

Challenges in Translating German Comics Nerd Girl into Indonesian

Eqtsani Alfatkhuss Shivana^{1*}; Widya Agustina²; Rizman Usman³

¹ State University of Malang, Indonesia, eqtsani.alfatkhuss.2202416@students.um.ac.id

² State University of Malang, Indonesia, widya.agustina.2202416@students.um.ac.id

³ State University of Malang, Indonesia, rizman.fs@um.ac.id

*Corresponding author:

E-mail:

eqtsani.alfatkhuss.2202416@students.um.ac.id

Abstract

Nerd Girl is a German comic by Sarah Burrini. This study examines the challenges that arise in translating the German comic Nerd Girl into Indonesian. Comics as visual literary works require translators to maintain a balance between linguistic, cultural, and visual aspects. The main objective of this study is to identify forms of incompatibility between the source text (SL) and target text (TL), and to describe the translation strategies used. This study uses a qualitative approach with case study methods and content analysis, where data are obtained from the original comic text and the translation results carried out by the researcher herself. The results of the study show that the main challenges include translating idioms, figurative language, slang, cultural references, wordplay, and character speech styles. The translation strategies used include cultural adaptation, the use of functional equivalents, and a contextual approach based on visuals and narrative logic. In conclusion, the success of comic translation depends not only on linguistic accuracy, but also on understanding the cultural context and character characterization.

Keywords: *Comic Translation, German Language, Indonesian, Translation Challenges, Nerd Girl, Translation Strategies, E-Comic, Cross Cultural*

Introduction

Literary works are one of the media in language learning. Literary works are divided into several types, one of which is comics. According to Bonnet (in Soedarso, 2015), comics are a composition of images and words that aim to provide information that is intended to be conveyed to the reader, based on this opinion, comics are also included in the type of literary works, namely illustrated literature.

According to Rahmah (2018), a written work has the appeal of a literary work if its readers are able to understand the story presented in its entirety. This is not easy if the reader does not understand the language or signs and meanings that have been presented in the presentation of a literary work. Then there is a group that adheres to 'free' translation, arguing that the important thing in translation is the spirit, not the words. They also say that what is more important is the meaning, not the words, or the sentences used (Galingsing and Tambunsaribu, 2021).

According to Baker (in Larasati and Rasikawati 2022), the common difficulty that translators often experience in translating texts from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) at the word level is inconsistency. Problems can arise when there is no word in the TL that has the same meaning as the word in the SL. Baker classifies this inconsistency problem into eleven categories. These categories are (a) culture-specific concepts, (b)

unlexicalized concepts, (c) semantically complex words, (d) differences in the meaning of words in the SL and TL, (e) absence of superordinates in the TL, (f) absence of specific terms/hyponyms, (g) differences in physical and interpersonal perspectives, (h) differences in expressive meaning, (i) differences in form, (j) differences in frequency and purpose of using certain forms, and (k) loan words in the TL. Other specific linguistic difficulties or challenges faced are multilingualism, intertextuality, profanity, slang, and censorship (Altenberg and Owen 2015).

According to Muhammad (2016), in translating comics, several things that need to be considered include the size of the balloon that determines the number of characters in it, which depicts the conversation or dialogue of the characters, then there are variations in the shape of the balloon that indicate the intent or feeling between the character's conversation. In addition, there are various kinds of different sound imitations between the SL and TL in translating comics.

The comic "Nerd Girl" is a German-language comic by a talented German illustrator, Sarah Burrini. This comic presents the life of a teenage girl who loves pop culture and technology. The purpose of this study is to identify the challenges in translating comics, especially in observing and describing the incompatibility between the translated comic (TL) and the original comic in German (SL). This study needs to be conducted to provide an overview to translators, especially comic translators, of the challenges they will face when translating. The challenges faced during the translation process can also make translators develop further in translating, especially in translating foreign-language comics better.

Method

The method used in this study is qualitative with a case study approach and content analysis. This method was chosen because the study aims to identify and analyse the challenges in translating the German comic Nerd Girl into Indonesian and aims to examine the linguistic, cultural, and visual elements in the comic.

