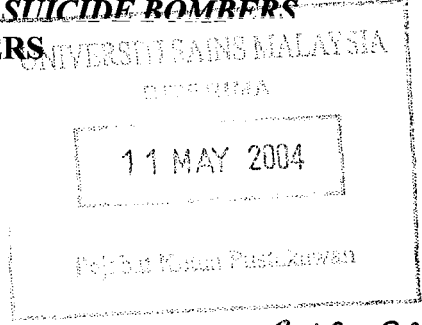# TRANSLATING *MILITANTS, RADICALS* AND *SUICIDE BOMBERS* IN THE MALAY NEWSPAPERS

Rokiah Awang
Universiti Sains Malaysia
arokiah@usm.my

1. Introduction

Generally, language evolves in accordance with the developments in the society in which the language is spoken. Thus, the use of language in the culture frequently determines the adoption or rejection of certain words where some words are created in or imported into the culture to respond to new needs, while existing words may fade away due to non-usage. Circumstances also determine the use of words, for example, in role-borrowing (see Leech, 1966), where words from one domain may cross over into another domain, to be used in another context. Further, cultural usage also determines the development of denotative or connotative meanings of words. In general, denotative meaning refers to its literal meaning while connotative meaning depends on the semantic association over and above its denotation (Jackson, 1988:58). Just as a word has multiple references, a word may also convey various meanings. As many lexical items have secondary meanings, a word can be expressed in different ways and depending on its context, the same word can convey different meanings (Larson, 1993). The word *red,* for example, can be used in different contexts – to denote a colour, to refer to a belief/ideology (communist), or to express an idiomatic expression (as in 'painting the town red').

Words also can be equivalent at lexical level (referential meaning) but disparate at the functional level (Afifi, 1986:217). For instance, the term polygamy has the same referential meaning, that is, to marry more than one wife. However, the item takes a different context when its function is compared between religions, for example, Islam with Christian. Polygamy is legal in Islam in which a man is permitted to take up to four wives at any one time. On the other hand, polygamy is illegal in most Christian faiths. In this example, the cultural factor determines the connotative meaning of the word. Words, then, may acquire multiple, synonymous, varied or even antonymous meanings from the original referents due to their usage in the language.

2. Connotative Meanings and Ideology

Meaning does not exist unless receivers of the texts (readers, listeners, viewers) are involved in the process of producing their own distinctive kinds of meaning (Hodge and Kress, 1993). Being culturally embedded, meanings can be drawn from various sources pertaining to the society. Nida and Taber (1969:92) identify three principal sources of connotative words: (a) association of word with the speaker, (b) the practical circumstances in which the word is used, and (c) the linguistic setting characteristic of the word.

Particular words gain their connotative meanings due to the association of the words with the speaker/listener, such as in child language, which is distinctively determined

by the child-adult status. Certain vocabulary items may obtain their meanings from particular social groups; drawing association from the social status, gender, educational background. etc.. of the speakers. The same word used by a person in different circumstances, such as swear words uttered in a religious setting vis-à-vis a non-religious one. carries different weights and thus. different connotations. Words that juxtapose or collocate with other words may carry various meanings due to the linguistic association. The word *green*. for example. when co-occurs with another linguistic item in the metaphorical context, such as *green with envy*, *green at the gills*, *a green worker*, inevitably develops meanings associated with emotion.

The various meanings that connotative words represent: attitudinal. associative. affective, reflected, collocative or allusive, etc. (Hervey and Higgins, 1992), points to the fact that connotative meaning is inevitably about points of view. about ideology. Ideology, as broadly defined by Hodge and Kress (1993:6) is "a systematic body of ideas. organised from a particular point of view". It is the implicit assumptions. beliefs and value systems shared collectively by a social group (Simpson, 1993).

