

An Analysis of Idiom Translation Strategies in *The Life of Pi* By Yaan Martel

Bella Pratama Ongkosaputri¹, Esriaty S. Kendenan²
Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana
elzbthbella12@gmail.com¹, esriaty.kendenan@uksw.edu²

Abstract

Idiom is a fixed group of words which has a particular meaning. Translating idioms to another language can be complicated and quite challenging because idioms cannot be translated word-by-word. This research aims to identify English idioms in Yaan Martel's Life of Pi and to examine the translation strategies used by Tanti Lesmana in translating the novel into Indonesian based on Mona Baker's (1992) theory. The data of this qualitative research were collected from Life of Pi as the Source Text (ST) and Kisah Pi as the Target Text (TT). The results show that there are 18 idioms found in the novel. The data of ST idioms were verified by checking their existence in online dictionaries. To determine their translation strategies, the researchers analyzed the meaning of the ST idioms then found their equivalences in Kamus Ungkapan Bahasa Indonesia (Badudu, 2008). These idioms were translated using three out of four translation strategies. The most frequently applied strategy is translation by paraphrase with 13 idioms, translation by using an idiom of similar meaning and dissimilar form of 4 idioms, and finally translation by omission of 1 idiom. Translation by paraphrase is the most frequently applied strategy because of the difficulty in finding equal idioms in target text.

Keywords: *Life of Pi, idiom, translation strategy*

submit date: 25-03-2025 accept date: 25-08-2025 publish date : 13-09-2025

Correspondence author: Bella Pratama Ongkosaputri, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Indonesia. E-Mail: elzbthbella12@gmail.com



INTRODUCTION

The research will analyze Idioms translation in the Life of Pi from English to Indonesian. The Life of Pi is a novel written by Yaan Martel that was published in 2001. This novel tells the story of Pi, the son of a zookeeper. Living in poverty in Pondicherry, India, they try their luck by moving to Canada on a freight ship. A ship breakdown leaves Pi stranded in the middle of the Pacific Ocean with a zebra, hyena, orangutan and tiger named Richard Parker. They try to survive in the middle of the ferocious ocean.

Researchers chose this novel because it won the 2002 Boeke Prize, a prestigious South African literary award, which highlights its significance and excellence in storytelling. Yann Martel's use of idiomatic language throughout the novel adds depth and realism to the characters and their experiences. What also drew me to this book is the fact that there appears to be a lack of scholarly articles focused on it as a primary subject of study. This gap presents a unique opportunity for me to explore the novel in a new light and contribute fresh insights to its analysis.

In the source text (ST), Life of Pi was written by Yaan Martel and was published by Knopf Canada Publishing in 2001. The novel mainly targets the story of the eponymous Indian teenager who is adrift at sea, after a shipwreck, in a lifeboat delivered with a Bengal tiger. Yaan Martel has also written other books entitled The High Mountains of Portugal. In the target text (TT), Life of Pi has been translated into Indonesian with the title The Story of Pi by Indonesian with the title Kisah Pi by Tanti Lesmana which was published in 2004 by Gramedia Pustaka Utama. This translation aims to bring this popular novel in English to Indonesian readers who are interested in adventure fiction

Life of Pi by Yaan Martel won the 2003 Boeke Prize, a South African novel award and a 2012 film adaptation directed by Ang Lee and based on a screenplay adapted by David Magee was widely released in the United States on 21 November 2012. At the 85th Academy Awards, the film won four awards out of eleven nominations, including Best Director. In this novel, Yaan Martel uses expressions to enrich the story. One of the expressions that we can find in this story are idioms. Idioms are an interesting and integral component of language, reflecting our understanding of communication. Mona Baker's, a leading figure in translation studies, has contributed significantly to our understanding of how idioms function across languages. Her work investigates the complexity of idiomatic expressions, exploring their meaning, usage and challenges in translation. There are several studies that analyze three book titles using translation strategies. Mona Baker (1992) studied the translation of idioms in the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (Putra & Novalinda, 2019) and in researcher found that this study aims to analyze the translation strategies used by translators in translating English idiom into Indonesian. The data source is taken from J.D Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* by analyzing 35 idioms from the novel. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, the author found that there are three idioms that use translation strategies by translating idioms that have the same meaning but different forms, 25 idioms that use idiom translation strategies by paraphrasing. Krisandini & Sutrisno (2022) also applied Mona Baker's (1992) strategies and Newmark's (1988, 1991) taxonomy in analyzing the translation of idioms in the novel entitled *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. The idioms were classified using Baker's (1992) according to the translation strategy. The results show that translation by Paraphrasing is the most frequently used strategy by the translators. There are 222 idioms (82%) translated using paraphrase translation strategy, 28 idioms (10%) with literal translation strategy, 14 idioms (5%) with translation strategy using idioms that have the same meaning and form. The third translation is in the novel *This Earth of Mankind* (Floranti & Mubarok, 2020). The researcher compared them with the idioms in the target language (English). The dominant translation strategy used by the author is paraphrase with 11 data. Some previous studies

