

An Analysis of Translation Strategies on Idioms Found in Novel *Babel* or *The Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of The Oxford Translators' Revolution*

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: June 11th, 2025

Revised: October 12th, 2025

Accepted: November 13th, 2025

Keywords:

Babel: An Arcane History

Descriptive qualitative

Idioms

Translation strategies

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyse and identify the strategies used in idiomatic translating and the most dominant strategy utilised in “Babel; or The Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators’ Revolution” by R. F. Kuang, from English to Indonesian. The data were collected by listing the idioms in the source text and their corresponding translation in the target text, which is entitled *Babel; atau Pertumpahan Darah: Sejarah Gelap Revolusi Penerjemah Oxford* (Babylon; or Bloodshed: The Dark History of the Oxford Translator's Revolution), translated by Siska Nurohmah, identifying the idioms by classifying the idioms found using Fernando’s theory about the classification of idiom types. The method used in this research was a descriptive qualitative approach, where the collected data were later analysed according to Baker’s idiomatic translation. Based on the results of data analysis that had been obtained with the idiom translation strategy used by translators in chapters one and two, there are 11 translations using a similar meaning and form strategy, 2 translations using a similar meaning and dissimilar form, 20 translations by paraphrasing, and 1 translation by omission or ellipsis. Paraphrasing was the most frequently used strategy in this translation, accounting for 58.82% of the total.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The interpretation required to comprehend an English idiom from a non-English speaker in Indonesia is periodically necessary for a deeper understanding, as it captures unfamiliar circumstances that occur infrequently. Breaking language barriers and enabling readers from diverse backgrounds to access and appreciate literary works from various cultures has high potential, which hinges critically on translation (Munday, 2001). This is enormously significant in literary crafts that are abundant in figurative language, such as idioms, which frequently include meanings profoundly embedded in cultural contexts (Newmark, 1988). The difficulty of idiomatic translation stems from the intricate interaction between language and culture, which influences the interpretation of idioms, the target language’s comprehension, and valuation.

An intriguing instance of this difficulty is presented in the novel *Babel: An Arcane History* by R.F. Kuang, concisely within a novel set in nineteenth-century Oxford, weaving complex themes of language, colonialism, and power through a rich tapestry of historical fiction and fantasy; contained within, is particularly notable for its use of idiomatic expressions and figurative language, which are integral to its narrative tone, contributing to the novel's thematic depth, and character development to indicate homogeneously with idiomatic expressions within *Babel* are intricately woven into the narrative and offering insights into the cultural and historical settings depicted.

The researcher chose *Babel: An Arcane History* as the object of study because this novel contains a considerable number of multiple idioms, and how the story dives into the tension between the ethics of language and the impact of translation on cross-cultural dynamics. In addition, as this novel debuted that unsurprisingly garnered the first spot on The New York Times Best Seller list and more, made the 2022 Waterstones Book of the Year shortlist and went on to win the 2022 Nebula Award for Best Novel and the Blackwell's Books of the Year for Fiction in 2022 ((Blackwell's Books 2022; (Nebula Awards, 2023); (New York Times, 2022); (Waterstones, 2023a). The novel's reliance on idioms as stylistic apparatuses adds depth and authenticity to its narrative, enhancing readers' connection to the period and the story's cultural tensions (Kuang, 2022).

The primary obstacle addressed in this thesis is the difficulties translators encounter while dealing with idioms, especially given the significant linguistic and cultural variations between the source languages and target languages (Baker, 2007). The process of translating idioms is intricate because these expressions often contain cultural references or meanings that are not directly comprehensible. The dilemma lies in identifying analogous terms and expressions that preserve tone, cultural resonance, and the idiom's original intent, while also integrating seamlessly into the target language (House, 2015). Consequently, to effectively communicate the original meaning, explicit translation strategies and meticulous consideration are necessary.

The purpose of this research is to assess the translation strategies applied to idioms within *Babel*, evaluating their effectiveness in preserving the source's original meaning while adapting to the target language, without compromising cultural resonance. Specifically, this research seeks to address the following inquiries:

1. How are idiom translation strategies implemented in *Babel: An Arcane History*?
2. What specific strategies are used to preserve the original meaning of idioms in this novel?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Idioms and Idiomaticity (1996), *Idiomatic Phrases* " by Chitra Fernando is a significant book that provides an essential supporting structure for studying idiomatic phrases from a functional point of view. The methodology incorporates idiomaticity within a comprehensive language framework, underlining its pragmatic and stylistic importance. This functional lens highlights the significance of idioms as both ornamental language elements and essential components in the process of meaning-making in communication.