Thus. whether a word is inferred. implied or presupposed depends on its reference to the other values or ideologies that it represents and the contextual situations. The lexical choices may indicate the degree of formality. the relationship between the speaker and listener, the group-based or institutional embedding of discourse, and particularly the attitudes and ideologies of the speaker (Van Dijk, 1988).

As observed by Fairclough:
> In some cases, what is ideologically significant about a text is its vocabulary items. *per se*: for instance. *subversive* and *solidarity* belong respectively to 'right' and 'left' ideological frameworks, and the occurrence of either one will tend to ideologically 'place' a text. In other cases. it is the way words co-occur or *collocate:* [...], behaviour collocates with *sick* and *healthy*, giving an ideologically specific (and dominant) scheme for classifying behaviour. In yet other cases, it is the metaphorical transfer of a word or expression from one domain of use to another [...]: for instance. *solitary confinement* in psychiatric text [...] metaphorically represents a medical situation in terms of imprisonment.
> (Fairclough, 1989:113-114, emphases original)

3. News Translators as Cultural Gatekeeper

News is a representation of the world in language (Bell. 1991: 4). News places values on whatever it produces and, thus, is not a neutral presentation of facts. Subsequently, news media and news practitioners are not neutral agent in news dissemination. News staff do not merely report events, but are active agents in constructing socio-political realities (Hall et al. 1978. cited in McNair. 1994). The media present their account of social reality by drawing on particular sets of values that are shaped and moulded by societal factors such as politics, power, and ideology.

As such. cultural gulf exists between the Source Culture (SC) and the Target Culture (TC); a reason may be due to the journalists' own cultural imprinting (Jackson, 1978) brought about by socio-politico factors such as national culture. ideologies. press system, and religious beliefs. What is a house in the Western society may not coincide with the image of a house as conceptualized by Asian minds. The concept of

democracy as perceived in one country may not necessarily be the same as that of the Western concept in which representatives are elected by the public in a general election. Also, what a journalist sees as a value in her/his background and culture may not be as what s/he envisages when looking at another culture. Similarly, what are acceptable societal values in one culture may not be tolerable in another. Inevitably, lexical items can almost never be translated with their full referential equivalences. In fact, shifts between the Source Text (ST) and Target Text (TT) items are more likely to occur as unacceptable connotations may be replaced by more favourable terms in what can be described as "cultural gatekeeping".

Translators gatekeep their culture against SC infiltration by mediating some information in the ST through various translation procedures such as deletion, addition, lexical substitution, implicitation and generalization. (Some of the procedures will be discussed further in the next section on analysis of translation strategies in the Malay newspapers) Such cases of "cultural gatekeeping" in media translation can, for instance, be seen in film dubbing and news translation. In film dubbing, Delabastita (1990) notices that shifts occur between the original script and the script used for dubbing where the dubbed script shows the disappearance of slang and dialect, as well as cases of toning down of social criticism and filtering of obscenity from the former version. Abu-Ssyadeh's (1991) study on the Arab Press shows terms such as *terrorist, guerrilla, revolution, rebellion* and *military coup,* considered unfavourable in the Arab culture, replaced by more favourable terms in the TT. Sidiropoulou's (1995) comparison on the translation of news headlines in the Greek press with the English headlines, illustrates that the headlines in the TT are seldom literal translations of the ST. Changes in the linguistic aspect of the Greek versions resulted in biased presentation of the illocutionary force of Greek headline utterances, the reason of which can be attributed to ideology.

4. Ideology in News Translation

In this section, we will look at some examples in the Malay newspapers that illustrate the translation strategies employed by the news translators in translating politically- or ideologically-related terms. The examples are taken from *Berita Harian* (literally, *Daily News*), the leading quality Malay newspaper in Malaysia. *Berita Harian*'s readers are predominantly Malay but with a large number of readers from the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups.

Example 1:

Source Text
Palestinian police have rounded up some 600 **militants** from the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS) and Islamic Jihad since the two **radical** groups claimed a spate of **deadly suicide bombings** in Israel between February 25 and March 4.