have analyzed idioms in The Case of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, The Catcher in the Rye's Novel, and This Earth of Mankind. However, no one has specifically focused on The Life of Pi. This novel has been discussed in terms of the similes and metaphors in the novel and its Indonesian translation. This study aims to fill the gap by analyzing idiom translation strategies in Life of Pi and the strategies used by translators in the novel Life of Pi.

Fernando (1996) in Krisandini & Sutrisno (2022, p. 26) defines an idiom as an “indivisible unit whose components cannot be varied or varied only within definable limits” The components that form an idiom are fixed or only language (words, phrases, and sentence) whose meaning cannot be taken from general grammatical rule which is applied in the language or defined from the lexical items which construct the unity.” That being said, the meaning of an idiom does not always depend on each of the items that construct the whole phrase or sentence.

The researchers using idiom translation strategies by Mona Baker's (2018) an idiom or a fixed expression can be translated into another language depending on many factors. It is not only a question of whether an idiom with a similar meaning is available in the target language. Other factors include, for example, the significance of the specific lexical items which constitute the idiom, that is, whether they are manipulated elsewhere in the source text, whether verbally or visually, as well as the appropriateness or inappropriateness of using idiomatic language in a given register in the target language (Baker, 2018, p. 77)

METHOD

This research will use a qualitative method to compare the source text and target text in the novel Life of Pi. (Bryman 2008a: 366) in Martyn Hammersley (2013, p.1) defines an qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. The source of data for this research is the book Life of Pi by Yann Martel, originally published in 2001 by Knopf Canada, with a target audience of readers

who enjoy adventure fiction. The target text is its Indonesian translation, *Kisah Pi*, translated by Tanti Lesmana and published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama in the same year, 2004.

The data were collected by reading the entire comprehension of the context, Then we noted down along with the page numbers where they were found and then to collect the data were compared with their translations. The translated idioms were noted down as well along with the page numbers. Thus, there were two primary pieces of data in this research: the idioms in ST and their Indonesian translations in TT.

Here are the steps of data collection in this research:

1. Reading the book *Life of Pi* in English and its Indonesian translation.
2. Finding idioms ST by looking at words whose meanings could not be easily understood by interpreting the words separately.
3. Making a list of idioms found in *Life of Pi* was made.
4. Checking the online dictionary to verify the existence of idioms.

This study aims to analyse the translation strategies used in translating idiom from the Source Text (ST) into the Target Text (TT) using Mona Baker's (2018). Baker outlines several idiom translation strategies, which are crucial in maintaining the form and meaning of idioms across languages. These strategies include translating idiom using similar meaning and form, translating idiom using similar meaning but dissimilar form, translating idiom by paraphrase, and translating idiom omission. In this study, idioms in ST were identified and compared with their equivalents in TT to determine which strategy was used by the translators. For each idiom, it is checked whether the idiom in ST has a direct equivalent in TT, whether it has been paraphrased, or whether a more general one has been used to preserve meaning. By carefully analysing the translation of idioms, the aim is to better understand how translators navigate the complexities of idiomatic meaning and structure while ensuring that the translation remains contextually appropriate. This comparison not only highlights the choices made by the translator, but also underlines the importance of context in translating idiomatic, as context can often influence meaning and form.

