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A THOUSAND FIREFLIES IN MANHATTAN: TRANSLATION IN THE SHORT STORIES OF UMAR KAYAM¹

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***Abstract:** This paper discusses the techniques used by major Indonesian author Umar Kayam for presenting representations of American English and Javanese language and culture in his early Indonesian-language short stories, published as *Sri Sumarah dan Cerita Pendek Lainnya* in 1975. Using Vinay and Darbelnet's list of translation strategies, the paper suggests that Kayam made extensive use of direct translation, especially literal translation with borrowings from English, and borrowings with Indonesian glosses for Javanese terms. He also uses calques and adaptations in a very few incidences.*

***Key words:** Umar Kayam, translation, calques and adaptations*

INTRODUCTION

Umar Kayam is widely recognised in Indonesia as a major realist fiction writer of the early New Order period. In 1975 Kayam published his American and post-1966 stories together as *Sri Sumarah dan Cerita Pendek Lainnya*³. In this paper I would like to explore the process of linguistic and cultural translation which occurs within the original Indonesian text of the short stories themselves.

¹ This paper is based on a lecture presented to the Department of Linguistics of Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Indonesia, March 28th 2005. For the original Indonesian texts referred to here see *Sri Sumarah dan Cerita Pendek Lainnya*, Pustaka Jaya 1975. My English translations can be found in *Sri Sumarah and Other Stories*, Heineman Educational Books (Asia), Kuala Lumpur 1980.

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³ Pustaka Jaya, Jakarta 1975; reprinted with additions 1986.

UMAR KAYAM

Umar Kayam was born in Ngawi, Central Java, on 30 April 1932, in the family of a HIS school teacher, "a primary school for the children of *priyayi* nobles, who were preparing to be government administrators under Dutch colonial rule" (Rahmanto 2004:1). After attending school in Yogyakarta, he is trained as a teacher at Universitas Gajah Mada (Sarjana Muda UGM, 1955). After teaching for a few years, he then undertook postgraduate studies in America, completing the degrees of Master of Education at New York University in 1963, and Doctor of Philosophy at Cornell University in 1965. On his return to Indonesia, he was appointed as the Director General of Radio, Television and Film for the Ministry of Education (1966-1969), then as Head of the Jakarta Arts Council (1969-1972). Following this, he went on to serve as the Director of the Pusat Latihan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Universitas Hasanuddin, Ujungpandang (1975-1976), and of the Pusat Penelitian Kebudayaan, UGM (1977-1997). He was appointed a professor at UGM in 1989 and retired in 1997.

Umar Kayam began writing short stories in New York: these were published after 1966 in the literary magazine *Horison*, and later collected as *Seribu Kunang-kunang di Manhattan* (1972). He wrote four longer stories around the events of 1965: two of these appeared as *Sri Sumarah dan Bawuk* (1975). His complete short stories appeared as *Sri Sumarah dan Cerita Pendek Lainnya* (1986). During the 1990s, he also wrote two novels: *Para Priyayi* (1992) and *Jalan Menikung: Para Priyayi 2* (1999). Other short stories, appearing sporadically throughout this decade, were gathered as *Parta Krama* in 1997, in a collection published in honour of his retirement, and republished in a more complete form as *Lebaran di karet, di karet ...* (2002). His other books included collections of his weekly newspaper columns: *Mangan Ora Mangun Kumpul* (1990); *Sugih Tanpa Banda* (1994); *Madhep Ngator Sugih, Madhep Ngidul Sugih* (1998) and *Satrio Piningit ing Kampung Pingit* (2000). His studies of Javanese culture were *Seni, Tradisi, Masyarakat* (1981); *Semangat Indonesia, Suatu Perjalanan* (1985); and an analysis of wayang, *Kelir Tanpa Batas* (2001). He passed away on 16 March 2002.

TRANSLATING KAYAM, KAYAM TRANSLATING

Andre Lefevere has stated: "Texts are not written in a vacuum. Like language, literature pre-exists its practitioners. Writers are born into a certain



culture at a certain time. They inherit that culture's language, literary traditions (its poetics), its material and conceptual characteristics (its micro waves and the ideas of Sigmund Freud in twentieth-century American culture, chamber-pots and the ideas of the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century England) – in a word its 'universe of discourse' – and its standards."⁴ In studying translations we are interested in words, but we must also consider the cultures which shape and determine those words.