Target Text:
Polis Palestin menahan kira-kira 600 **aktivis** pergerakan Islam Hamas dan Jihad Islam sejak dua kumpulan itu mengaku melancarkan beberapa **serangan bom menggunakan pejuang berani mati** di Israel di antara 25 Februari dan 4 Mac lalu.

Back-translation:
Palestinian police arrested around 600 **activists** from the Hamas Islamic Movement and Islamic Jihad since the two groups claimed launching several **bomb attacks using fighters who are unafraid to die** in Israel between the past 25 February and 4 March.

Here, several ST terms – **militants, radical** and **deadly suicide bombings** – are changed in the TT. The ST term **militant** is substituted with the word *aktivis* 'activist', the word **radical** is deleted and the phrase **deadly suicide bombing** is translated into *serangan bom* 'bomb attack'. The translator has also added the phrase *menggunakan pejuang berani mati* 'literally, using fighters who are unafraid to die' to explain the term **suicide bombing.**

Both **militant** and **radical** can be transliterated into Malay with the terms *militan* and *radikal*, respectively, while the literal translation of the phrase **suicide bombing** is *pengeboman bunuh diri*. However, the translator has decided not to adopt the referential equivalents and instead substituted them with other terms/phrases due to the pragmatic function of news translation. As van Dijk (1988:81) postulates: "Whether the newspaper selects terrorist or freedom fighter to denote the same person is not so much a question of semantics as an indirect expression of implied but associated values incorporated in shared-word meanings."

To understand the motive for the substitution of the ST terms, it is necessary that we understand the word from the ideological point of view of the target culture. Similar to examples found in As-Ssaydeh's study (discussed above), the ST terms, **militant** and **radical**, are considered negative in the Malaysian culture and has to be substituted with terms that are more positive or neutral in the TT. A componential analysis[1] of the terms used in the ST and TT may produce semantic features, as below:

(1) militant: [+action, +combative, +aggressive]
     aktivis 'activist': [+action, –combative, –aggressive,]

(2) radical: [+action, +fundamental, +extreme, +revolutionary]
     aktivis 'activist': [+action, –fundamental, –extreme, –revolutionary]

The analyses show that the translated terms are milder in denotations compared to the ST. The word *aktivis* 'activist' suggests action but without the meaning of extremity or aggressiveness, features that are conjured by the terms **radical** and **militant**. While the terms used in the ST display negative connotations, the translated terms supposedly carry neutral or at least better connotations than the ST words. The examples show that the ST terms are undertranslated in the TT as a strategy to deflect/soften the negative connotations of the ST. While doing so, the translator has also changed the focus of the story by changing the ST tone from negative to positive in the TT.

The phrase **suicide bombings** in the context of the story, refers to the act of a person bombing a public place by placing the bombs on his body. From the Western perspective this act is seen as a suicide action, thus, the use of the phrase **suicide bombings** by the original writer. However, from the bomber's perspective this is not

suicide at all but the act of *jihad*. The term *jihad* refers to the Arabic word denoting 'holy war undertaken by Muslims against unbelievers' (Oxford, 1991:637). The term is recognized, accepted and used by Muslims worldwide in general. Although *jihad* is generally referred to in its religious context, that is, the act of fighting for Islam (against non-Muslims), it can also be associated with non-conflict situations, for example, the struggle to achieve a good cause in whatever aspect and at whatever level. In fact, the struggle to overcome one's compulsion to commit bad deeds can in itself be considered *jihad* (against evil desires).

