

# Translation Shifts in Goenawan Mohamad's Poem Collection "On God and Other Unfinished Things" (with Special Reference to Poem 33)

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## Abstract

*It has been acknowledged among translators that translating literary texts poses some difficulties. The translators have to make a decision among other choices related to diction. Not only diction, the inherent literary elements must also be rendered adequately in order to achieve "literariness". Although the debate whether maintaining literary elements in a way that does not deviate from the source text or creating the elements anew is far from over, it is also worth noting that the essence of translation activity is not creating an original text, but it is a re-creation of meaning, a result of translators' interpretation.*

*Researches on literary translation are mostly about to what extent the translation is able to deliver a 'similar' literary value, the strategies applied by the translators, and how the target text readers respond to the 'new creation' of such texts. The elaboration of how the literary translation undergoes changes or shifts is not quite an issue in the field of literary translation research because it is considered 'too linguistic'. However, in light of the Prague School tradition which examines shifts not only on surface level, but also on discourse level, the discussion on the shifts occurring in literary translation is worth conducting.*

*This paper tries to take a look at the translation shifts occurring in the English version of Goenawan Mohamad's poem collection entitled "On God and Other Unfinished Things" which is translated from Bahasa Indonesia "Tuhan dan Hal-hal Yang Tak Selesai", especially poems 33 by comparing the literary elements in Bahasa Indonesia and English versions. The analysis departs from category shift in micro-level analysis to the semantic, textual, pragmatic, rhetorical, and stylistic components. The result shows that there are some significant distinctions concerning the linguistic and non-linguistic discrepancies found in Gunawan Mohamad's poems and their English translation.*

**Keywords:** *literary text, translation shift*

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## Introduction

Translation shift is introduced by J.C. Catford (1978) who sees translation (or language) as communication which should fulfill its core function: delivering the message successfully to the readers (p. 73). In the process, the translation undergoes some changes (or, shift) in its target text. The shift according to Catford is the "departures from

formal correspondence in the process of going from SL [source language] to TL [target language]" (p. 73). The term formal correspondence refers to Nida's division of equivalence types, i.e. formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence (1971, p. 4). Therefore, when a translation undergoes shifts in its SL, it means that it is no longer formal equivalence, but it tries to move closer to the target language, which is called dynamic

equivalence.

Literary translation, of course, is not on the level of formal correspondence, since it needs a recreation of meaning resulted from the translators' interpretation. The translators having a background which inevitably influences his perception to the text being translated will, of course, "shift" the elements in the text according to their native culture. Lefevere (1992) affirms that "[Literary] translation can teach us about the wider problem of acculturation, the relation among different cultures that is becoming important..." (p. 12). Acculturation here also refers to language, a language acculturation, or shift, in Catford's term.

Lefevere further suggests that translators "need to learn to proceed from the top down, that is, from the culture to the structure of that text to paragraphs, lines, phrases, and words..." (p. 13). The elaboration of the micro-linguistic level will cater us the description of the translation shift.

The paper tries discuss Goenawan Mohamad's poem collection entitled "Tuhan dan Hal-Hal yang Tak Selesai" which is translated by Laksmi Pamuntjak into "On God and Other Unfinished Things". Goenawan Mohamad (or, GM) is notoriously well-known for his extensive knowledge on literature, politic, religious, social as well as economic aspect of life as seen in his "Catatan Pinggir", a weekly feature in *Tempo* magazine. His poem collection was published in 2007 by KataKita, Jakarta, so was the translation. The book consists of 99 selected poems, discussing things which are actually not related to God, but GM cleverly swerves them into God-matter, a skill of GM's own.

The paper focuses on Poem 33 talking about Pasternak (literature), cities (social condition), and sacred books (religion). The three categories represent GM's extensive resource. The comparison between GM's poems and Pamuntjak's translation will observe the shift and test whether the translation is able to cater GM's original message or it goes straying into other than GM's intended meaning.

## Shifts in Literary Translation

### Translation Shift Analysis

Catford (1978) divides translation shift into two: level and category shift (p. 73). Level shift is related to "something which is expressed by grammar in one language and lexis in another." (Munday, 2008, p. 60). Meanwhile, category shift is specified into structure, class, rank, and intra-system shift (Catford, 1978, pp. 76-81). Although Catford's theory of shift is criticized for being too linguistics and sometimes quite inoperable because he invented examples, not really taken from authentic texts, therefore decontextualized, it is still helpful for identifying some changes occurring in the target text.

