

# Idiom Translation Quality Assessment on “Landline” Novel by Rainbow Rowell

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**Abstract:** This study aimed at assessing the quality of idiom translation in a novel entitled “Landline” by Rainbow Rowell. By referring to the Translation Quality Assessment model designed by (Nababan et al., 2012), this study assessed the idioms’ translation according to the degree of accuracy, acceptability, and readability. The data analyzed in this study include the idioms and Indonesian translations, as well as the assessment result made by three expert assessors. Those idioms were identified and grouped based on the classification adapted from Palmer (1981). There are 37 idioms found, which consist of two idioms that can undergo syntactic changes, ten idioms with syntactic limitation, ten frozen idioms, five partial idioms, and ten phrasal verbs. The findings show that the Indonesian translation of those idioms generally has a high-quality level, especially those which were translated into equivalent idioms in the target language. Paraphrasing also plays a major role as a translation strategy used by the translator. However, this strategy may sometimes lead to distortion of the original message in the target language.

**Keywords:** translation quality assessment, accuracy, acceptability, readability

## INTRODUCTION

Translation quality assessment (TQA) is the focal point of any translation studies since it ensures how the message is transmitted between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). There are at least three aspects that should be considered in assessing a translation product, namely the accuracy of the message, the conformity with the rules of the target language, and the degree of the text readability. (Nababan et al., 2012) categorizes these aspects into accuracy, acceptability, and readability. These aspects certainly provide challenges to translators since translation practice involves two cultures in which they should be able to bridge intercultural understanding (Hoed, 2006). Therefore, the quality of a translation, especially literary works such as novels, is important to be evaluated because readers are generally not aware of the possibility of changes in messages or errors in the translated text they read. In line with this motion, Colina (2015) emphasizes that translation quality assessment is essential in translation studies since it examines the appropriateness of a translation product. Manipuspika (2021) also points out that a translation should be assessed to ensure whether it meets certain required standards and validate someone’s competence as a translator.

Nevertheless, translation quality assessment still leaves a gray area regarding what measurement should be used. There are various translation quality assessment models

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with different variables proposed by scholars such as Carroll (1966), Nida & Taber (1974), Newmark (1988), House (1997), (Hoed, 2006), and Nababan et al. (2012). Yet, the TQA model designed by Nababan et al. (2012) becomes one of the most widely used in Indonesia because of its practicality. He suggests that translation should be assessed based on three aspects, which are accuracy, acceptability, and readability. Accuracy deals with the message delivery into the target language by considering equivalence, shifts, reduction, addition, and mistranslation. Acceptability assesses the translation from the perspective of naturalness, whether it is appropriate to the cultures and communication ways of the target readers. Readability makes sure that the language and structures of the target text can be comprehended by the target reader.

That model has been widely used in several studies in assessing translation products. Some of the latest studies are conducted by Sofie & Ayuningtias (2023) on website articles of the Indonesia Embassy in Beijing, Fatariska (2023) on an article about Batik, Putri et al. (2022) on city tourism official web page articles, and Naratama (2017) on journalistic text. Specifically for literary texts such as novels, the model was also used in studies conducted by H. Nugraha (2019), Ningsih et al. (2020), and (Syah et al., 2023). Therefore, it shows that the translation quality assessment model is applicable to any kind of assessment context and type of text.

In the context of literary text translation, one of the culture-related challenges can be found in the translation of idioms. They are culture-specific expressions that may provide difficulties for translators due to cultural differences, especially those owned by English and Indonesian (R. F. Nugraha, 2017). Nguyen & Dao (2021) also highlight idiom translation as one of the four problems encountered by translators in dealing with equivalents across cultures. Since novels typically use colloquial language, idioms are frequently used in the text. Their bond to the culture and conventions of a certain community require translators able to understand the culture and conventions of both the source language and the target language. Idioms are formed by habits and ways of communication, making an idiom in a certain community group different from those of the other even though referring to the same message. Therefore, translators must be able to find the equivalence to facilitate cross-cultural communication as affirmed by Fangfang & Ying (2021).

Translating a literary text is not as simple as it may be perceived. Besides considering the accuracy, acceptability, and readability of a text, a translation must also take the aesthetic aspect into account, which includes the authors writing and language styles such as using idioms or any figurative language. By using a certain style of language, writers can improve the aesthetics, as well as show the uniqueness of their works (Dhyaningrum et al., 2016). Moreover, using figurative language can make their writing more alive (Ekowati et al., 2017). This certainly provides greater challenges on how the translator can preserve the same aesthetic degree from the SL into the TL. Hakemi (2013) stated that the translation of a literary work may not be able to reach the same aesthetic degree as the source text. Though, it does not mean that translators can just forsake this aspect. Instead, they should maintain the aesthetic degree as much as possible in translating literary texts.

