when being pressed. The target text in TL2 does not sound natural in English and the meaning is ambiguous. The adjective “soft” does not collocate with the noun “prey” in English. Thus, the translation result of TL2 has ambiguous meaning.

Data 14

SL: “*Tempo apa **tanggal mainnya**?*”

TL1 (Connotation): “So **when**’s the big day?”

TL2 (Denotation): “So **when**’s the date to play?”

The Indonesian phrase “*tanggal mainnya*” contains a connotative meaning which is to describe a big thing happening on a day without plans beforehand. In the conversation of the story, they were talking about a big day that would happen in the future but they didn’t know the day exactly. For that reason, the translator translated the Indonesian phrase “*tanggal mainnya*” to the English phrase ‘the big day’. In terms of denotative meaning, the phrase is used to ask friends or relatives to go to play together. On the other hand, the question can also start with “*kapan*” or “*when*” in English. Therefore, the English translation for the Indonesian phrase “*tanggal mainnya*” is ‘the date to play’. However, the translator didn’t find any situations where they were making plans to play. Since the TL2 is a literal translation, the meaning of the source text is distorted in the target text.

Data 15

SL: “*Adik-adik Monang, Miri dan Ria, mengawasi semua itu dengan **mata besar**, heran.*”

TL1 (Connotation): “Monang’s sisters, Miri dan Ria, watch this scene, **bright-eyed** with amazement.”

TL2 (Denotation): “Monang’s sisters, Miri dan Ria, watch this scene, **big-eyed** with amazement.”

The connotative meaning of noun phrase “*mata besar*” was Miri and Ria enthusiastically watched everything. ‘Bright-eyed’ is the proper English translation in this context because that means to notice the situation around with the eyes. Because of that, the translator translated “*mata besar*” into bright-eyed. The denotative meaning in “*mata besar*” was the size of the eyes. It refers to the change of eyes from normal size to big size or in Indonesian it is also called “*melotot*”. For that reason, the English translation of “*mata besar*” in terms of denotative meaning is “*big-eyed*”. The translator might assume it was the look of the eye, not how big the eye was. The “bright-eyed” has a different meaning from “big-eyed” in English. The translation result of the TL2 is ambiguous and the diction is incorrect.

Discussion

Based on the analysis, the researchers found that the source language words and phrases containing connotative meaning were translated into the TL by using connotative meaning. For instance, the Indonesian phrase “*mata besar*” is translated into ‘bright-eyed’ (connotative), not ‘big-eyed’ (denotative). As the purpose of this study is to see whether the back-translation using denotative meaning is natural or unnatural, it reveals that the result of the back-translation is out of context in the target text. The bac-translation result distorts the meaning of the source text in the target text. This research shows that the translation of the source text containing connotative meaning must be translated into target text semantically (Leech, 1981) which is denotative translation to retain the meaning of the SL in TL. This research is limited only to a back-translation of sentences containing connotative meaning into denotative meaning. The researchers suggest that other researchers can do a further back-translation in the different kinds of sentences to compare whether the back translation for other kinds of sentences retains the meaning in the target text or not.

The current study’s findings strongly align with those of Hartina (Hartina, 2017) and Novitasari (Novitasari, 2018) in several key areas. Like Hartina, who demonstrated that connotative meanings in the *Doang-Doang* of Makassar reflected cultural and emotional expressions, this study found that the

connotative phrases in *Raumanen* carried rich emotional and cultural weight. For instance, expressions like “*mata besar*” (translated as “*bright-eyed*”) did not merely describe physical characteristics but conveyed curiosity or amazement, a sentiment deeply embedded in the cultural context. Similarly, the findings resonate with Novitasari's conclusion that religious texts translated from Arabic to English contained denotative meanings that were preserved (Novitasari, 2018), but connotative meanings often depended heavily on the translator's interpretation and the linguistic norms of the target language. This study demonstrates a parallel process in literary translation: connotative expressions were maintained in the English translation by Isla Winarto, while the back-translation into denotative meaning often led to awkward or ambiguous renderings. This reinforces Novitasari's emphasis on the need for sensitivity to linguistic and cultural nuance in translation. Therefore, both previous studies support the current research findings by illustrating the critical role of connotative meaning in preserving not just language but also emotion, cultural identity, and literary style.