Identifying the characteristics of idioms found in the ST, idioms often convey non-literal meanings. Analyze how they can symbolize concepts or ideas, as well as their unalterable structure that maintains its form in various contexts, usually idioms can strengthen the content of the text, find the meaning of the idioms in the ST. Look at the surrounding sentences or paragraphs. Context can provide clues to the meaning of the idiom, then consider the literal meaning of the words in the idiom and how it differs from the figurative meaning. Idioms often don't make sense when taken literally. Sometimes, finding synonyms or similar phrases can help you understand idioms better. To see the accuracy, you can use a dictionary or online idiom resources and then finding the translation of the idioms in the ST with Identifying Idioms read the Text and highlight idiomatic expressions, understanding the context consider the context in which the idiom is used, as this can affect its meaning, using a dictionary with idiomatic dictionaries in both the source and target languages, as they often provide translations and explanations, last check for the examples look for examples of idiom usage in both languages to ensure your translation is accurate.

Analyzing the strategies used by the translator to translate ST idioms into TT, the translator uses idiom strategies namely translation of an idiom of similar meaning and form, translation of an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form and translation of idioms by paraphrase. In translation an idiom of similar meaning and form is shown by the similarity of idioms from ST and TT, both have the same idiom form and the same meaning, then translation an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form can be shown by the difference of idioms from ST and TT, the idioms are different but have the same meaning, and finally Translation idiom by paraphrase is shown by there is no similarity of idioms and meanings from ST and TT but the writer explains the meaning with his own writing so the meaning in the idiom is not in accordance with the translation.

In order to ensure the validity of idioms that were identified, some English idiom dictionaries were used as references, namely Cambridge Dictionary Online, Merriam Webster Dictionary Online, and The Free Dictionary Online were used

to analyze the data. This procedure was also applied for the Target Text, where the Dictionary of Indonesian Expressions (Badudu, 2008), were used to help analyze the data in the TT

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The researcher found 18 idioms in the novel *Life of Pi*, the researcher will conduct an analysis by using Mona Baker's strategies in their research.

1. Idiom found in the novel *Life of Pi*

The idioms found in this study are 18, the researcher provides 2 analyses that show that the ST is an idiom accompanied by concrete with an online dictionary of idioms.

Datum 1

ST :In fact, it was as hard as a rock.

TT: Malahan kotoran itu keras menjadi batu karang

The idiom contained in Data 1, hard as a rock, refers. This idiom shows something being very hard . hard as a rock It means very hard (Merriam Webster). As written in *Kamus Ungkapan Bahasa Indonesia*, membatu means “menjadi keras seperti batu” (hard as a rock) (Badudu, 2008, p. 40). The translation strategy used here seems to be translating an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, as the idiom "hard as a rock" directly corresponds to "keras menjadi batu karang" in Indonesian, maintaining both form and meaning. In conclusion, the dissimilarity in meaning and form arises from the way translators handle idioms. They may retain the exact form and meaning, adapt it to a similar form with a different meaning, or simplify if there is no direct idiomatic equivalent in the TT.

Translation by using similar meanings but different forms. The core meaning something very hard has been retained, but the specific image of ‘stone’ in the ST has been replaced with a more complex metaphor involving ‘coral’ and

'rock' in the TT. This may reflect an attempt to make the idiomatic more understandable in Indonesian.

Datum 2

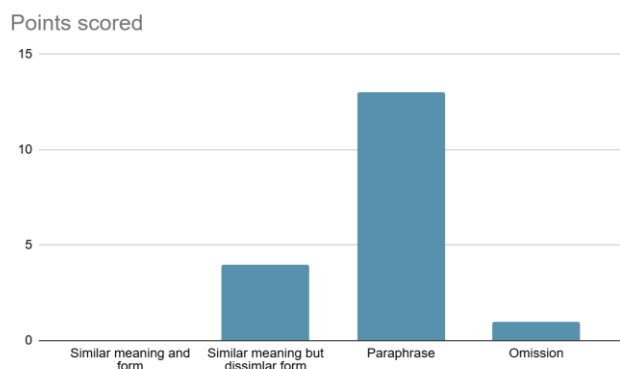
ST : Night crept up. My surroundings disappeared into pitch-black darkness.