Fernando categorises idioms into pure-idioms, semi-idioms, and literal-idioms, each distinguished by varying degrees of compositionality and semantic opacity. This classification acts as a basis for understanding to take part in idioms' particular position in translation, as their meaning often cannot be directly inferred from their constituent parts.

Building on Fernando's insights, Baker's idiom translation strategies provide a practical framework for addressing these. In *Other Words* (2007), Baker outlines four types of strategies: (1)

using an idiom of similar meaning and form, (2) using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, (3) paraphrasing, and (4) omission or ellipsis. The inherent subjectivity and creativity associated with translating idiomatic expressions are underscored by Baker's model, which emphasises the translator's discretion in selecting strategies based on textual, cultural, and contextual considerations.

The integration of Fernando's theoretical approach with Baker's practical tactics enables a comprehensive approach to idiom translation. Fernando's focus on idiomaticity as a functional and social construct establishes the theoretical basis for comprehending the difficulties of translating idioms. Baker's techniques provide pragmatics suitable for interpreting these difficulties. Baker's paraphrasing method aligns with Fernando's assertion that idioms often carry culturally specific meanings, which may necessitate innovative recontextualization in the target language.

This study contributes to a more profound comprehension of the application of translation strategies in idiomatic expressions within literary texts by addressing these questions, thereby elucidating the role of translation in moulding readers' perceptions and comprehension of intricate narratives (Venuti, 1995).

Baker (2007) found the following:

Idioms are "at the extreme end of the scale from collocations in one or both of these areas: flexibility of patterning and transparency of meaning. They are frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and, in the case of idioms, often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components." (p. 63)

Furthermore, according to experts, understanding idioms involves recognising that they are expressions whose meanings are not derived from the literal translations of their words but rather convey unique or culturally specific connotations. Larson (1998) notes that those are "expressions of at least two words which cannot be understood literally, and which function as single units," denoting that their figurative meaning diverges from direct translation. Thus, they are often severely more complex to translate because they require linguistic nuances and knowledge of cultural context.

Table 1. Novel's script with translation from SL to TL

Source Language	Target Language
"Your mother and grandparents are dead, your father unknown, and you have no extended family. Stay here, and you won't have a penny to your name. "	"Ibu dan kakek-nenekmu sudah mati, ayahmu tak diketahui, dan kau tak punya kerabat lain. Kalau kau tinggal di sini, kau tak akan jadi apa-apa. "

Based on the translation of the idiom above, the translator employed a paraphrase translation strategy. Translators interpret the English idiom "you won't have a penny to your name" as "*kau tak akan jadi apa-apa*" in Indonesian. Which, if translated in cultural terms, would mean "*miskin; tidak punya satu sen pun*". By employing idioms with similar meanings and vocabularies and associating them with the Indonesian language in a cultural context, the translator conveys the idiom expression by transforming its meaning from the source language into the target language. The example mentioned above classifies the expression as a pure idiom.

The researcher will present an analysis that has been conducted before for the development of this research (Martendi, Setiawan, & Ashadi, 2022). Their research is entitled "The Translation of

Indonesian Cultural Terms into English of the Battle of Surabaya Movie”. In this research, the types of idioms contained in the Battle of Surabaya Movie are analysed and classified. The researcher classifies the types of idioms in the movie based on Indonesian culture, and moreover, with Javanese culture. The types include abbreviations, substitutes, addressing proper names, names that indicate respect, Javanese phrasal compounds, figures in Javanese old-fashioned speech, and Javanese slang. The distinction between prior research and this study is in the subject matter addressed. The film was selected as the object by earlier researchers. Hereinafter, the research problem is where the second distinction may be found. Previous researchers only focused on identifying and describing the translation of Indonesian cultural terms found but did not intend to pinpoint the exact translation technique used in the Battle of Surabaya Movie.

Therefore, to continue this analysis, there are several reasons for deciding on the topic *Babel: An Arcane History* in this thesis. The causes fall into three categories: 1) based on the theoretical gap aspect on the grounds of, 2) based on the research gap aspect on the grounds of, and 3) empirical gap aspect. In this instance, however, the researcher will focus on examining the research gap that this study addresses. A previous study conducted by Ngestiningtyas (2013) concluded that the most frequently employed translation strategy for Indonesian idioms is by using similar meanings and forms. Translation by paraphrasing and translation by employing an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form are additional strategies that can be implemented. The translation by omission or ellipsis strategy did not yield any idioms.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, which allowed for an in-depth analysis of the translation strategies applied to idioms in *Babel: An Arcane History*. A qualitative methodology allows for in-depth analysis of linguistic and cultural elements within idiomatic expressions, emphasising the interpretative aspects necessary for grasping translation techniques in literary texts (Creswell, 2014). By this technique, emphasising the nuances of idiom translation, this approach simplifies a comprehensive exploration of how figurative language is adapted from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) (Denzin, 2018).

