
Semantics Equivalence of Cultural Terms of *Meurukon* Texts Translated from Acehnese into Indonesian

Cultural
Terms in
Meurukon
Texts

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper is aimed at describing semantics equivalence of cultural terms in *meurukon* texts translated from Acehnese into Indonesian. A qualitative descriptive approach is used to analyze the context of semantics equivalence in these texts: varied semantics structure, especially the ones caused by the cultural gap between the two languages.

Design/Methodology/Approach – This research is designed to be of qualitative descriptive nature, wherein data are documented and analyzed using various methods proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), such as data condensation, data display, drawing and verifying conclusions. The researcher is considered the key instrument in the whole process. The source of the data collected is from *meurukon* texts and its translation that consists of 623 sentences: they mainly comprise words and phrases that contain semantics equivalence of cultural terms.

Findings – The result of the research shows that there are 129 cultural terms found in 623 sentences. Of the analyzed data, it is seen that only 16.66% of the data is not equivalent with the target text, while 83.34% words and phrases of *meurukon* text are equivalent. This suggests that as a result of translation, the *meurukon* text has high semantics or lexical equivalences with the target text.

Research Limitations/Implications – This research is focused on semantics equivalence found in *meurukon* texts. The semantic equivalence here only pertains to lexical meaning of nouns and adjectives by using componential analysis.

Practical Implications – The result can be used in a sample of ways for the analysis of semantics equivalence of cultural terms in *meurukon* text translated from Acehnese into Indonesian using componential analysis.

Originality/value – This research identifies *meurukon* as an oral tradition of Acehnese culture, which is in the question and answer format about Islamic law in Aceh, specifically North Aceh.

Keywords Meurukon, semantics equivalence, cultural terms

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1. Introduction

Meurukon, a specific Acehese culture that is almost extinct in the Acehese society, is one culture that needs to be conserved to prevent it from being extinct among the people of Aceh in particular and Indonesia in general. This has been the motivating factor for the researcher to analyze the semantics equivalence of cultural terms found in the minority people of North Aceh maintained in *meurukon* texts, translated into Indonesian to be published in all the Aceh areas with a hope to make it familiar with all the people of Indonesia since Acehese culture is also a part of Indonesia. The research in that direction is most vital because the translation should be able to reflect the meaning of original text in order to ensure that the originally intended meaning in source text has been transferred accurately into acceptable meaning in target text.

Translation theory is created not for any one specific language, but can also be applied to all the languages in the world and in all kinds of texts, due to significant cultural differences between one region and another. Thus it is a difficult task to translate cultural texts than any other types of texts. The focus of translation needs to be on some elements such as the differences in terms of linguistics and similarities in terms of culture itself. It can be said that being a translator of cultural texts is more challenging than being a translator of other kinds of texts. Nevertheless, translation of cultural text is considered to be more interesting and knowledgeably more meaningful, and would need a variety of translation strategies and techniques to achieve good results (Lubis, 2010).

To present the culture variation between one region and the other, there needs to be a specific language that may not be easily understood by the people in a different country or region. To minimize the complication, information needs to be used as a tool to introduce local culture. In fact, in Indonesia, most of the local culture was unable to be understood by other society since those texts are found only in the local language, hence creating a barrier in the process of understanding the culture by the people who live in other cities in the same country. One of the efforts that can be taken to make the local culture stay longer is by analyzing the product of translation on local culture into Indonesian. That would mean to ensure the Indonesian society understands the components of meaning contained in a translational work of local culture.

This article focuses mainly on *meurukon*, an activity of asking and answering a question about Islamic law in the form of poetry with good rhythm. *Meurukon* is a kind of oral tradition that has developed in Acehese society, which contains great Islamic value that is in line with the Acehese tradition. In this culture, "*meurukon*" seems to be a collaboration between rhythm and religion. The reason why this topic is chosen is based on a preliminary study which showed that while some meanings are equivalent some are not. See, for instance, the example provided below:

The translator has translated the word *Syehkuna* into "guru" (teacher) in target language. The word *syehkuna* is a specific cultural term and is an untranslatable word, because it has no equivalent terminology in the target language. When it is translated into word "guru" (teacher) in target language, the cultural significances contained in the word *syehkuna* is lost.

Table 1.

