

An Analysis of Wordplay and Idiom Translation in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets into Indonesian

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Article history:

Received
6 June 2025

Revised
7 July 2025

Accepted
15 July 2025

Available online
15 July 2025

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Abstract: This study investigates the translation of wordplay and idioms in Chapter 1 of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* into Indonesian, highlighting the linguistic and cultural challenges inherent in translating creative language. Utilizing Delabastita's (1993) typology for wordplay and Baker's (2017) strategies for idioms, the research employs a qualitative comparative method. Findings reveal that wordplay is predominantly paraphrased (66.7%), often resulting in diminished humor and stylistic nuance, while idioms are largely translated literally (55.6%), occasionally producing unnatural phrasing. Nonetheless, successful cultural substitutions—such as rendering “a load of rubbish” as “omong kosong besar”—demonstrate effective dynamic equivalence. The study underscores the tension between maintaining textual fidelity and achieving cultural accessibility, offering practical insights for translators working with fantasy literature and linguistically inventive texts.

Keywords: wordplay, idioms, translation strategies, literary translation, Indonesian translation

INTRODUCTION

The translation of literary works, especially those filled with wordplay and idioms, is a complex task that becomes even more challenging when dealing with languages as different as English and Indonesian. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* serves as a perfect example of this challenge, as J.K. Rowling's clever use of puns (like "Flourish and Blotts" for a bookstore name) and English idioms (such as "kettle of fish") requires careful adaptation to work in Indonesian. Previous studies have looked at either idioms (Krisandini & Sutrisno, 2022) or wordplay (Prihatini, 2022) separately, but none have thoroughly examined how both are handled together in the Indonesian version of this popular novel

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To cite this article: Fauzi, F. A., Hamid, F. H. S., Syahid, A., & Fauzi, I. (2025). An Analysis of Wordplay and Idiom Translation in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* into Indonesian. *Ebony --- Journal of English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature*, 5(2) 2025, 333–341.

(Siregar & Pane, 2021). This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing Chapter 1's translation using two key frameworks: (Delabastita & Hulst, 1993) theory for wordplay and (Baker, 2017) strategies for idioms.

Wordplay, which includes puns and clever word uses, is particularly tricky to translate because it often relies on specific sounds or double meanings that don't exist in other languages (Agoes, 2016). For instance, the name "Diagon Alley" sounds like "diagonally" in English, creating a playful effect that's hard to replicate directly in Indonesian (Chen, 2024; Mar et al., 2022). Research shows that translators often have to choose between keeping the exact words (which might not make sense) or changing them to preserve the meaning but lose the wordplay (Delabastita & Hulst, 1993). In Indonesian translations, we frequently see the second approach simplifying complex wordplay into clearer phrases, as happened with *Perahu Kertas* (Bonita, 2021) and *SpongeBob SquarePants* subtitles (Nurlaila & Purwaningsih, 2015). This often means sacrificing some of the original's humor and cleverness to make sure readers understand the main point (Br. Kembaren, 2020).

Idioms those colorful expressions like "kick the bucket" present different but equally difficult problems. Because they're deeply tied to culture, a direct translation might confuse readers who don't share that cultural background. Baker's (2017) research shows several ways translators handle this: they might translate literally (keeping the original words), substitute a similar Indonesian idiom, or sometimes even leave out particularly confusing ones. Studies of other Harry Potter books found that Indonesian translators often choose literal translations (Krisandini & Sutrisno, 2022), though this can sound unnatural. Other times, they successfully swap English idioms for Indonesian equivalents, like changing "a load of rubbish" to "omong kosong besar" (Baker, 2017). The choice depends on how well the cultural ideas behind the idioms translate between languages (Ghafel et al., 2011; Nida, 1964).

What makes this study particularly important is that while there's been lots of research on Harry Potter translations in general, very little focuses on how both wordplay and idioms work together in the Indonesian version. Most studies look at just one aspect like (Hang, 2018) work on character names in Vietnamese or Krisandini & Sutrisno's (2022) analysis of idioms missing how these elements interact in Rowling's writing. There's also much more research on European language translations than Indonesian ones (Bonita, 2021; Br. Kembaren, 2020), despite the growing popularity of Indonesian translations.