3.2 Research Object

The object of this research is R.F. Kuang’s novel *Babel: An Arcane History*, chosen for its extensive use of idiomatic language that reflects complex cultural and historical contexts. In addition to enriching the narrative, the novel’s extensive use of idioms brings a substantial translation component, rendering it an ideal text for analysing elements of idiomatic translation strategies. As noted by Newmark (1988), idioms amuse a part at significant role in conveying a text’s cultural enveloped, and the translation has the ability to deeply impact readers’ perception and interpretation of a narrative.

3.3 Data Sources

The data for this study comprises a selection of idioms identified within *Babel* and their translated equivalents. *Babel: An Arcane History* is a novel written by R.F. Kuang and first published in 2022. In a courteous, throughout attractive manner layered with linguistic insights and historical commentary, *Babel* is a dark academia fantasy novel that delves deeply into themes of how translation shapes culture, colonialism, reparation, the BIPOC Black Lives Matter movement, and,

moreover, through identity. Under the title “*Babel; atau Pertumpahan Darah: Sejarah Gelap Revolusi Penerjemah Oxford*,” Siska Nurohmah translated this book into Indonesian.

This novel comprises a total of five books, consisting of 33 chapters, one interlude, and one epilogue. Approximately 34 idiomatic expressions were selected for analysis, focusing on those with culturally significant meanings or nuanced expressions that add depth to the novel’s themes. The researcher extracted data from Chapters 1 and 2. The rationale for selecting this chapter is as follows: apart from the genuinely interesting plot and the world-building process of the main character, the integrity of the layered narrative is inseparable. As quoted by Kohlke (2023) in *Babel: An Arcane History*, it lingers unsettlingly in the mind long after the reader closes the book on Robin’s story.

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

Research instruments are tools used by researchers to collect data. The instruments utilized in this research inquiry are actual books and pencils. The purpose of this examination is to analyze the idiomatic expressions present in the novel *Babel: An Arcane History*. Furthermore, this research alone was taken in two distinct versions: English and Indonesian. The English edition of the novel served as the source language (SL), while the Indonesian novel “*Babel; atau Pertumpahan Darah: Sejarah Gelap Revolusi Penerjemah Oxford*” was designated as the target language (TL).

3.5 Techniques of Data Collection

Data was collected through close reading and identification of idioms within the novel. This involved identifying idiomatic expressions in the source language (SL) and locating their translated equivalents as target language (TL). The researcher conducted multiple readings of *Babel* to ensure comprehensive identification of idioms, a process recommended by qualitative researchers for in-depth text analysis (Bogdan, 2007). Additional notes were gathered in the context in which each idiom appeared to better understand its intended effect and meaning.

3.6 Techniques of Data Analysis

Subsequent to data collection, the researcher evaluates the data through a series of procedures, specifically:

1. Reading the novels *Babel; or the Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators’ Revolution* in the English version and *Babel; atau Pertumpahan Darah: Sejarah Gelap Revolusi Penerjemah Oxford* in the Indonesian version.
2. Compiling the idioms included in the novel.
3. The researcher categorizes the sorts of idioms included in the novel *Babel: An Arcane History* according to Fernando’s theory.
4. Analyzing the idiom translation procedures, which are referred to by the translator in accordance with Baker’s theory.
5. At the end, the researcher delineates a conclusion derived from the findings of the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Question 1: How are idiom translation strategies implemented in *Babel: An Arcane History*?

Following analyzing the aforementioned data, the researchers ascertained the findings to address the difficulties previously outlined in the study. The researcher identified four sorts of idiom translation procedures as strategies utilized by translators while translating idioms from the novel

Babel: An Arcane History. The strategies found are using idioms of similar meaning and form, using idioms of similar meaning but in dissimilar form, translation by paraphrasing, and translation by omission or ellipsis. The researcher also found three types of idioms contained in the novel: pure idioms, semi-idioms, and literal idioms.

There were 34 idioms used in the *Babel: An Arcane History* novel. To expand on the findings, the next section depicts the novel's idiomatic translation approach.