4. Conclusion

This research highlights the use of connotative meanings in the English translation of the Indonesian novel *Raumanen* by Isla Winarto. Several examples are provided where the translator chose connotative translations over literal (denotative) ones, ensuring the preservation of cultural context and the natural flow of language. For instance: Data 1, “*di mukanya*” was translated as “in front of her” rather than the awkward “on her face.” Data 2, the phrase “*begitu mahal dengan tanda tangannya*” was translated connotatively as “it had been very difficult to obtain the signature,” rather than the literal “expensive signature.” Data 3 showed how “*luas pandangannya*” was rendered as “broad-minded” instead of the denotative “broad-sighted.” Other examples continued to demonstrate how literal translations would be unnatural or ambiguous, while connotative translations preserved meaning and cultural nuances. These choices reflect the translator's aim to adapt the source material into the target language while keeping the meaning clear and culturally relevant. By opting for connotative translations, the translator maintained the essence of the original text and avoided awkward or misleading interpretations that might arise from literal translations.

The findings of the research are strongly aligned with key translation theories, particularly those related to the distinction between denotative and connotative meanings and the importance of adapting translations to fit cultural and linguistic contexts.

1. Translation as Meaning Transfer: The study emphasizes that translation is not just about converting words but also about transferring meaning, which is central to translation theory (Iordan, 2021). In the *Raumanen* translation, the decision to use connotative meanings over denotative ones helps preserve the intended nuances and cultural context of the original text, a process that requires a deep understanding of both the source and target languages.
2. Semantic Translation: According to Newmark, semantic translation focuses on conveying the message more accurately, especially when dealing with idiomatic or figurative language (Newmark, 1981). The researcher's findings demonstrate this principle by showing how connotative translations, such as “struck the jackpot” for “*durian runtuh*” or “broad-minded” for “*luas pandangannya*,” help maintain the essence of the message, rather than adhering strictly to the literal meaning.
3. Cultural and Contextual Adaptation: Translation theory also stresses the importance of cultural adaptation. Literal translations can often sound unnatural or be misinterpreted in the target language (Sitanggang & Tambunsaribu, 2023). The study's findings underscore this by highlighting how connotative translations, like “deep within her” for “*dalam hati kecilnya*,” better reflect the intended emotional or cultural meaning than the denotative alternatives.
4. Back Translation and Quality Control: The theory also mentions the use of back translation as a tool to ensure translation accuracy and cultural appropriateness (Salourou, 2024). This aligns with the research's emphasis on how back translations, when compared to the original, reveal the significance of choosing connotative translations to avoid distortion of meaning (Koby et al., 2014).

The significance of these findings lies in the importance of understanding the delicate balance between denotative and connotative meanings in translation. Literal translations often fail to capture the subtleties and cultural connotations of the original text, leading to a loss of the intended impact. By focusing on connotative meanings, the translator ensures that the essence of the original message is preserved, making the translation more fluid, culturally accurate, and engaging for the target audience. The implications of this study suggest that translators must not only have a strong grasp of linguistic

structures but also be sensitive to the cultural context of both the source and target languages. This research reinforces the idea that translation is a complex, interpretative process that requires informed choices to maintain the integrity and emotional depth of the original text. Moreover, it highlights the importance of back translation as a tool for improving translation quality and ensuring cultural relevance. In conclusion, the study underscores the value of semantic translation and cultural adaptation in literary works, providing insight into the nuanced decision-making that translators must engage in to produce a high-quality translation that resonates with the target audience.

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