A model for analyzing translation shift based on Catford's theory has been proposed. The model is constructed by Al-Zoubi and Al-Hassnawi (2001) in their paper "Constructing a Model for Shift Analysis in Translation." Al-Zoubi and Al-Hassnawi state that the lack of macro-linguistic analysis in Catford's theory prevents it from going deeper into "semantic, textual, pragmatic, rhetorical, and stylistic component." (pp. 10-16). Added to micro-linguistic analysis as in Catford's theory, the model sees the shift occurring in the target text more holistically.

This in line with what actually Catford means about "departure from formal correspondence in translation" (1978, p.76). Formal correspondence, according to Catford, is "any TL category (unit, class, element of structure, etc.) which can be said to occupy, as nearly as possible, the "same" place in the "economy" of the TL as the given SL category occupies in the SL" (1978, p. 27). Thus, he suggests that measuring translation equivalence does not stop at finding level and category shifts, but it should also consider textual equivalence, or "any TL text or portion of text which is observed on a particular occasion." (1978, p. 27).

### Literary Translation

As mentioned previously, literary translation should emphasize on the "pursuing

of coherence through the creation of unitary, stable representations of characters and events” (Barbaresi, 2002, p. 131). The difference of literary text and other text types puts under special treatment of analysis. What is pursued is not only on the linguistic level but also on the style, or extra linguistic level. The literary translation, as affirmed by Barbaresi (2002), should pursue adequate representation of the literary elements in the ST. Although there is possibility that the “representation” also undergoes changes, or shift, the translation should not go stray farther from the ST.

Nevertheless, since the translation is not created in vacuum but in a social milieu, the translator cannot free themselves from social and cultural influence around him. Both the ST writer and the translator are “born into a certain culture at a certain time...they can write within the parameters set by that culture or they can try to bend them or go beyond them.” (Lefevere, 1992, p. 86).

In light of this paradigm, it can be understood if the shifts that occur in the translation happen solely for the sake of catering the fluid rendition of the ST to the TT readers.

### Shifts in the Translation of Goenawan Mohamad’s Poems 33

The following discusses somewhat at length the various types of shifts found in GM’s translated poems. The discussion is presented part by part, followed by elaboration of the types of shifts in each poem.

No	Source Text	No	Target Text
1/S T/ P33 / S1	Rasa syukur adalah sebuah momen etis. Ia tak menuntut konsep. Seperti puisi. Itu sebabnya Boris Paternak memberi kita suatu definisi, atau satu jawaban, tentang apa itu puisi, dengan empat baris yang padat:	1/ TT / P3 3 / S1	Being grateful is an ethical moment. Just like poetry, it has no need for concept. Thus, Boris Pasternak, with his definition of poetry, single and compact:

The first stanza in the poem number 33 indicates there is a class shift, *syukur* (noun) translated into “grateful” (adjective), and structural shift, *Boris Pasternak memberi kita suatu definisi* (S+P+D+O) translated into “Boris Pasternak, with his definition of poetry” (S+OP) with no predicate. Beside those two category shift, we can also see an expression shift (i.e. change of certain expression). The translator changes the word *empat* with “single”, indicating that it has become a common practice that a stanza consists of four lines, thus called “single”. The sound of “single and compact” also suggests the fluidity of the poem, compared to, for example, “four-line, compact stanza.”

No	Source Text	No	Target Text
2/ST / P33/ S2	<i>Siul yang jadi matang di saat sekejap Kertak suara es di angin kedap Malam yang mengubah hijau jadi beku Duel suara bulbul dalam lagu</i>	2/T T/ P33 / S2	<i>It's a whistle blown ripe in a rice, It's the cracking of ice in a gale, It's a night that turns green leaves to ice, It's a duel of two nightingales.</i>

Datum no 2/TT/P33/S2 indicates that there are three category shifts found, structural, class, and rank. In the ST, the structure is varied, while in the TT it is uniformed: S+P+O. The repetition style in the TT compensates the different rhyme *aabb* in the ST and *abab* in the TT. By maintaining the rhyme, however, the translator sacrifice a certain meaning, i.e. *beku* translated into “ice” to pursue rhyming pattern *aa* for line 1 and 3. This also highlights the expression shift (change/omission of certain expression) as in *Duel suara bulbul dalam lagu* into “It’s a duel of two nightingales”. The omission of *suara* and *lagu* in the TT suggests there is a serious change of meaning. The TT only refers to the “duel of nightingale’s voice”, while in the TT there is a sense of physical duel is happening between two nightingales. Nevertheless, such change of meaning is compensated by the rhyme of “gale” in line 2 and “nightin-gale” in line 4. The interpretation of *hijau* into “green leaves” shows the translator’s boldness to go beyond what is stated. In fact, there is a strong

indication that the translator, perhaps forced by a more urgent task to make the poem fluid, translates somewhat differently from the ST. It is interesting to note that the translator, she herself a writer, tends to give a rather free rendition to the TT in terms of the diction and style.