Similar meaning and form

One of the methodologies employed in the translation of idiomatic expressions in the novel *Babel: An Arcane History* was the strategy of maintaining both similar meaning and form. For the most part, the translator translated English idioms into Indonesian using literal translation. The table below displays several idioms.

Table 2. Similar meaning and form strategy

English	Indonesian
...it made his knees <u>tremble</u> . (p.14)	...hingga membuat lututnya <u>gemetar</u> — (p.16)
He pulled on his english accent <u>like a new coat</u> ... (p.18)	Dikenakannya aksen inggris itu <u>bagai mantel baru</u> ... (p.21)
...it wasn't the same as <u>living and breathing</u> mandarin... (p.28)	...tidak sama dengan <u>hidup dan bernapas</u> dalam bahasa mandarin... (p.32)
...crisscrossing the <u>heart</u> of London... (p.31)	...melintasi <u>pusat</u> kota London... (p.36)
... <u>inhuman blankness</u> ... (p.38)	... <u>ekspresi kosong yang tak manusiawi itu</u> ... (p.45)

A similar meaning and form translation technique was used to translate the idioms, as indicated in Table 1. The phrase “tremble” directly translates to “*gemetar*” also literally translates to quiver slightly. Then, the idiom “like a new coat” and has lexical forms with the meanings “*bagai mantel baru*,” which means the new thing used thereafter. Then, “living and breathing” is word-for-word with translated to “*hidup*” and “*bernafas*,” both of which denote the concepts of being alive and respiring. Following that, the word “heart” which means the innermost part of something, translated to “*pusat*.” The linguistic structure and significance of the phrase are similar. Lastly, the expression “inhuman blankness” employed a literal translation technique, maintaining the same structure as the source language “*ekspresi kosong yang tak manusiawi itu*,” with the meaning the expression is shown when in-depth thinking of and glimpsing as calm even though it makes the feeling uneasy when see it. This translation was executed without any alterations to the linguistic structures, and it retained the identical meaning. Only the phrase structure differed; the translation was in direct speech, and the other side, for the original, was constantly in indirect speech.

Similar meaning and dissimilar form

Table 3. Similar meaning and dissimilar form strategy

English	Indonesian
... <u>pregnant</u> with possibility. (p.22)	... <u>penuh dengan berbagai kemungkinan</u> . (p.26)
...a matter of <u>great and bloody</u> importance. (p.32)	... <u>menjadi begitu besar dan hebat</u> maknanya. (p.37)

Following that, in the abovementioned table, the idioms “pregnant” and “*penuh*” both mean filled. The idiom “pregnant” literally means enceinte, but in English, can also be rephrased “full of meaning.” Although the term “*penuh*” was translated in a different lexical form, the translation retained the same meaning as the original language, and “*berbagai*” is an additional word to support. Lastly, “great” was translated as “*besar*” and “bloody” was translated as “*hebat*,” the word translated as considerable size and does not have to do with involving a lot of blood also injuries. Consequently, this translation was categorized as having similar meaning but a dissimilar form strategy.

Paraphrase strategy

Table 4. Paraphrase idiom-translating strategy

English	Indonesian
...some pages creased and <u>dog-eared</u> ... (p.21)	Beberapa halaman kusut dan <u>terlipat</u> ... (p.25)
“At least <u>push your food</u> around on your plate for a bit.” (p.22)	“ <u>Sentuh saja</u> makananmu barang sedikit.” (p.26)
“Here, or <u>back home</u> ?” (p.29)	“Di sini, atau di <u>tempat kelahiranmu</u> ?” (p.34)
“He’s even more of your <u>splitting image</u> than the last—” (p.29)	“Yang ini jauh <u>lebih mirip</u> denganmu dibandingkan sebelumnya—” (p.34)
“It takes <u>the teeth</u> out of it all.” (p.43)	“Tapi <u>taringnya</u> kurang tajam kalau tanpa kepemilikan.” (p.50)

The term “dog-eared” describes folding down the corner of a page in a book, typically to mark a page, as shown in the table above. In the translation, the translator employed the term “*terlipat*,” which clarifies the circumstances. As an outcome, the paraphrase strategy was implemented to accomplish this translation. The idiom “push your food” means shove on and was translated as “*sentuh saja*,” which meant in the context to indicate that one wishes to give the appearance of having a meal. In this example, the translator contributed more information about the circumstances, which resulted in this paraphrased translation. The term “back home” literally meant return to where you are from at. In this instance, the translator paraphrased the translation by clarifying the meaning without altering the intended meaning of the idiom. It was then replaced by a term a similar meaning as the idiom, “*tempat kelahiran*.” Furthermore, the idioms “splitting image” was made up of two words: “splitting” (*terpisah*) and “image” (*gambaran*). This idiom refers to look very similar. Thereafter, the term “*lebih mirip*” appeared in this translation, and the translator employed the paraphrasing technique to clarify the meaning. Last, “the teeth” means one of the hard, white objects in the mouth. This idiom adjusted by the translator to become “*taringnya*” interpreted the term by describing the circumstances explicitly. To better understand the idiom, the expression “It takes the teeth out of it all” is used. This process helps demonstrate comprehension, integrate information into new works, and maintain originality. Hence, this translation was classified as having a paraphrase strategy.