Here, the translator sees *jihad* in a partly religious and partly cultural context. *Jihad* is differentiated from suicide in that the ultimate mission is not to kill oneself but to fight with whatever means that one possesses even though one might be killed during the act. While *jihad* is greatly encouraged in Islam, suicide is forbidden. Mindful of its position as a Malay newspaper in a Muslim-populated nation (but with substantial numbers of non-Muslim population) the translator has chosen a moderate view and prefer to use the word **berani mati** 'literally, unafraid to die' to replace the word **suicide**. The denotative difference between suicide and ordinary death can be seen in the componential analysis below:

(3) suicide: [+expire, +intentional hurting, +on oneself,]
      mati 'die': [+expire, –intentional hurting, ±on oneself]

The difference between the term **suicide** and **berani mati** largely lies in the meaning that the former is a deliberate action to hurt oneself, a feature which is not covered by **berani mati**. The term **suicide bombings** is translated generally as **serangan bom** 'bomb attack'.

The rationale for the substitution of the term **suicide** with **serangan** can be explained by the following semantic analysis:

(4) suicide: [+expire, +seek action, +intentional hurting, +on oneself]
      serangan 'attack': [±expire, +seek action, –intentional hurting,
      –on oneself]

While the above example refers specifically to the Muslim *jihad*, the substitution of such a term in the TT is not confined to the Muslim context. In another story on Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Tiger, the translator has also substituted the ST term **suicide attack** with **serangan berani mati** in the TT. This can be attributed to the existence of Indian readers who read *Berita Harian*.

Both examples of substitution can then be considered culture-related translational deviation. The deviations are, however, politically-related also as the connotations are not specific to Malaysian culture per se. The substitution examples above illustrate the influence of ideology in the process of translation where cultural values such as religion and nationalism may come into play. Here, the translator has opted for the strategy of being visible in the text by filtering some of the messages in the ST through substitution before passing them to the readers.

Example 2

Source Text:
The troops reinforced U.N. police patrolling the former Olympic village of Dobrinja amid reports that the **Serbs** were smuggling in guns.

Target Text:
Nato memperkukuhkan kedudukan tentera dan menghantar polis peronda Pertubuhan Bangsa-Bangsa Bersatu (PBB) ke bekas kampung Olimpik Dobrinia kerana **gerila Serb** dilaporkan menyeludup senjata.

Back-translation:
Nato reinforced its military position and sending the United Nations (U.N.) patrol police to the former olimpic village Dobrinia because **Serbs guerillas** are reported to be smuggling guns.

In this example, the translator has added the word *gerila* 'guerrilla' to the noun Serb in the TT. The story from which the example is taken highlights the atrocities inflicted by the Bosnian Serbs upon the Muslim Bosnians. The reason for the translation strategy of adding a negative-connotation word *gerila* to the neutral term **Serbs**, is due to the fact that Malaysia is a Muslim-populated country. As, generally, the press in any country mirrors the basic interests and goals of the political, economic and cultural elite, most of the world press tend to be nationalistic if not ethnocentric (van Dijk, 1988b). Many of the Malaysian mainstream newspapers abide by the official line and formulate their organizational policies based on government and national policies. With respect to developments in the former Yugoslavia, the government has the policy of condemning the actions of the Bosnian Serbs because of their atrocities. Here, the translator plays the role of shaping the image of the news to suit the policy of the newspaper and the Malaysian government. He has labelled the Serbs the aggressor by inserting the word *gerila* 'guerrilla' in the TT, leading to overtranslation of the ST information.

The decision to add the ideologically-loaded word may or may not be accepted by all the target readers. Since *Berita Harian* is a Malay newspaper whose readers comprise mostly of Malays of Muslim faith, it is assumed that the strategy is employed to conform to the target readers culture and religious values. However, the example below taken from a story on the Sri Lankan *Tamil Eelam* separatist group, reveals that the policy of inserting a negative-connotation word in the TT is not confined to news related to Muslims only.

Example 3

Source Text:
The **separatist** Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rammed an explosive laden boat against the Israeli-built Dvora craft escorting a naval convoy off Vettilaikerni on Saturday, military spokesman Sarath Munasinghe said.