Example of
Equivalence Problem
Found in *Meurukon*
Text

Source Text	Target Text
<i>Meu'ah lon lake ubak Syehkuna</i> (I ask forgiveness to <i>Syehkuna</i>)	<i>Maaf saya mohonkan pada guru</i> (I ask forgiveness to <i>teacher</i>)

This fact led us to conduct a scientific research to analyze the semantics structure in *meurukon* texts. This seems to be a way to prevent, preserve, and introduce the culture of *meurukon* to the younger generation so that the culture does not go extinct.

This article focuses only on semantics equivalence contained in the translation of *meurukon* texts. Using componential analysis, semantics equivalence is achieved only on lexical semantics of cultural terms that comprises nouns and adjectives.

Catford (1965) defined translation as the replacement of text material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (target language). Further, Newmark (1988) defined translation as the rendering of the meaning of a text into another language in such a way that the author originally intended the text. Furthermore, Bell (1991) stated that "Translation is the expression in another language (target language) of what has been expressed in another, source language, preserving semantic and stylistics equivalence." Translation can be said as a process of transferring proper meaning of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences from one language into another or from source language into target language.

In transferring meaning from one language into another, we must pay attention on equivalences. Baker divided equivalence into four: (1) equivalence that can appear at word level and above the word level, when translating from one language into another; (2) grammatical equivalence, when referring to the diversity of grammatical categories across languages; (3) textual equivalence, when referring to the equivalence between an SL (Source Language, in this case, Acehnese) text and a TL (Target Language, Indonesian) text in terms of information and cohesion; and (4) pragmatic equivalence, when referring to implicatures and strategies of avoidance during the translation process (Baker, 2011).

Meurukon is a term which is closely related to Islam and it is derived from the word "rukun (pillar)." The activity of studying *rukun* is called *meurukon* in Acehnese. The activity in the form of religious art is the form of confession about the existence of Islam and to learn deeply from its principles. Those principles revolve around worship, the principles of aqiqah, the principles of shalat, the principles of slaughter, and furthermore is discussed deeply in the form of poem and art.

The art of *meurukon* brought about a positive effect in the creation of character, courtesy, behavior, and good character as a human being. Acehnese society is acclaimed to be known as the society of "serambi Mekkah," which believes that Islamic religion will bring happiness on the days here and after. Islamic religion should be developed and propagated to all aspects of life using some methods. *Meurukon* is one such method used as the missionary endeavor by the Acehnese in the past in delivering those principles of Islam.

According to Usman (2009), the function of *meurukon* is basically to intensify the Islamic teaching. In other words, the culture of *meurukon* is an educative Acehnese culture that contains educational elements in it. People find it more interesting to learn about religion through this art form since it is performed in the form of poem and not as the process of learning as is usually followed in a classroom teaching. In that sense, *meurukon* becomes a performance and entertaining art, in which the semantic equivalence is focused on cultural words as proposed by Newmark.

Newmark (1988) defines that "cultural word is words referring to objects, processes, institutions, custom, ideas peculiar to one group of people." From that definition, it can be understood that the term culture refers to specific culture and generally they are difficult to be translated and each community has their own culture, different beliefs, and different social organization. According to Newmark (1988), culture can be divided into five categories: (1) ecology – geographical and territory; (2) material culture – food, clothes,

places, transportations; (3) social culture – leisure and work; (4) organization, customs, ideas – artistic, political and social, and religious; and (5) gesture and habits.

2. Methods

The kind of research adapted in this study is qualitative descriptive that answers the problem of semantics equivalence in the *meurukon* texts qualitatively, especially on the differences between semantics structure/meaning that was caused by the cultural gap between two cultures, Aceh and Indonesia. The data for this research was taken from the document of *meurukon* text and its translation into Indonesian. The data collected contains words: phrases that contain cultural terms from the source language and target language. The data were analyzed using componential analysis model proposed by Katz and Fodor (1963) and Nida (1982). The following are some of the steps that were followed: (1) Select the words from the text namely *meurukon* text from Acehese into Indonesian, which comprises some general components and the meaning chosen was in correspondence with the words; (2) enlist all specific semantics features referred to the cultural words based on Newmark theory in Acehese and Indonesian using two kinds of dictionaries: Acehese dictionary (1985) and Indonesian Dictionary (2008); (3) determine the diagnostic components that can be used for each word, then describe them one by one; and (4) describe the diagnostic components in narrative form and then take a conclusion.