No	Source Text	No	Target Text
3/S T/ P3 3/ S3	Siul suara beku yang retak di permukaan sungai, malam yang berubah warna, merdu burung di antara pohon—hal-hal yang mempesona, tapi segera akan hilang, dan sang penyair tahu betapa tak ternilainya itu.	3/T T/ P33 / S3	Whistle, the crack of deep freeze on a river's surface, night that changes colour, the dulcet tone of birds amid trees - enthralling, though ephemeral, the value of which the poet knows too well.

The stanza three of the poem furthers emboldens translator's style by modulating the point of view. The ST employs unspecified things first, *hal-hal*, while the TT already gives a headstart by mentioning *hal-hal* ("the things"), which are then referred anaphorically. *Hal-hal* which is plural is also translated into singular noun "value", an intra-system shift. It is interesting to note, however, that both GM and the translator seems to interchange their diction (rumor has it that the translator translated the poem with a close supervision from GM). In stanza two and three, GM employee the word "es" and "beku", referring one thing, *siul*, so does the translator use the word "ice" and "freeze" twice referring to "whisper".

No	Source Text	No.	Target Text
4/S T/ P33 / S3	Tak mengherankan bila ia menolak mendukung Sejarah dan Akidah, arah nasib yang tak bisa diubah dan ajaran yang jadi kekal.	4/T T/ P33 / S3	Hardly astonishing, then, is Pasternak's refusal to throw his weight behind History and The Creed, fate's stubborn course and teachings cast in stone.

In datum number 4/TT/P33/S3, the translator seems to shift the style from denotation to idiom. *Ajaran yang kekal* is translated into "teachings cast in stone". "Cast in stone" is idiomatic expression showing a longevity or perpetuality of an action.

The other style shift found is the translation of *mendukung* into "throw his weight behind", another denotation to idiom. The shift style applied here highlights the translator's choice to be more subtle than the TT writer in conveying certain idea. The blunt style of GM, however, seems wrapped in idiomatic expression which is softer and more obscure.

No	Source Text	No.	Target Text
4/S T/ P33 / S3	Tak mengherankan pula bila ia dikutuk Partai yang mengungkung bagaikan Gereja dan para pendukung kesusastaan model Soviet yang takwa.	4/T T/ P33 / S4	Neither is it surprising that he was denounced by Party that imprisoned his words the way of the Church and the devout exponents of the Soviet model of literature.

The number of stanzas in poem 33 differ starts from this stanza. The translator divides stanza 3 into two stanzas, beginning with this part. There is a shift in the form of addition of certain expression and style shift of general-specific.

The ST goes on further by adding the word "word" for the translation *mengungkung* - "imprisoned his words". This also shows the occurrence of style shift of changing the general to specific description. *Partai yang mengungkung* implies the imprisonment of not only physical but also psychological being. Meanwhile, its translation "Party that imprisoned his words" shows the detail of what is being forbidden. There is a changing tone both by GM and the translator. GM's tone is changing every stanza after stanza, from being obscure to being clear, and vice versa, so is the translator. The tone maintenance here indicates the translator's faithfulness in

subscribing to the TT writer (although oftentimes it sacrifices a degree of meaning).

No	Source Text	No.	Target Text
6/S T/ P33 / S4	Ia tahu posisinya.	6/T T/ P33 / S5	He knew where he stood.

There is no shift found in this stanza.

No	Source Text	No.	Target Text
7/S T/ P33 / S5	Sebelum ia diberangus, dalam novel <i>Dr. Zhivago</i> nya ia cantumkan sajak <i>Hamlet</i> . Ia memakai tokoh lakon itu sebagai metafor, di saat harus memilih bertindak atau tak bertindak, hidup atau mati, <i>to be or not to be</i> .	7/ TT / P3 3/ S6	In his banned novel, <i>Dr. Zhivago</i> there is the poem "Hamlet," which uses the Shakespearean character as a metaphore for taking or not taking action, life versus death, to be or not to be.

Level shift is found in the TT translation, indicated by the lack of time aspect. The word *sebelum* in the ST is not conveyed in the TT so that the sequence of event is missing. There is also a rank shift in the form of condensing two sentences into one sentence.