By examining Chapter 1 ("The Worst Birthday") in detail, this research will show what strategies work best for translating both wordplay and idioms into Indonesian. We'll look at specific examples like how "The magic word" became "Kata sihirnya" (losing its double meaning) or how "a load of rubbish" successfully transformed into "omong kosong besar." The findings will help translators facing similar challenges with creative texts and contribute to our understanding of how humor and cultural references can cross language barriers. This is especially important for fantasy literature like Harry Potter, where made up words and magical concepts add extra layers of difficulty (Cornelio, 2016).

The study uses a qualitative approach, carefully comparing the original English text with its Indonesian translation to identify patterns in how wordplay and idioms are handled. For wordplay, we'll categorize examples based on Delabastita's (1993) system (like puns,

ironic phrases, etc.) and see which translation strategies are used most often. For idioms, we'll apply Baker's (2017) framework to analyze whether translators preferred literal translations, cultural substitutions, or other approaches. This method builds on previous successful studies of literary translation (Angguntur et al., 2020; Inayah et al., 2018) while focusing specifically on the unique challenges of Harry Potter.

What we discover will have both theoretical and practical value. On the theoretical side, it will deepen our understanding of how linguistic creativity works across languages - especially humor and cultural references that are hard to translate directly (Nugraha, 2023). On the practical side, it will give translators concrete examples of what strategies work (and don't work) when bringing creative English texts into Indonesian. This could lead to better translation practices for fantasy literature and other wordplay rich genres. Future research could expand on these findings by looking at more chapters or comparing translations in other language pairs to see if similar patterns emerge (Wang & Liu, 2017).

The challenges are significant as shown by cases where phonological jokes like "Muggle" (which sounds like "maggot") couldn't be directly translated, or where idioms had to be completely reworked for Indonesian readers. But by systematically analyzing these challenges, this study will provide valuable insights into the art of literary translation. It will show how translators navigate the difficult balance between staying faithful to the original text and making it accessible and enjoyable for a new audience (Molina & Hurtado Albir, 2004). The results should interest not just translation scholars but also practicing translators, publishers, and even fans who wonder how their favorite magical phrases made the journey from English to Indonesian.

The growing demand for quality translations of fantasy literature in Indonesia further underscores the importance of this study. As noted by Mar et al. (2022), the Indonesian publishing market has seen a 40% increase in translated fantasy works since 2018, with readers increasingly critical of how linguistic creativity is handled. This trend mirrors global patterns observed by Wang & Liu (2017), where culturally adaptive translations consistently outperform literal ones in reader surveys. By examining Harry Potter a benchmark for fantasy translation this study addresses both scholarly and industry needs, offering evidence-based strategies to meet rising audience expectations while preserving authorial intent.

Although numerous studies have examined either idioms (e.g., Krisandini & Sutrisno, 2022) or wordplay (e.g., Prihatini, 2022) in isolation within the *Harry Potter* series, few have comprehensively explored how these two translation challenges interact within a single framework. Moreover, there is a paucity of research focusing specifically on Indonesian translations, with most prior analyses centered on European language contexts (Bonita, 2021; Br. Kembaren, 2020). This study addresses this gap by systematically analyzing both idioms and wordplay in the Indonesian version of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, using established theoretical models. It aims to identify recurring patterns, assess the effectiveness of translation strategies, and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of linguistic creativity in literary translation.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design to analyze the translation of wordplay and idioms in Chapter 1 ("The Worst Birthday") of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (HP-COS) and its Indonesian translation (*Harry Potter dan Kamar Rahasia*). The methodological framework integrates Delabastita's (1993) taxonomy of wordplay and Baker's (2017) typology of idiom translation strategies, providing a structured approach to analyzing linguistic and cultural equivalence.

Research Design

A qualitative comparative approach was adopted to facilitate in-depth textual analysis of both source and target texts. The scope was deliberately limited to Chapter 1 to ensure focus and depth.

Data Collection

Primary data were drawn from all identifiable instances of wordplay and idioms in the English text, along with their corresponding translations in the Indonesian version. Data selection was conducted via close reading, and each instance was annotated with contextual, narrative, and linguistic functions.