Kayam's stories are set, as I have noted above, firstly in America, then in Java. Their poetics are that of the modern Indonesian story, with some influence from American authors such as Carson McCullers, Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Salinger, Bellow and Updike (see *Musim Gugur di Connecticut*). They tend to revolve around indirect conversations between two characters and move to clear (although often understated) climaxes. This avoid of obvious conflict is perhaps an Indonesian value. The stories also feature Indonesian literary values relating to loneliness (*sepi*) and nostalgia (*rindu*). Their universes of discourse range over middle class in mid-town Manhattan and the experiences of the *priyayi* class of Java during the twentieth century; while their ideologies relate to moral laxity and uprightness, responsibility, faithfulness, obedience, political struggle and arbitrary human destiny.

Kayam's short stories show that he was very sensitive to different language registers. In a few places Kayam describes speech styles explicitly – he refers to the Jakarta accent of Sri's customer in *Sri Sumarah*; the ungainly rapid speech of Pak Carik who seeks to remarry Sri, also in *Sri Sumarah*; the "*keterusterangan serta ketajaman pikiran*" of Hasan, Bawuk's husband, in the story "Bawuk:: and the obvious Javanese-ness of Wandu's coarse "*Diancuk!*" in "*Kimono biru buat isteri*", in "*Kimono biru buat Isteri*". Sri Sumarah also notes a significant difference between the directness of Indonesian and the allusiveness of Javanese, when she comments: "*kenapa mesti dijelaskan dalam bahasa Indonesia tentang hal-hal yang bisa ditangkap dalam bahasa Jawa?*"⁵

⁴ Andre Lefevere: *Translating Literature*, MLA, NY 1992, p. 86. Note: Lefevere explains "the standards for acceptable behavior" within a culture as its "ideology", p. 87. All underlining added.

⁵ In order not to overburden my text, I would ask my readers to consult the texts themselves for the sources of words and sentences quoted. Assuming a readership familiar with Indonesian, I have also left these words and sentences untranslated into English.

Most of Kayam's representations of these other languages and cultures use a fluent standard Indonesian. Apart from making an extensive analysis of Kayam's Indonesian, there is not a lot that need be said about this. One begins the task of translating them into English by seeking an equivalent standard English, but one that is based (for the American stories) on an American conversational style.⁶

I would like to spend my time here not on discussing how one might translate Kayam's stories into English but on a different issue. If Kayam's stories are themselves also translations of the language and culture of America and Java, how does he translate these into the Indonesian which he writes? Our focus is on Kayam translating other languages and cultures into Indonesian.

TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

A useful starting point for a discussion of Kayam's translation techniques is Vinay and Darbelnet's more general list of translation strategies:

1. Direct translation
 - 1— borrowing (taking the SL term)
 - 2— calque (borrowing an expression from another language, but translating literally each of its elements)
 - 3— literal translation (direct transfer)
2. Oblique translation
 - 4— transpositions (replacing one word class with another without changing the meaning of the message)

⁶ In her book *Among the White Moonfaces: Memoirs of a Nyonya Feminist*, Times Books International, Singapore 1996, major Malaysian author Shirley Geok-lin Lim writes: "In 1974 ... I returned to Malaysia for the summer. Second Brother was teaching at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang ... A visiting Australian professor, red-haired and red-skinned from the tropical sun, invited me to teach a creative writing course with him. A scholar of Indonesian literature, Harry addressed the students in fluent Bahasa, for the national language of Indonesia came from the same Malay linguistic stock as the Malaysian national language. I had not used Bahasa Malaysia since studying it at seventeen for the precollege examinations, so I lectured in English. It was another of those international cultural ironies that befuddle simple identity equations. Harry had just translated a collection of stories set in New York City by an Indonesian writer. "If you could read this and check the American idioms," he said, "I would be ever so grateful." He had never been to Manhattan, had to guess at the speech of New Yorkers from old American movies, and thought of me as American." (p. 263, 265-266)

- 5— modulation (variation in the form of the message, obtained by a change in the point of view)
- 6— equivalence (rendering one and the same situation by using completely different stylistic and structural methods)
- 7— adaptation (creating a new situation that can be considered equivalent to that referred to in the SL message).⁷

Beside Kayam's consistent use of literal translation, I would like to point to the other categories which are most relevant to the nature of translation in Kayam's writing: borrowing, calque and adaptation. Of these, the most important category by far is borrowing.