TT: Malam merangkak naik. Sekelilingku gelap gulita

The idiom contained in Data 2, pitch black, refers. This idiom is often used in a situation or environment that is completely dark, with no light at all. in ST. pitch black means Very hard (Merriam Webster). As written in Kamus Ungkapan Bahasa Indonesia, Gelap buta means “ gelap pekat ” (very dark) (Badudu, 2008, p. 107). The meaning of both (pitch-black darkness and gelap gulita) is essentially the same, both describe complete darkness. The form (the way the structure and the words used) is different. In pitch-black is used, while in Indonesian, a different phrase gelap gulita is employed to express the same concept of intensity of darkness. This is using strategies of similar meaning but dissimilar form. Pitch-black is an idiom because it transcends the literal meanings of the individual words to create a figurative expression of complete darkness. It evokes an image of deep darkness that is understood culturally and contextually, making it a fixed, idiomatic phrase in English. It is not meant to be interpreted literally as the substance pitch, but rather to convey the idea of total obscurity or darkness in various situations.

2. Strategies To Translate Idioms in the novel Life of Pi

Strategies found from four strategies, found three strategies that exist in this novel namely translation of an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, translation by paraphrase, and translation by omission and here the researcher gives each strategy one data analysis.



The table shows that translation by paraphrase is more dominant.

a. Translation An Idiom of Similar Meaning but Dissimilar Form

It is often possible to find an idiom or fixed expression in the target language which has a meaning similar to that of the source idiom or expression, but which consists of different lexical items (Baker, 2018, p. 79).

Datum 3

ST : Notice how they come in: mighty predators though they are, "kings of beasts"

TT: Perhatikan bagaimana mereka kedalam arena, para predator perkasa ini "raja-raja hutan"

In the ST, the idiom found is with Kings of beast. In the Free Dictionary the idiom with Kings of beast means Lion. Therefore, King of the beast can be classified as a idiom because it has one component with literal meaning and another one component that carries nonliteral meaning. The translator translates with King of beast into Raja- Raja Hutan in TT, which is equivalent in meaning and form. According to Kamus Ungkapan Bahasa Indonesia,dengan Raja Hutan means Harimau (Tiger) (Badudu, 2008, p. 296). It can be said that the translator applies the strategy of using an idiom of similar meaning and dissimilar form. In the ST idiom kings of beasts refers to lions, symbolizing dominance and strength. This is a common metaphorical phrase in English that associates lions with the idea of being the most powerful or revered animal, but in the TT translator uses raja-raja hutan (which translates to kings of the jungle), but in Indonesian, this expression is more commonly associated with tigers (harimau). This phrase

retains the symbolic meaning of being the powerful ruler of the jungle or wilderness, but uses a different animal (tiger instead of lion).

b. Translation by Paraphrase

This is by far the most common way of translating idioms when a match cannot be found in the target language or when it seems inappropriate to use idiomatic language in the target text because of differences in stylistic preferences of the source and target languages. may or may not find the paraphrases accurate; the examples below are quoted as they appear in the original documents to illustrate the strategy of paraphrase rather than to explain the meanings of individual idioms (Baker, 2018, p. 81).

Datum 4

ST: These people walk by a widow deformed by leprosy begging for a few paise, walk by children dressed in rags living in the street, and they think, "Business as usual."

TT: Saat melewati janda yang cacat oleh kusta dan mengemis meminta receh, atau anak-anak jalanan berpakaian compang-camping, orang-orang ini berpikir, "Cuma pura-pura saja, biar dikasihani".

The idiom in the Source Text is Business as usual. According to Meriam Webster of Idioms, this idiom means used to say that something is working or continuing in the normal or usual way. Business as usual is translated into Cuma pura-pura saja, biar dikasihani in the Target Text. It is not an idiom. Therefore, the translator applies the third translation strategy: the translator uses his/her own words to target language so that the meaning can be acceptable and understandable. In the ST the idiom Business as usual means that something is continuing in the usual, normal manner, often without concern or disruption despite difficult circumstances, but in the TT Cuma pura-pura saja, biar dikasihani can be roughly translated as just pretending, to gain sympathy which deviates from the

idiomatic meaning of business as usual. Instead of simply conveying that everything continues as normal, it adds a layer of interpretation about pretending to be unaffected to gain sympathy from others.

c. Translation idiom by Omission

As with single words, an idiom may sometimes be omitted altogether in the target text. This may be because it has no close match in the target language, its meaning cannot be easily paraphrased, or for stylistic reasons (Baker, 2018, p. 85).