Analytical Framework

- **Wordplay** was categorized according to Delabastita's (1993) framework, including types such as punning, paronymy, and homophony.
- **Idioms** were analyzed using Baker's (2017) strategies, including literal translation, cultural substitution, omission, and paraphrase. Each case was tabulated for comparison, enabling systematic identification of dominant strategies and patterns, following methods established by Angguntur et al. (2020) and Inayah et al. (2018).

Evaluation Criteria

To assess the quality of translation, the study employed Nida's (1964) theory of functional equivalence and Molina & Hurtado Albir's (2004) principles of dynamic adaptation. Emphasis was placed on whether the translation preserved narrative coherence, humor, and cultural resonance.

RESULTS

This study analyzed the translation of wordplay and idioms in Chapter 1 ("The Worst Birthday") of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (HP-COS) and its Indonesian version (*Harry Potter dan Kamar Rahasia*). The findings are categorized into two main sections: wordplay translation strategies and idiom translation strategies, based on Delabastita's (1993) and Baker's (2017) frameworks, respectively.

1. Wordplay Translation Strategies

The analysis identified six instances of wordplay in Chapter 1, which were translated using the following strategies:

a. Direct Retention (16.7%)

Example: The term "M word" was retained as "Kata 'M'" in Indonesian, preserving the allusion to taboo language related to magic. This strategy effectively maintained the metahumor about the Dursleys' fear of magic (Cornelio, 2016).

b. Paraphrase (66.7%)

Example: The phrase "The magic word" (implying "please") was translated as "Kata sihirnya", losing the original double meaning. While this clarified the literal meaning, it sacrificed the ironic humor (Prihatini, 2022).

c. Cultural Adaptation (16.7%)

Example: The idiomatic twist in "Foul-weather friend" (a parody of "fair-weather friend") was translated literally as "teman di saat sulit", missing the playful subversion of the English idiom (Br. Kembaren, 2020).

Notable Challenge: The phonological play in "Muggle" (evoking "maggot") was untranslatable, highlighting Delabastita's (1993) observation that sound-based humor often requires compensation strategies.

2. Idiom Translation Strategies

Nine idioms were analyzed, with the following translation approaches:

a. Literal Translation (55.6%)

Example: "like a bomb that might go off" was rendered as "seperti bom yang bisa meledak". While this retained the original imagery, it occasionally felt unnatural in Indonesian (Inayah et al., 2018).

b. Cultural Substitution (33.3%)

Example: "a load of rubbish" was adapted to "omong kosong besar", an Indonesian phrase with equivalent connotative meaning. This achieved dynamic equivalence (Baker, 2017) and resonated better with local readers (Krisandini & Sutrisno, 2022).

c. Omission (11.1%)

Example: The idiom "slipped through Voldemort's clutches" was paraphrased as "berhadapan dengan Voldemort", omitting the vivid idiomatic expression to avoid cultural obscurity (Ghafel et al., 2011).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal significant challenges in translating wordplay and idioms from English to Indonesian, particularly in a linguistically rich text like *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. The analysis shows that translators frequently employed paraphrasing

for wordplay (66.7% of cases), prioritizing clarity over stylistic replication, which often resulted in the loss of humorous or ironic elements present in the original text. This aligns with Prihatini's (2022) findings in *The Amazing World of Gumball*, where translators similarly sacrificed wordplay for comprehensibility. However, this approach risks diminishing the playful and creative aspects that are central to Rowling's writing style. For instance, the translation of "The magic word" as "Kata sihirnya" retains the literal meaning but loses the double entendre that adds depth to the original dialogue. Direct retention was used sparingly (16.7%), primarily for terms deeply embedded in the Harry Potter universe, such as "M word," which preserves cultural specificity but assumes reader familiarity with the source material, as noted by Cornelio (2016). The untranslatability of phonological plays, like "Muggle" evoking "maggot," underscores Delabastita's (1993) argument that sound-based humor often requires compensation strategies, such as relocating puns to other parts of the text where they might be more adaptable.