BORROWING ENGLISH WORDS

We may consider Kayam's fluent Indonesian as representing a dynamic use of Vinay and Darbelnet's third category, literal transfer from American and Javanese languages and cultures

Beyond literal translation, Kayam also makes extensive use of borrowing, Vinay and Darbelnet's first category. In the American stories, Kayam simply retains many original English terms in his Indonesian without translating them at all. In the story *Seribu Kunang-kunang di Manhattan*, for example, we find such items as "scotch", "martini", "gin", "vermouth", "darling", "Empire State Building", "New York Times", "Central Park Zoo", "medium large (pyjamas)", and a song, "deep blue sea, baby ...". In the story "Sybil", we find: "please?", "OK?", "toast", "fish" (a card game), "lolly" (for candy?), "subway", "supermarket", "cafeteria", "hot dog", "hamburger", "pizza", "coke", "root beer", and the film title "Curse of the Werewolf". The other American stories confirm that the borrowings without translations mainly refer to the categories which relate to alcohol, foods, places, song and film titles. *Sybil* also includes the semi-calque "*segelas gin dan tonic*".

Usually the borrowings are single words woven grammatically into Indonesian sentences. *Seribu Kunang-kunang di Manhattan*, begins: "*Mereka duduk bermalas-malasan di sofa. Marno dengan segelas Scotch dan Jane dengan segelas martini*". On a few occasions, Kayam

⁷ Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet (1958): *Comparative Stylistics of French and English*, pp. 30-41. (Abridged version in Hatim and Munday: Translation: An advanced resource book. pp. 148-151.)

represents whole sentences within an Indonesian language setting: "*Bapak mabuk lagi semalam. Ibu dipukuli. Puas, Tuan? Now get out! Out!*" (*Secangkir Kopi dan Sepotong Donut*).

BORROWING ENGLISH SENTENCES

We should note, however, that when Kayam borrows whole sentences, he most commonly has specific socio-linguistic purposes in mind. *Isteriku, Madame Schlitz dan Sang Raksasa* represents Madame Schlitz thick Austrian accent as follows: "Interezting, interezting. I' zink your husband's name is also interezting. H-h-Omar Kay-yyamm. *Berterus-terang saja karena tertarik akan nama suami Nyonya maka aku ke mari*. Just curious, you know." (Kayam comments: I think my wife was embarrassed half to death at that time by my wife.) Part of the point of the story is that Madm Schlitz' accent is false: when alone, she is discovered to speak with a normal mid-town Manhattan accent.

The story *There goes Tatum* describes a confrontation with an Afro-American thief. Some of the thief's sentences are presented in "Black English": "Mistuh, gimme fifty cents, please", "There goes Tatum", "That's a good boy. Thank you, Mistuh". In the same story we also find borrowed words and sentences set in Indonesian: "Fifty cents. *Dengan uang itu aku bisa beli satu hero-sandwich salami sebesar guling*." (Note that "hero-sandwich salami" is actually an Indonesian calque, in which the adjective follows the noun.) Had Kayam decided to rigorously translate this dialect of American English, he may have felt it difficult to choose an appropriate sub-dialect of Indonesian. The question, of course, is which one would he have used: Jakarta dialect? *prokem*? None would have been suitable, so the choice to represent the thief's speech in this particular English seems reasonable enough and not misleading for the reader.

BORROWING JAVANESE WORDS

The most frequent translation strategy used by Kayam in the post 1965 Javanese-based stories is also borrowing.