Target Text:
Gerila Harimau Pembebasan Tamil Eelam (LTTE) melanggar sebuah bot peronda tentera buatan Israel, dipanggil Dvora, penuh dengan-bahan letupan yang mengiringi

sekumpulan konvoi laut di perairan Vettilaikerni semalam, kata jurucakap tentera, Sarath Munasinghe.

Back-translation:
The **guerilla** Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE*),* knocked into an Israeli-built military patrol boat, called Dvora, laden with explosives that was escorting a group of naval convoy on the offshore of Vettilaikerni yesterday, said a military spokesperson, Sarath Munasinghe.

The example shows that the translator has also added the term *gerila* when translating the original news. What can be deduced from the examples above is that the policy of condemning terrorism covers acts of terrorism in general. It is not restricted to the so-called 'enemy of the Islamic community' alone but any group regardless of ethnicity or nationality.

5. Conclusion

As the meaning of a word is derived from its association with a particular context, speaker or culture, the meaning varies from one context, speaker or culture to another. Thus, lexical changes made by translators in news translation are facilitation of the meaning of the words and purpose of translation as seen from the perspective of the TC. The decisions made are influenced by the socio-politico factors such as ideologies, national policies, customs and religious beliefs.

End note:
[1] Meanings can be differentiated using the method of componential analysis, propounded by Katz and Fodor (1963) and later adopted by many researchers for lexical and semantic studies. Componential analysis refers to semantic analysis in which meanings of lexemes are analysed based on their minimal components, and which can then be differentiated with other lexemes or groups of lexemes (Jackson, 1988:79). The relevance of using componential analysis lies in the ability of the method to show the contrasts and combinations of meanings which may be used to explain the difference between the choice of words in the original language and the translation. This study concentrates on distinguishing features of lexemes within a specified semantic domain as a method of determining, largely, cases of overtranslation and undertranslation.

References:

Abu-Ssaydeh, A F (1991). The western news media and the language of international political news items in the Arabic press: implications of interaction. In *FIT Newsletter.* 10:4, p. 425-445.

Afifi, Elhami Abdelzaher (1986). *Linguistic Perspectives of Interlingual Translation.* PhD Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin. Ann Arbor: U.M.I.

Bell, Allan (1991). *The Language of News Media.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Delabastita, Dirk (1990). Translation and the Mass Media. In *Translation, History and Culture* (Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, eds.), p. 97-109. London/NY: Pinter Publishers

Fairclough, Norman (1989). *Language and Power*. London/New York: Longman.

Hervey, Sandor and Higgins, Ian (1992). *Thinking Translation. A Course in Translation Method: French-English*. London/New York: Routledge.

Hodge, Robert and Kress, Gunther (1993). *Language As Ideology* (2nd edition). London/New York: Routledge.

Jackson, Howard (1988). *Words and their Meaning*. London and New York: Longman

Katz, Jerrold J and Fodor, Jerry A (1963). The structure of a semantic theory. In *Language. Vol 39, No 2*, p. 170-210.

Larson, Mildred (1993). Translating secondary functions of grammatical structure. In *Translation and Meaning. Part 2.* (Barbara Lewandowska-Tomasczyk & Marcel Thelen, eds.), p. 251-258. Rijkschogeschool Masstricht, the Netherlands: Faculty of Translation and Interpreting

Leech, G.N. (1966). *English in Advertising*. London: Longman

McNair, Brian (1994). *News and Journalism in the UK: A Textbook*. London: Routledge.

Nida, Eugene A. and Taber, Charles (1969). *The Theory and practice of Translation*. Leiden:Brill.

Rokiah Awang (2000). *The Translation of English News into Malay in the Malay Newspapers of Malaysia*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Sidiropoulou, Maria (1995). Headlining in Translation: English vs. Greek Press. In *Target* 7:2, p. 285-304.

Simpson, Paul (1993). *Language, Ideology and Point of View*. London/New York: Longman.

van Dijk, Teun A (1988b). *News Analysis: Case Studies of International and National News in the Press*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.