3. Results and discussion

The total data consisted of 623 sentences. Since it is a huge number to analyze in qualitative reasearch, it focused only on cultural words that have been categorized into five by Newmark (1988). A detailed explanation on the analysis of semantics equivalence in *meurukon* text can be seen in the following.

The discussion and conclusion can be seen in the following table that shows the differences in equivalence between the source text and target text in each cultural category. To avoid redundancies, only the words exhibiting equivalences are shown below.

The table above shows that all the 11 terms of ecology culture in source text has semantics equivalence in target text. It means that the meaning of source text of ecology culture equivalenced with the meaning in target text.

It can be seen from the above table that six among seven (85.7%) material cultures can be found to have equivalence in semantic target text, while only 14.3% is unequivalent. The name of a place, however, cannot be translated into target text. If it is attempted, then it would bring about a significant shift in meaning.

It can be seen from the above table that four terms among seven (57.1%) can be found to have lexical equivalence in target text, while two (42.9%) are unequivalent in target text. It indicates that in social culture, the cultural categories cannot find equivalences on specific

No.	Category	Total Data	Data Analyzed
1	Ecology – geographical and territory	20	11
2	Material culture – food, clothes, places, transportations	6	6
3	Social culture – leisure and work	10	7
4	Organization, customs, ideas – artistic, political and social, and religious	90	11
5	Gesture and habits	3	1
	Total	129	36

Table 2.
Data Classification of
Cultural Categories
Newmark (1988)

cultural concept – the concept that can only be found in Acehnese, not in other languages. Such concepts should not be translated, because if it is done it would experience a significant *meaning shift* resulting in unequivalent meaning.

Of the 11 data analyzed, 9 (81.82%) are found to be equivalent, while only 18.18% is unequivalent. The two unequivalent terms are *untranslatable*. The translator should transfer the meaning of source text to target text using equivalent translation procedures. Word “*meurukon*” is a cultural term that cannot find its equivalence in target text (Indonesian). It should be translated with word “*meurukon*.”

No.	Source Text	Glossary	Target Text	Level of Equivalence
1	<i>langet and donya</i> [Sky and earth]	God's creation	<i>Langit</i> [sky] <i>and dunia</i> [world]	Equivalent
2	<i>Tanoeh Anoe</i>	Name of place	<i>Tanoeh Anoe</i>	Equivalent
3	<i>nanggroe baka</i>	Place after died	<i>alam akhirat</i>	Equivalent
4	<i>rhoet ngon di blang</i>	Street and field	<i>jalan and sawah</i>	Equivalent
5	<i>cicem hamamah</i>	Pigeon	<i>Burung merpati</i> [pigeon]	Equivalent
6	<i>Lampoh</i>	Garden	<i>Kebun</i> [garden]	Equivalent
7	<i>bungong seulanga</i>	Acehnese flower	<i>bunga kenanga</i> [kenanga flower]	Equivalent
8	<i>cempala</i>	Name of bird	<i>murai</i> [small bird]	Equivalent
9	<i>ramoe and rambat</i>	Part of Acehnese traditional house	<i>serambi dan rambat</i>	Equivalent
10	<i>pante</i> [beach]	Sea part	<i>pantai</i> [beach]	Equivalent
11	<i>pade</i> [paddy]	Main food	<i>padi</i> [paddy]	Equivalent

Table 3.
Result of Translation
of *Meurukon* Text in
Ecology Culture

No.	Source Text	Glossary	Target Text	Level of Equivalence
1	<i>Jalan raya</i> [main road]	Main road	<i>Jalanan</i> [along the road]	Unequivalent
2	<i>Darossalam</i>	Name of city in Banda Aceh	<i>Darussalam</i>	Equivalent
3	<i>Banda</i>	Capital city of Aceh province	<i>Banda Aceh</i>	Equivalent
4	<i>Meunasah</i>	Place for praying of Muslim villagers	<i>Meunasah</i>	Equivalent
5	<i>Makah</i>	Holy place	<i>Mekkah</i>	Equivalent
6	<i>Neugara</i>	Country	<i>Negara</i>	Equivalent