For idioms, the study found a predominance of literal translation (55.6%), which, while preserving the original imagery, sometimes resulted in unnatural or awkward phrasing in Indonesian, as observed by Inayah et al. (2018). This conservative approach may reflect a desire to maintain the integrity of Rowling's world-building, where idioms often carry narrative significance. On the other hand, cultural substitution (33.3%), as seen in the translation of "a load of rubbish" to "omong kosong besar," successfully achieved dynamic equivalence (Baker, 2017), demonstrating how localized idioms can enhance reader engagement without sacrificing meaning. However, omissions (11.1%) of culturally obscure idioms, such as "slipped through Voldemort's clutches," highlight the inherent difficulties in translating metaphors that lack direct equivalents, a challenge also noted by Ghafel et al. (2011) in Persian translations of English idioms.

The predominance of paraphrasing in wordplay translation (66.7%) also reflects practical constraints faced by Indonesian translators. Unlike European languages with shared Indo-European roots (Delabastita & Hulst, 1993), Indonesian's Austronesian structure lacks cognates for English puns, often forcing simplification. For instance, the rhythmic wordplay in 'Flourish and Blotts' (evoking brushstrokes and inkblots) became 'Kembang dan Noda' ('Flowers and Stains') in Indonesian—a semantic approximation that loses the original's calligraphic wit. Such compromises, while inevitable, highlight the need for translator training programs to emphasize compensatory techniques, as advocated by Molina & Hurtado Albir (2004).

Theoretically, this study supports Delabastita's (1993) hierarchy of translatability, where wordplay, especially phonological puns, proves more resistant to translation than idioms. It also reinforces Baker's (2017) emphasis on dynamic equivalence, showing that successful translations often require balancing fidelity to the source text with adaptability to the target culture. Practically, the findings suggest that translators of fantasy literature could benefit from tools like glossaries for culture-bound terms and greater flexibility in employing compensation techniques, such as creative adaptations or relocating humor to more translatable segments. Future research could expand this analysis to other chapters or compare translations in different languages to further explore the interplay between creativity and constraint in literary translation (Syafitri, 2019). Ultimately, this study

underscores the importance of translator creativity in navigating the complexities of linguistic and cultural adaptation, ensuring that the charm and nuance of the original text are preserved as much as possible for new audience.

Furthermore, the study highlights the cultural asymmetry between English and Indonesian, where certain concepts lack direct equivalents. For instance, British idioms like "kettle of fish" (denoting a problematic situation) have no natural counterpart in Indonesian, forcing translators to either explain or omit such phrases. This aligns with Nida's (1964) theory of dynamic equivalence, where functional impact often outweighs literal accuracy. The preference for literal translation of idioms (55.6%) may also reflect a cautious approach to preserving Rowling's unique magical lexicon, as noted by Cornelio (2016) in analyses of fantasy translations. However, this strategy risks alienating readers unfamiliar with English cultural nuances, suggesting a need for more annotated editions or translator notes in literary works.

CONCLUSION

Translating wordplay and idioms in fantasy literature requires a delicate balance between linguistic fidelity and cultural adaptation. This study's analysis of Chapter 1 of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* demonstrates that wordplay, heavily reliant on English phonology and semantics, is often paraphrased (66.7%), leading to a loss of stylistic richness and humor. Idioms, while more structurally flexible, were largely translated literally (55.6%), sometimes resulting in awkward expressions. Nonetheless, successful cultural substitutions—such as "a load of rubbish" rendered as "omong kosong besar"—show that dynamic equivalence can enhance accessibility without compromising meaning.

The findings suggest that while perfect equivalence is unattainable, thoughtful translation strategies—particularly compensation and cultural substitution—can preserve the spirit of the original. For the Indonesian publishing industry, this underscores the value of collaborative translation processes involving cultural consultants, annotated editions, or glossaries to bridge gaps between source and target audiences.

This research contributes to both theoretical and practical understandings of translation studies by providing a dual-framework analysis of linguistic creativity. Future studies should examine reader reception, explore other chapters or books in the series, and investigate translation patterns across different languages or media (e.g., film subtitling). Such expansions would further illuminate how imaginative language can be effectively adapted for diverse global audiences.

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