In assessing literary texts translation, the aesthetics aspect should also be taken into consideration. This aspect is embodied in the accuracy since it also ensures that the readers received the same effect after reading the translation. In other words, an idiom should be translated into its idiom equivalence if any, because it will provide the reader with figurative language. On the other hand, if there is no equivalence, the translator can use other strategies such as paraphrasing.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach in the form of an embedded case study since this research is limited to the case of translating idioms in a novel. The data source for this research is the novel *Landline* by Rainbow Rowell (2014) and its Indonesian translation by Airien Kusumawardani (2016) as well as assessors of the quality of idiom translation who are considered to have met the assessment criteria set out in the translation quality assessment model by Nababan et al. (2012). The background of three assessors in this study are professional translators, having proven experiences in translating novels, and graduates of the Linguistics Department of Universitas Indonesia in the field of translation studies.

The data source is the English version of the novel consisting of 356 pages and published by Orion Publishing in London. The translated version in Indonesian of this novel consists of 367 pages and was published by Spring Publisher in Indonesia. The data to be examined are 37 English idioms found in the first chapter of the novel. Those idioms are analyzed based on the classification developed from the types of idioms proposed by (Palmer, 1981) and their translation into Indonesian, both in idiom and non-idiom form. That classification includes idioms that can undergo syntactic changes, idioms with syntactic limitations, frozen idioms, partial idioms, and phrasal verbs. The assessment results by three assessors are generalized to make a quality statement for the idiom translation.

*Table 1. Accuracy Assessment Rubric*

Category	Score	Qualitative Parameter
<b>Accurate</b>	3	The idiomatic message in the source text is accurately transferred to the target text; there is no difference in message or function perceived by the reader.
<b>Less Accurate</b>	2	Some of the idiomatic messages in the source text have been transferred accurately to the target text. However, there are still partial message differences or multiple message translations, which disrupt the integrity of the original message.
<b>Inaccurate</b>	1	The idiomatic message in the source language text is inaccurately transferred to the target language or deleted; the message conveyed is completely different from that contained in the source text.

*Table 2. Acceptability Assessment Rubric*

Category	Score	Qualitative Parameter
<b>Acceptable</b>	3	The translation sounds natural; the technical terms are commonly used and familiar to readers; the phrases, clauses, and sentences used are following the rules of the Indonesian language.
<b>Less Acceptable</b>	2	In general, the translation already sounds natural; however, there are slight problems with the use of technical terms or some grammatical errors that occur.
<b>Unacceptable</b>	1	The translation is not natural (sounds like a bad translation); the technical terms are not commonly used and are not familiar to the reader; the phrases, clauses, and sentences used are not following the rules of the Indonesian language.

Table 3. Readability Assessment Rubric

Category	Score	Qualitative Parameter
High readability	3	Words, technical terms, phrases, clauses, sentences, or translated texts can be easily understood by readers.
Medium readability	2	In general, translations can be understood by readers; however, certain sections must be read more than once to understand the translation.
Low readability	1	The translation is difficult for readers to understand.

The quality value for each idiom is concluded based on the tendency of the assessment found in the three aspects. For instance, if two of the existing aspects get a value of 3 and one aspect gets a value of 1, then the quality score obtained for one idiom is 3. If each of these aspects has a different value, namely 1, 2, and 3, then the value given is the median, which is 2.

After the quality score for each idiom is found, the overall idiom translation quality score for each aspect of quality must be determined. The determination of this value is done by finding the mode of the existing quality value series. This quality value of course consists of three levels, namely 3 (high), 2 (moderate), and 1 (low). The value is obtained from the mode value found.

## RESULTS

There are 37 idioms found in the first chapter of this novel. This number consists of two idioms that can undergo syntactic changes, ten idioms with syntactic limitations, ten frozen idioms, five partial idioms, and ten phrasal verbs.

### 1. Accuracy

Accuracy measures the completeness message conveyed to the target language (TL). This aspect examines whether there is a shift in messages on source language (SL) compared to TL. There are 14 idioms that were translated accurately, 17 idioms were translated less accurately, and six idioms were translated inaccurately. The percentage of accuracy of idiom translation in this novel can be seen in the following table.