Datum 5

ST: who were in the thrall of reason, that fool's gold for the bright reminded me of the three-toed sloth; and the three-toed sloth, such a beautiful example of the miracle of life, reminded me of God.

TT: sampai-sampai tidak bisa menerima apa-apa yang di luar akal mengingatkanku pada sloth berjari tiga; sementara itu, sloth berjari tiga, yang merupakan contoh indah keajaiban kehidupan, mengingatkanku pada Tuhan

It can be seen in the example above that Fool's gold is not realised in Indonesian. According to the Cambridge Dictionary idiomatic Fool's gold is the name popularly given to any yellow metal, such as pyrite or chalcopyrite, that may be mistaken for gold. The translator applies an omission strategy. The translator also has the option of not realising an idiom in the translation because it does not have an equivalent. The idiom does not have a close equivalent in the target language or its meaning cannot be paraphrased easily. The omission of Fool's gold in the Indonesian translation is an example of idiomatic omission because the phrase doesn't have a direct, commonly understood equivalent in Indonesian. Fool's gold refers to a substance (like pyrite) that looks like gold but isn't valuable, and it's used metaphorically to describe something that seems valuable but isn't. In this context, it can be interpreted as a warning against being

deceived by appearances, particularly in the realm of reasoning or intellectual pursuits.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, 18 idioms were found in the novel. The idioms were classified based on the idiom classification proposed by Mona Baker (2018) and the results showed that most of the idioms belonged to Translation by paraphrase. The idioms were then analysed using the translation strategies proposed by Baker (2018). It was found that translation by paraphrase is the most widely used strategy by translators, while translation by using idioms that have the same meaning and form is the least used strategy. This may be due to the difficulty of finding an equivalent idiom due to the lack of idioms that have the exact same form and meaning as the Target Text. In addition, translation with similar meaning and form is also not found. By removing the idiom in the TT the message conveyed in the sentence can change. Although the idiom can be replaced with another phrase that fits the context, the form of the sentence in the Target Text will change. In addition, the translation using idioms in paraphrase is more dominant than the translation using idioms that have the same meaning and different forms. This can happen because the translator is able to find suitable idioms in the Target Text whose meaning is close to the meaning in the Source Text.

REFERENCE

- Badudu, J. S. (2008). *Kamus Ungkapan Bahasa Indonesia*. Penerbit Buku Kompas.
- Mona baker—In other words_ a coursebook on translation (2018, routledge)-74-114. Pdf. (2024, July 11). SlideShare. https://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/mona-baker-in-other-words_-a-coursebook-on-translation-2018-routledge-74-114-pdf/270189480
- Hammersley, M. (2013). *What is qualitative research?* Bloomsbury.
- Martel, Y. (2001). *Life of pi*. Canada by Random House of Canada.
- Martel, Y. (2004). *Kisah pi*. PT Gramedia Putaka Utama.

- Putra, H. A., & Novalinda, N. (2019). The strategies used in translating idiom from english into indonesia in the catcher in the ryeâ€™s novel. *Vivid: Journal of Language and Literature*, 8(1), 13–17. <https://doi.org/10.25077/vj.8.1.13-17.2019>
- Krisandini, M. T. K., & Sutrisno, A. (2022). The translation of idioms from english into indonesian: The case of j. K. Rowling’s harry potter and the half-blood prince. *Lexicon*, 8(1), 24–32. <https://doi.org/10.22146/lexicon.v8i1.65904>
- Floranti, A. D., & Mubarak, Y. (2020). Indonesia–english translation of idiomatic expressions in the novel this earth of mankind. *Buletin Al-Turas*, 26(2), 207–220. <https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/al-turats/article/view/13834>
- Definition of business as usual. (2025, February 18). <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/business+as+usual>
- Definition of free as a bird. (n.d.). Retrieved February 28, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/free+as+a+bird>
- Fool’s gold. (n.d.). TheFreeDictionary.Com. Retrieved February 28, 2025, from <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/fool%27s+gold>
- King of the beasts. (n.d.). TheFreeDictionary.Com. Retrieved February 28, 2025, from <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/King+of+the+Beasts>
- Pitch black. (n.d.). TheFreeDictionary.Com. Retrieved February 28, 2025, from <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/pitch+black>