Table 4.
Result of Translation
of *Meurukon* Text in
Material Culture

No.	Source Text	Glossary	Target Text	Level of Equivalence
1	<i>Syehkuna</i>	teacher <i>meurukon</i>	<i>guru</i> [teacher]	Unequivalent
2	<i>Piasan</i>	A show	<i>Tontonan</i>	Unequivalent
3	<i>teungku</i>	Teacher of reciting Quran	<i>teungku</i>	Equivalent
4	<i>Teungkuimum meunasah</i>	Leader of shalat in <i>meunasah</i>	<i>Tengku imam meunasah</i>	Equivalent
5	<i>teungku syiah</i>	Intellectual person	<i>ulama</i>	Equivalent
6	<i>teungku cut</i>	Islamic teacher	<i>guru</i> [general teacher]	Unequivalent
7	<i>u'lama</i>	Ulama	<i>ulama</i>	Equivalent

Table 5.
Result of Translation
of *Meurukon* Text in
Social Culture

The phrase “Abu Krueng Kale” basically refers to the name of a person who is good at Islam (*ulama*). In Aceh, mostly people called the name of *ulama* based on his place of living or village. The phrase “Abu Krueng Kale” is translated into target language also with the same phrase. The translator has done his best.

4. Conclusion

Based on the result of analysis, it was found out that in general the cultural terms in *meurukon* text have high equivalences with the translated text. Of the 140 data on cultural terms analyzed, 36 consisted of 11 ecology cultures, 6 on material culture, 7 on social culture, 11 on organization culture, and 1 on the culture of gestures and habit. The result of analysis of ecology cultures shows us that 100% has high equivalences with the target text. In material cultures, it was found that only 14.3% data has unequivalence with target text, and 85.7% has had great equivalences. In social cultures, 57.1% was found to be equivalent while 42.9% was not. In organization cultures (customs, activity, political, religious, and art concept), it was found that 81.82% had good equivalence while only 18.18% did not. In the last one, gestures and habit culture, 100% has good equivalence from source text into target text.

Based on the result of analysis of data in *meurukon* text on semantics equivalence of cultural words, it is shown that from 623 sentences, 129 cultural words and phrases were found to be equivalent. From the data analysis, it is shown that only 16.66% of the data is not equivalent with the target text, while 83.34% of words and phrases of *meurukon* text are equivalent. It means that the result of translation of *meurukon* text has high semantics or lexical equivalences with the target text. The finding of this research also indicated that in translating the cultural text, the translator should focus not only on single word but also on context. The equivalences and the function of each word would be different if it is put in a different context.

Table 6.
Result of Translation
of *Meurukon* Text in
Organization Culture,
Customs, Activity,
Concept of Politics,
Religious, and Art

No.	Source Text	Glossary	Target Text	Level of Equivalence
1	<i>Meurukon</i>	Acehnese traditional culture	<i>mendaras (reciting Quran)</i>	Unequivalent
2	<i>kuliah</i>	Giving lecture on all field	<i>khotbah (Giving lecture on Islamic field)</i>	Unequivalent
3	<i>Selaweuet</i>	Selawat	<i>Selawat</i>	Equivalent
4	<i>Seudati</i>	Acehnese traditional dance	<i>Seudati</i>	Equivalent
5	<i>Rapai</i>	Acehnese musical instrument	<i>Rapai (genderang)</i>	Equivalent
6	<i>seumayang</i>	Prayer	<i>shalat</i>	Equivalent
7	<i>jeulamee</i>	Brideprice	<i>mahar</i>	Equivalent
8	<i>a'lem</i>	Pious	<i>alim</i>	Equivalent
9	<i>Modham</i>	One of Islamic ideology	<i>Mazhab</i>	Equivalent
10	<i>Euseulam</i>	Religion's name	<i>Islam</i>	Equivalent
11	<i>kaphe</i>	Not Moslem	<i>kafir</i>	Equivalent

Table 7.
Result of Translation
of *Meurukon* Text in
Gestures and Habit
Culture

No.	Source Text	Glossary	Target Text	Level of Equivalences
1	<i>Abu Krueng Kale</i>	Name of Acehnese ulama	<i>Abu Krueng Kale</i>	Equivalent

5. Suggestion

According to our research findings, it is indicated that the translation of cultural category of *meurukon* text depends mainly on the procedures used and the context where the terms represent lexical and phrasal meaning in the text used. Hence, it is suggested that the translator should focus more on context where the terms are used, because the accuracy in meaning in the target language can vary if it is applied in a different context.

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