Table 4. Accuracy Assessment Result

No.	SL	TL	Assessor			Score
			1	2	3	
<b>Idioms that can undergo syntactic changes</b>						
1	blow (someone's) mind	<i>membuat otak (seseorang) meledak</i>	1	2	2	2
2	keep (someone) on a short leash	<i>sangat mengekang (seseorang)</i>	2	3	3	3
<b>Idioms with syntactic limitations</b>						
3	give (someone) the cold shoulder	<i>tidak menghiraukan (seseorang)</i>	2	2	3	2
4	bury the lead	<i>belum menyampaikan hal terpenting</i>	2	2	1	2
5	slip on banana peel	<i>lelucon sederhana seperti seseorang yang terpeleset kulit pisang</i>	1	1	3	1
6	have a crush on	<i>naksir</i>	2	3	3	3
7	cry wolf	<i>hanya berpura-pura</i>	2	2	2	2
8	shoot blanks	<i>mandul</i>	2	3	3	3

9	catch (someone's) breath	<i>menarik nafas</i>	2	2	1	1
10	dead end	<i>jalan buntu</i>	2	3	3	3
11	throw (someone) under the bus	<i>mengorbankan (seseorang)</i>	2	2	3	2
12	hang in the balance	<i>sedang tidak pasti</i>	2	2	2	2
<b>Frozen idiom</b>						
13	what's up	<i>ada apa</i>	3	3	3	3
14	green light	<i>lampu hijau</i>	3	3	3	3
15	never mind	<i>sudahlah</i>	1	2	1	1
16	on fire	<i>berapi-api</i>	3	3	2	3
17	pain in the ass	<i>sangat menyulitkan</i>	3	3	2	3
18	back and forth	<i>saling</i>	3	3	3	3
19	butterflies in (someone's) stomach	<i>kupu-kupu di dalam perut (seseorang)</i>	3	3	3	3
20	damn the torpedoes	<i>masa bodoh dengan torpedo</i>	1	3	1	1
21	prince charming	<i>pangeran tampan</i>	3	3	3	3
22	in a fog	<i>dalam keadaan setengah sadar</i>	3	1	2	2
<b>Partial Idiom</b>						
23	big deal	<i>membesar-besarkan</i>	2	2	3	2
24	free spirit	<i>berjiwa bebas</i>	3	3	3	3
25	nerves of steel	<i>mental baja</i>	3	3	3	3
26	dead weight	<i>beban yang sangat berat</i>	2	2	3	2
27	train of thought	<i>rangkaian pikiran</i>	3	3	3	3
<b>Phrasal Verb</b>						
28	get (something) over with	<i>mengungkapkan (sesuatu)</i>	2	2	3	2
29	figure (something) out	<i>tahu dengan sendirinya</i>	2	2	3	2
30	brush past	<i>berjalan melewati</i>	2	2	3	2
31	sprawl out	<i>berbaring</i>	2	2	3	2
32	pop out	<i>melompat keluar</i>	2	3	2	2
33	hole up	<i>bersembunyi</i>	2	2	3	2
34	fall apart	<i>kacau balau</i>	2	3	2	2
35	black out	<i>kehilangan sebagian ingatan</i>	2	1	2	1
36	fish for	<i>pancing</i>	1	2	3	2
37	send (someone) away	<i>mengusir</i>	2	2	3	2

The table above shows that most of the idioms in the first chapter of the novel are translated less accurately. Inaccurate translation only plays a minor number. Therefore, the original messages from the source language are mostly transmitted into the target text. Even though there may be a little distortion of the message, it does not affect the meaning significantly.

## 2. Acceptability

Acceptance focuses on assessing the conformity of the translation with the language and cultural norms of the TL. Points to be considered in the acceptability assessment include sentence structure, translation prevalence, word selection, and collocation, as well as other

matters relating to the culture of communication in TL.

The findings show that the majority of idioms are translated with a high degree of acceptability. Out of a total of 37 data, there were 31 data with acceptable translation, four data translated with less acceptable translation, and only two data translated with unacceptable translation.