Some (but not all) of these borrowed words and phrases come from Javanese, as one might expect given the background of the characters in the stories. In *Musim Gugur di Connecticut*, we find only the kinship terms "mas" and "mbakyu", and the weekday "Rebo". These kinship terms recur in *Bawuk*, together with "tayuban" and "ledek". The social categories of



“*priyayi*” and “*abangan*” are crucial to understanding the story and *Bawuk*’s motivations in particular. The text of “*Bawuk*” tends to assume an understanding of these sociological terms.*

Sri Sumarah is heavily loaded with single untranslated Javanese words embedded in Indonesian sentences. These words tend to be emotional words — “*ngenes*”, “*bekti*”, “*roso senang, krasan dan tenteram*”; female hygiene — “*bau anyir dan amis*”; food — “*gudeg*”, predictably, and “*manggo*”; conventional greetings — “*kulo nuwun*”, “*nyuwun pangestu*”; and a few others.

As in the American stories, the use of a word from a second language such as Javanese indicates that the sentence should not be read as an Indonesian sentence. When the soldiers tell *Sri Sumarah* “*Anak sampeyan dan suaminya itu ikut berontak*”, we are meant to understand that they are speaking Javanese. Similarly when *Bawuk* attempts with some difficulty to teach the servants Dutch songs she has learnt at school, she says: “*Ayo mBok, ayo Pan. Ik bin een kleine officier ... Lho, jangan kelene opisir. Klei ... ne. Of ... fi... cieieierrr. Ayo mBok, ayo Pan. Waaaah, bodo ya kalian.*” We must assume that she speaks to them in Javanese. The servant girls’ comment in “*Kimono biru buat isteri*” — “*Sudah ditunggu-tunggu dari tadi. Kok baru rawuh. Tuane sama nyonyae sudah nar bopen sejak siang tadi*” — is explicitly described as “*gaya nada Jateng yang tebal dan kental*”, again an indication of Kayam’s sensitivity to various registers.

It is interesting to speculate why Kayam considered his readers to be potentially fluent in English but not in Javanese. Perhaps this was a recognition of the diversity of his educated modern Indonesian readership.

BORROWING WITH EXPLICATION

In these stories, Kayam develops three further strategies involving the use of borrowed terms.

The first of these is to add a translation of the Javanese into Indonesian in a footnote: for example, text “*di kamar aja takon*”, footnote “*jangan tanya*”; and text “*Gusti nyuwun ngapura*”, footnote “*Tuhan mohon ampun*”. This strategy is also used for song titles (interestingly he never translates English song titles).

* See the classic study by Clifford Geertz: *The Religion of Java*. Free Press, Glencoe 1961.

The second is to add a translation immediately next to the word or phrase. In *Sri Sumarah*, some of these relate to the life cycle: “*jodoh yang sudah tersedia – jodoh sing wis pinasti kata orang Jawa*”, “*laku – satu perjalanan yang panjang menghadap Tuhan*”, “*kelon, tidur bersama anaknya, mengelus-elus rambutnya, menyanyikan tembang sambil menggrayangi kutu*”. Others are terms for ascetic practice: “*nyekar, menabur bunga ke makam*”, “*tidur kekadar, di luar, malamnya*”, and “*wisik, bisikan mereka yang sudah ada di atas sana*”. These two terminological usages (untranslated borrowing, glossed borrowing) are often used to frame movements within the wider story.

The third strategy is to add an explanation, rather than a translation of the term, within the main text. *Sri Sumarah* begins with a long explanation of Sri’s name and that of her husband, at various stages in their lives. In the same story, we find Kunti glossed as “*Kunti, ibu Pandawa*” and “*Sembadra, alias Lara Ireng, adik Kresna dan Baladewa, isteri Arjuna, laki-laki dari segala laki-laki. Dialah isteri yang sejati. Patuh, sabar, mengerti akan kelemahan suami, mangagumi akan kekuatannya.*”

BORROWINGS FROM OTHER LANGUAGES

Kayam’s borrowings in the Javanese post-1965 stories relate to more than the Javanese language and culture. They cover a time span which not only includes the world of the wayang-shadow theatre and traditional Javanese society, but also one in which Javanese society and culture was influenced by Dutch colonialism, the Indonesian Revolution, the 1965 Coup, and Indonesian engagement with Japanese business during the early 1970s.