No	Source Text	No.	Target Text
8/S T/ P33 / S5	Tapi Pasternak juga menggabungkan kebingungan Hamlet dengan rasa gentar Yesus di Taman Getsemani, ketika tahu nasib apa yang menanti.	8/ TT / P3 3/ S6	Yet Pasternak also melded Hamlet's vacillations with Christ's trepidation in the Garden of Gethsemane, the moment the latter knew what fate awaited him.

In datum 8/TT/P33/S6, the name *Yesus* is changed into "Christ", last name is more

familiar mentioned in the target language to suggest a respect or distance. In the source language, the common calling for people is their first name. Thus, the tone is shifting from calling someone his or her first name to indicate intimacy to distancing oneself from others by calling their last name.

No	Source Text	No.	Target Text
9/S T/ P33 / S5	Di ambang pentas, sebelum layar dibuka, Hamlet berbisik: <i>jauhkan cawan ini dari diriku, Abba, bapaku.</i> "	9/T T/ P33 / S6	On the verge of the stage, before the curtain was drawn, Hamlet whispers: "Abba, Father, if it be possible / Let this cup pass from me."

There is no shift found in this stanza.

No	Source Text	No.	Target Text
10/S T/ P33 / S6	Ia sendirian. Ia seakan-akan noktah yang gamang dalam keluasan sejarah yang sedang ditegakkan. Di sekitarnya mengepung orang-orang "farisi," katanya. Dengan kata lain, di sekitarnya hingar suara kecaman orang-orang yang merasa paling patuh kepada akidah agama atau ideologi negara.	10/ TT/ P33 / S7	He was, like a frail dot in the vastness of history becoming, alone. "Alone among the Pharisees I stand," he said. He was surrounded, in other words, by the clamour of self-righteous admonitions, people who thought themselves truest and purest, by dint of their adherence to religious creeds or state ideologies.

This stanza undergoes category shifts, which are rank and system. Rank shift also occurs in the condensation of the sentences from four sentences to three sentences. Intra-system shift is indicated by the change of voice from active (ST) in passive (TT). *Di sekitarnya mengepung orang-orang "farisi"* is translated

into “He was surrounded...” Again, there is a tone shift from specified into not-specified as in *keluasan sejarah yang ditegakkannya* which is translated into “the vastness of history”. The TT seems lack of the effort described in the ST. What happens with “the vastness of history”? What’s wrong with “the vastness of history”? Such questions might arise.

The interesting part of the stanza is the translator’s borrowing the word “din” which means “religion”. By employing the word “din” the translator intends to posit the readers in Arabian environment because the TT writer also borrows the word *akidah*.

No	Source Text	No	Target Text
11/ ST/ P33 / S7	Pramoedya Ananta Toer, mirip seorang “farisi,” ikut menuduh novel <i>Dr. Zhivago</i> yang dilarang itu sebagai telah memfitnah Revolusi Rusia. Tapi bisakah Pasternak, seorang penyair, tak memilih suara siul dan bunyi bulbul?	11/T T/ P33/ S8	Pramoedya Ananta Toer, himself resembling a “Pharisee,” had joined in denouncing the banned novel as a defamation of the Russian Revolution. And yet, how could he have not, Pasternak the poet, chosen the sound of whistle and nightingales?

The rank shift is indicated by the change of *yes-no question* into *question word interrogation*. GM leaves his poem with a question to be answered by *yes* or *no*, while the translator seems to ask more intensely and demand answers which are not only *yes* or *no*. Such tone change somewhat gives impact to the end effect of the poem. The effect shift here refers to what is expected by the readers at the poem’s end. The TT writer seems to end his poem simply by inviting the readers to ponder over the question, be it *yes* or *no*. Meanwhile, the TT translation demand, or rather, insists the readers to not end simply by pondering over *yes* or *no*, but more on forcing them to give tangible answers. Translating *Bisakah Pasternak...* into “How could he have not...”

suggests the translator’s adamant invitation to the readers to think harder, rather than producing *yes* or *no* answer.

### Concluding Remarks

The shifts occurring in the translation of poem 33 in “On God and Other Unfinished Things” consists of category, ranging from structure, class, rank, intra-system, and other expression shifts, encompassing style, change/omission of certain parts, point of view modulation, and specification. The various types of shifts occurring in the translation of poem 33 proves that what matters most is the fluidity of the translation, putting the target-text naturalness over the meaning.

The existence of translation shift in the poem strengthens the the idea of the importance of target-text-friendly rendition in literary translation since the literary text is different from other text types, be it operative, expressive, or informative as categorized by Reiss. The literary translation, or expressive text, needs more than literal and minimal transfer. The change and maintenance of certain expression in literary translation aims at providing target readers an aesthetically acceptable translation.

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