Table 5. Acceptability Assessment Result

No.	SL	TL	Assessor			Score
			1	2	3	
<b>Idioms that can undergo syntactic changes</b>						
1	blow (someone's) mind	<i>membuat otak (seseorang) meledak</i>	3	1	2	1
2	keep (someone) on a short leash	<i>sangat mengekang (seseorang)</i>	3	3	3	3
<b>Idioms with syntactic limitations</b>						
3	give (someone) the cold shoulder	<i>tidak menghiraukan (seseorang)</i>	3	3	3	3
4	bury the lead	<i>belum menyampaikan hal terpenting</i>	3	3	3	3
5	slip on banana peel	<i>lelucon sederhana seperti seseorang yang terpeleset kulit pisang</i>	3	2	3	3
6	have a crush on	<i>naksir</i>	3	3	3	3
7	cry wolf	<i>hanya berpura-pura</i>	3	3	2	3
8	shoot blanks	<i>mandul</i>	3	3	3	3
9	catch (someone's) breath	<i>menarik nafas</i>	3	3	3	3
10	dead end	<i>jalan buntu</i>	2	3	3	3
11	throw (someone) under the bus	<i>mengorbankan (seseorang)</i>	3	2	2	2
12	hang in the balance	<i>sedang tidak pasti</i>	3	3	3	3
<b>Frozen idiom</b>						
13	what's up	<i>ada apa</i>	3	3	3	3
14	green light	<i>lampu hijau</i>	3	3	3	3
15	never mind	<i>sudahlah</i>	3	3	3	3
16	on fire	<i>berapi-api</i>	3	3	2	3
17	pain in the ass	<i>sangat menyulitkan</i>	3	2	3	2
18	back and forth	<i>saling</i>	3	3	3	3
19	butterflies in (someone's) stomach	<i>kupu-kupu di dalam perut (seseorang)</i>	3	2	3	2
20	damn the torpedoes	<i>masa bodoh dengan torpedo</i>	1	2	1	1
21	prince charming	<i>pangeran tampan</i>	3	3	3	3
22	in a fog	<i>dalam keadaan setengah sadar</i>	3	2	2	2
<b>Partial Idiom</b>						
23	big deal	<i>membesar-besarkan</i>	2	3	3	3
24	free spirit	<i>berjiwa bebas</i>	3	3	3	3

25	nerves of steel	<i>mental baja</i>	3	3	3	3
26	dead weight	<i>beban yang sangat berat</i>	3	3	3	3
27	train of thought	<i>rangkaian pikiran</i>	3	3	3	3
<b>Phrasal Verb</b>						
28	get (something) over with	<i>mengungkapkan (sesuatu)</i>	3	3	3	3
29	figure (something) out	<i>tahu dengan sendirinya</i>	3	3	3	3
30	brush past	<i>berjalan melewati</i>	3	3	3	3
31	sprawl out	<i>berbaring</i>	3	3	3	3
32	pop out	<i>melompat keluar</i>	3	3	2	3
33	hole up	<i>bersembunyi</i>	3	2	3	3
34	fall apart	<i>kacau balau</i>	3	3	3	3
35	black out	<i>kehilangan sebagian ingatan</i>	2	2	2	2
36	fish for	<i>pancing</i>	3	1	3	3
37	send (someone) away	<i>mengusir</i>	3	3	3	3

Based on the table above, the translations have a high acceptability rate which reaches 84 percent. This shows that the translator has succeeded in translating the idioms in the novel *Landline* by Rainbow Rowell.

### 3. Readability

This aspect assesses the clarity of the writing. Sometimes, a translation may have a high level of accuracy but the message is difficult to understand due to various factors such as word choice, sentences that are too long, and so on. Based on the results of an assessment of a total of 37 data, there were 36 data translated with a high level of readability, zero data translated with a medium level of readability, and only one data translated with a low-level readability.

Table 6. Readability Assessment Result

No.	SL	TL	Assessor			Score
			1	2	3	
<b>Idioms that can undergo syntactic changes</b>						
1	blow (someone's) mind	<i>membuat otak (seseorang) meledak</i>	3	2	3	3
2	keep (someone) on a short leash	<i>sangat mengekang (seseorang)</i>	3	3	3	3
<b>Idioms with syntactic limitations</b>						
3	give (someone) the cold shoulder	<i>tidak menghiraukan (seseorang)</i>	3	3	3	3
4	bury the lead	<i>belum menyampaikan hal terpenting</i>	3	3	3	3
5	slip on banana peel	<i>lelucon sederhana seperti seseorang yang terpeleset kulit pisang</i>	3	3	3	3
6	have a crush on	<i>naksir</i>	3	3	3	3
7	cry wolf	<i>hanya berpura-pura</i>	3	3	3	3
8	shoot blanks	<i>mandul</i>	3	3	3	3
9	catch (someone's) breath	<i>menarik nafas</i>	3	3	3	3