Therefore, we find Dutch words and phrases in *Bawuk*, reflecting the colonial *priyayi* world of the 1930s: “*Juffrouw Dijkma*”, “*onder*”, “*disiplin, patuh, serius and efisen*”, “*huiswerk*” and the folktales *Roodkapje*, *Sneeuwitje*, and *Hans en Grietje*. There are again song titles and the greetings of conventional society: “*inggih*”, “*dalam ndoro*”. Even as adults, thirty years later, *Bawuk*’s brothers and sisters still use words and sentences in Dutch: “*Kok tahu saja jij?*”, “*Wat wil je daarmee zeggen, Mas Sun?*” Prior to the Coup, Dutch and English terms are most often used in political discussions: “*landereform*”, “*diskusi*”, “*aksi*”.

There are also a host of un glossed Indonesian political abbreviations from the Guided Democracy era: BTI, Gerwani, Lekra, TNI, CIA (*Bawuk*); CGMI, BTI, Kodim, CPM, PGRI, Ansor (*Sri Sumarah*); HIS, NU, PNI,

PKI, Gestapu (*Musim Gugur di Connecticut*). It is not clear why Kayam does not explicate these terms.

Finally, in *Musim Gugur di Connecticut*, set in Tokyo, there are a very few, highly conventional Japanese terms: “kimono”, “Kawabata”, “Domo arigato-gozaïmasuta” and “hai!” For once, the fact that they are untranslated indicates their alien and incomprehensible nature.



BORROWING FROM ARABIC

There are only a few words from Arabic in any of the stories, and they are extremely significant. The use of the word “halal” in *Sri Sumarah* throws a sudden unexpected light on the American stories in which absence of the religious values of moral decency (especially with regard to sexual and family relations, and the drinking of alcohol) present an implicit Indonesian sub-text to these stories and suggest why the stories are clearly lighter and more trivial than those set in Java. The quotation from the *Alfatihah* at the end of *Bawuk* clearly marks the behaviour of the members of the communists and their sympathisers as belonging to the “way of those who go astray”. Bawuk’s behaviour, however much it is justified by her loyalty to her husband, must not be followed by her children, who need to learn proper religious values.

OBLIQUE TRANSLATION

In comparison to Kayam’s regular use of direct translation devices, including borrowing, there are perhaps only a few places where he uses oblique translation.

The most obvious creation of a new situation that can be considered similar to that referred to in the SL message (adaptation) occurs in “*Kimono biru buat isteri*”: “... filsafat kuno yang mungkin sekuno I Ching. Bunyinya: Untuk memancing ikan kakap dibutuhkan lemparan umpan ikan teri. (Terjemahan bebas bahasa Indonesia jadi kira-kira akan berbunyi: Untuk menangkap Rolls Royce di Priok dibutuhkan Fiat 125)”.

We might also argue for cultural adaptation when Sri identifies herself with first Sembadra then Kunti; and when Mus, successful at last in buying the kimono for his wife, compares himself with “*Arjuna, alias Janaka, alias Dananjaya, alias Premadi*” and his role: “*mendatangkan gamelan Lokananta buat Sembadra dari kayangan*”.

A THOUSAND FIREFLIES IN MANHATTAN

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that Umar Kayam's story *Seribu kunang-kunang di Manhattan* provides us with an interesting metaphor for the act of translation. In this story, Marno looks out of the window of Jane's apartment and suddenly sees what he imagines to be a myriad of fireflies. Jane cannot see them. At first he describes them as "*lampu hijau kecil-kecil sebesar noktah.*" When she is finally able to visual them perched on a tree by the side of the road, an equivalent image presents itself, like the lights on a Christmas tree.

In translation, we are creating images for readers who cannot know the linguistic object referred to and its cultural significance. Kayam translates as much as he can by writing a language which the reader will understand. Then he goes further, by borrowing terms, especially English terms, which he does not translate (therefore assuming them to be somewhat familiar to the reader). In the Javanese-based stories, he goes does the opposite to the earlier American stories (thereby assuming many Indonesians not to be familiar with this "regional" language). He frequently glosses meanings in footnotes or in the text itself.

His methods throughout, therefore, are almost entirely those which Vinay and Darbelnet categorise as direct translation, in the form of literal translation with extensive borrowing. Only in a very few places do we find a use of calque, and of oblique translation in the form of adaptation. He wants the reader to see the fireflies, even in Manhattan.

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