The technique used in this study is the listening technique (Observation/observation) is a technique carried out by observing for the sake of data collection. This study also uses other techniques, namely the tapping and recording technique (Fatawi, 2018). According to Zaim (in Afrilla, et al. 2021) the listening technique is a data collection process carried out through the process of understanding, observing, and reading the use of the language being studied. After going through the listening process, sentences containing translation techniques can be obtained (tapped) and recorded as data, to facilitate reading the data (Ghufron, Yolanda, Mardiyah, 2022).

The researcher acts as the main instrument in the qualitative method or commonly called a human instrument. The research data is in the form of original comic text in the form of images and speech from the Nerd Girl comic character in German and its translation into Indonesian. The data in the form of original text in the form of images includes panels of the Nerd Girl comic containing speech in German. Each panel is analyzed based on the text that appears in the word balloon, narration, and visual elements that support understanding the meaning.

Results and Discussion

The translation was done by translating the online comic source (webcomics) Nerd Girl from German to Indonesian. The Nerd Girl comic consists of several panels in each episode. The translation data was obtained using an online dictionary. The episodes to be translated are episodes 1 and 2. The following is the original text script of the Nerd Girl comic episode 1:



Figure 1. Nerd Girl Comic Episode 1 (Original German Text)

Comics with original German text translated into Indonesian. Here are the results of the translation that has been done:

ikhtisar bab : *Petualangan paruh waktu gadis kutu buku*



Figure 2. Nerd Girl Comic Episode 1 (Translated into Indonesian)

The challenge faced after translating the Nerd Girl comic episode 1 was when looking for equivalent words. The German words used have many meanings. An example of a word that has many meanings in the Nerd Girl comic episode 1 is the word "Moloch" in the sentence "*Die großstadt, ein brodelnder moloch*" which means the name of a god, and another meaning as a figurative word to describe something that spends or sacrifices many things, such as money, time, or even soul. In the context of the Nerd Girl comic, "Moloch" is a figurative

word to describe something that spends or sacrifices many things, such as money, time, or even soul. The translation is strengthened by associating words with comic illustrations.

The next challenge is the use of brands in the dialogue in the comic. Initially, the researcher looked for the meaning of the word in the dictionary, and did not find it. After further research, the word is a brand of a drink. The word is "*Fritz-Cola*". Fritz-Cola is a soft drink made in Germany and has a relatively high caffeine content and is sold in glass bottles with a label that was originally black and white, using the faces of the two founders in the logo. In the context of the Nerd Girl comic, someone is depicted drinking and saying, "*Das is mein letzte fritzcola, ich schwör!*", which means "This is my last Fritz Kola, I swear!".

The difficulty in translating German comics written by native speakers is also a challenge in understanding the meaning of the dialogue in the comics. The use of German by native speakers means using a very high level of language. The use of high levels is still very foreign and difficult for international readers outside Germany or for people who are learning German. Some high-level words that appear in the comics include, "*An jeder schäbigen ecke lauert*" with the meaning "Lurking in every corner of the slum", "*Eine konsequente anwendung der wohnraumschutzsatzung*" with the meaning "Consistent application of housing law protection", and "*Drogenmissbrauch*" with the meaning "Drug abuse", as well as other dialogues in the comics.

The use of abbreviations in comic dialogues is also a challenge in translating comics. For example, in the sentence "*Is wat oda häste wat jegen den FC?!*". "Is wat oda" is an abbreviation of "*Ist etwas oder*" which means "Is something or", but in the context of the dialogue in the comic, the sentence "*Is wat oda häste wat jegen den FC?!*" means "Is there anything you want from FC?!". The comic depicts someone from a criminal gang asking with a high intonation because there is a punctuation mark "?!". The meaning of the sentence can be known after searching for translations from various sources and adjusting it to the illustration.

Figurative words in sentences in comics also pose their own challenges when translating and understanding the context of comics. Like in the sentence "*...konzept von gut und böse, kann man eh treten in tonne*". The sentence means "...the concept of good and evil, yes, can be thrown directly into the trash", then the meaning of the sentence is associated with the illustration and logic that fits the context. The sentence is a metaphor for the character's thoughts. The character in the Nerd Girl comic that is depicted is a taxi driver. The taxi driver said the sentence because he considered the opinion that would be conveyed regarding the concept of good and evil to others was useless, like trash that is thrown into the trash.