10	dead end	<i>jalan buntu</i>	3	3	3	3
11	throw (someone) under the bus	<i>mengorbankan (seseorang)</i>	3	3	3	3
12	hang in the balance	<i>sedang tidak pasti</i>	3	3	3	3
<b>Frozen idiom</b>						
13	what's up	<i>ada apa</i>	3	3	3	3
14	green light	<i>lampu hijau</i>	3	3	3	3
15	never mind	<i>sudahlah</i>	3	3	3	3
16	on fire	<i>berapi-api</i>	3	3	3	3
17	pain in the ass	<i>sangat menyulitkan</i>	3	3	3	3
18	back and forth	<i>saling</i>	3	3	3	3
19	butterflies in (someone's) stomach	<i>kupu-kupu di dalam perut (seseorang)</i>	3	3	3	3
20	damn the torpedoes	<i>masa bodoh dengan torpedo</i>	1	3	1	1
21	prince charming	<i>pangeran tampan</i>	3	3	3	3
22	in a fog	<i>dalam keadaan setengah sadar</i>	2	3	3	3
<b>Partial Idiom</b>						
23	big deal	<i>membesar-besarkan</i>	3	3	3	3
24	free spirit	<i>berjiwa bebas</i>	3	3	3	3
25	nerves of steel	<i>mental baja</i>	3	3	3	3
26	dead weight	<i>beban yang sangat berat</i>	3	3	3	3
27	train of thought	<i>rangkaian pikiran</i>	3	3	3	3
<b>Phrasal Verb</b>						
28	get (something) over with	<i>mengungkapkan (sesuatu)</i>	3	3	3	3
29	figure (something) out	<i>tahu dengan sendirinya</i>	3	3	3	3
30	brush past	<i>berjalan melewati</i>	3	3	3	3
31	sprawl out	<i>berbaring</i>	3	3	3	3
32	pop out	<i>melompat keluar</i>	3	3	3	3
33	hole up	<i>bersembunyi</i>	3	2	3	3
34	fall apart	<i>kacau balau</i>	3	3	3	3
35	black out	<i>kehilangan sebagian ingatan</i>	3	3	3	3
36	fish for	<i>pancing</i>	3	1	3	3
37	send (someone) away	<i>mengusir</i>	3	3	3	3

From the table above, it can be seen that the translator has succeeded in producing idiomatic translations that have a high level of readability in Landline novels. Translations that have a high readability degree reached 97 percent and there were only three percent with low readability. There are no translations with a medium readability degree.

## DISCUSSION

After analyzing the 37 idioms in the novel, it can be seen that translators mostly translate idioms into non-idioms. There are six idioms that are retained to be translated into Indonesian idioms and 31 idioms are translated using paraphrasing and literal strategies. This is because many existing idioms do not have comparable idiomatic translations so they cannot be translated into idiomatic forms as well. According to Baker (2011), the absence of

comparable idiom translation is one of the challenges in idiom translation.

In terms of quality, the results of the analysis show that the high level of quality of idiom translation in this novel is influenced by several factors. The strategy appears to be the main factor in determining the quality of a translation. Choosing the right strategy will have the opportunity to produce high-quality translations. If an idiom has a comparable idiom translation, the translation will have high quality if the idiom is translated into idiomatic form as well. Apart from having a high level of quality, translators can also maintain the aesthetics of literary works, especially the author's language style, even though that is not the main thing in translation. Likewise, idioms that do not have comparable idiomatic translations can be translated using paraphrasing and literal strategies. The results of this research analysis show that paraphrasing is a strategy to produce a better translation quality than the literal translation strategy.

## CONCLUSION

By using the translation quality assessment model by Nababan (2012), the Indonesian translation of Landline novel, specifically on idiom translation, have a good quality in terms of accuracy, acceptability, and readability. In this novel, the translator mostly used paraphrases in translating idioms. However, this strategy needs the translator's further attention since other factors also determine the quality of the translation. Translators must be careful in using paraphrasing strategies, even though they are seen as the easiest strategies for translating idioms. Paraphrasing is a strategy that requires the translator's ability to be able to decipher the message of an idiom into words, phrases, clauses, or sentences that are accurate, acceptable, and readable. The ability to paraphrase, including choosing inappropriate diction, will of course result in a low-quality translation even though the selection of the right translation strategy is appropriate.

However, this study is only limited to translation products, so the assessment of the quality of idioms is carried out without considering the justification of the novel translator. Therefore, future research can assess the quality of translation by considering it from the translator's point of view as well.

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