The part that next translated is the comic Nerd Girl episode 2. Here is the original text script of the comic Nerd Girl episode 2:

ZUR KAPITELÜBERSICHT: DIE NEBENBERUFLICHEN ABENTEUER VON NERD GIRL



STORY & ZEICHNUNGEN: SARAH BURRINI FARBEN: INES KORTH

Figure 3. Nerd Girl Comic Episode 2 (Original German Text)

Next, the Nerd Girl comic was translated into Indonesian. Here are the results of the translation of the Nerd Girl comic episode 2:

IKHTISAR BAB: PETUALANGAN PARUH WAKTU NERD GIRL



Figure 4. Nerd Girl Comic Episode 2 (Translated into Indonesian)

There were several challenges in translating the Nerd Girl comic episode 2, one of which was the emergence of wordplay (*Wortspiele*) which turned out to have no equivalent in

Indonesian. Like the sentence "*Nicht in die weichteile bitte*" in the phrase in *die Weichteile* literally means in the soft part. However, it turns out that in everyday language the phrase refers to a sensitive part of the human body, for example the male genital area. In the context of this comic, the sentence is delivered in a joking tone that aims to avoid the use of harsh words but can convey its meaning clearly.

Next, there is a challenge in cultural references. In the sentence "*Aber jetzt ist erstmal... Feierabend!*" the word *Feierabend* means going home from work or the end of working hours. However, in German culture it refers to a moment to relax after a very tiring day, which concept has its own cultural value in appreciating oneself after successfully getting through a hard day. In its translation it is impossible to follow the actual meaning, so adaptation can be done by using an equivalent that describes a relaxed situation, for example "but now it's time... to lie down first!" this allows the meaning of humour and culture to be conveyed to Indonesian readers.

In the Nerd Girl comic, each character seems to have a distinctive speaking style. For example, the main character Nerd Girl is depicted with a chatty but enthusiastic tone when speaking, while Deathwing (a cat) who is another character in this comic is depicted with a silent expression but remains a place for Nerd Girl to confide. The speaking style of the characters in the translation is important to adjust in order to maintain the existing characterization. In this case, the translator is not enough to just translate linguistically, but must also pay attention to the logical aspect, how language is used to build relationships between characters and shape their personalities.

Conclusion

The challenges in translating the Nerd Girl comic from German to Indonesian include various linguistic and cultural aspects. Some of them are:

1. **Lexical inconsistency**, such as words with plural meanings or certain contexts that are difficult to find equivalents for in Indonesian (example: Moloch).
2. **Use of local brands and cultural references**, such as Fritz-Kola and *Feierabend*, which have no direct equivalent in Indonesian culture.
3. **Native speaker's language**, including high language levels and complex sentence structures, make it difficult for foreign language learners to understand.
4. **Word games and figures of speech**, such as idioms or double-meaning phrases that must be translated considering the context and visuals in the comic panel.
5. **Character abbreviations and speech styles**, which influences the interpretation of meaning and the formation of characterization in the story.
6. **Slang style and language register of characters**, which reflects the personality of the comic character, both in terms of word choice, intonation, and sentence structure.
7. **Cultural references**, which shows the importance of cultural sensitivity in the translation process, in order to convey messages, emotions, and cultural nuances accurately without sacrificing the clarity and enjoyment of reading comics in the target language.

In facing these challenges, translators apply various strategies such as cultural adaptation, contextual translation, and character-based dialogue adjustments. The translation process is not only linguistic, but also interpretive and creative, to maintain the logic, integrity of the message, and the appeal of the story to local readers.

This strategy allows the translator to maintain the essence of humour, cultural nuances, and characterization that are characteristic of the Nerd Girl comic. This shows that the success of comic translation does not only depend on the equivalence of words, but also the ability to effectively convey meaning, emotion, and cultural context in the target language. Therefore, comic translation requires linguistic sensitivity, cultural accuracy, and high narrative creativity so that it can be enjoyed by cross-cultural readers without losing the soul of the original text.

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