Omission strategy

Table 5. Omission idiom-translating strategy

English	Indonesian
...had <u>accumulated the lion’s share</u> of both the... (p.19)	... <u>mengumpulkan</u> bijih-bijih perak...dalam <u>jumlah</u> world’s silver ore... (p.23)

Table 5 showed that the idiom “the lion’s share” refers to the largest part of something. The word “accumulated” was translated as “*mengumpulkan*”, and “the lion” was omitted from the text without any substitution, which relates to a large wild animal; meanwhile “, share” means to divide up. Whereas if these words are placed together, they have their definition itself, although not every component of the idiom translation was excluded, this translation was nevertheless seen as an omission or ellipsis due to the absence of some components.

4.2 Research Question 2: What specific strategies are used to preserve the original meaning of idioms in this novel?

These methods enabled a detailed understanding of how translation strategies influence the adaptation of idioms and contribute to an accessible, culturally resonant translation (Newmark, 1988); (House, 2015). A percentage of the data that was discovered is as follows:

Table 6. The Result of Translation Strategies Idiom

No.	Translation Strategies Idiom	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Using Idiom of Similar Meaning and Form	11	32.35%
2.	Using Idiom of Similar Meaning but in Dissimilar Form	2	5.88%
3.	Translation by Paraphrasing	20	58.82%
4.	Translation by Omission	1	2.94%
TOTAL		34	100%

Table 7. The Result of Types of Idioms

No.	Types of Idioms	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Pure Idiom	22	64.71%
2.	Semi Idiom	8	23.53%
3.	Literal Idiom	4	11.76%
TOTAL		34	100%

The table above represents the proportion of translation techniques employed for idioms and the various categories of idioms identified in *Babel: An Arcane History*, as outlined in chapters one and two of the novel. The researchers identified four distinct types of translation techniques. In order to evaluate the acquisition of translation techniques and their respective kinds using specific numerical data. The researcher illustrates the percentage of idiomatic translation techniques in the research data with a pie chart.

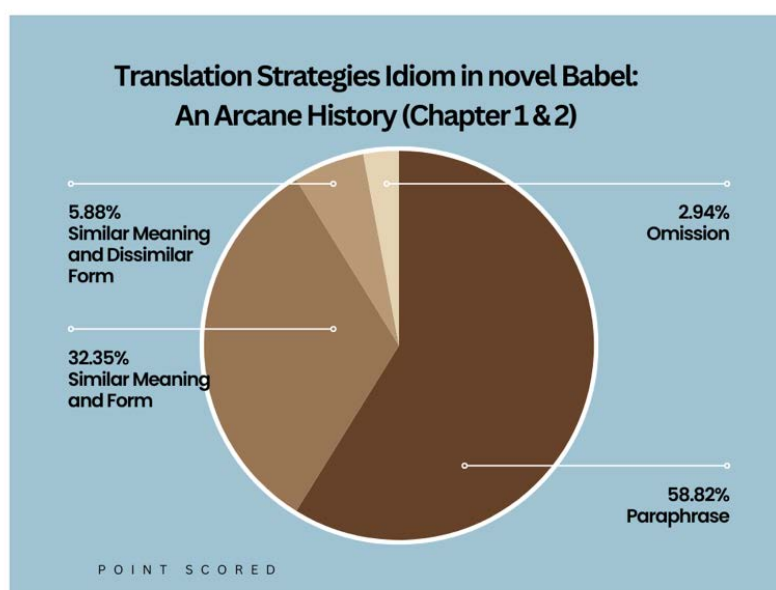


Figure 1. Translation Strategies Idiom in novel *Babel; or The Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators' Revolution*

The data analysis revealed that the researcher identified 34 types of idioms and translation methods in the first two chapters of the novel *Babel: An Arcane History*. The translating by paraphrasing is the most widely used translation strategy idiom with 20 data (58.82%), followed by using idiom of similar meaning and form with 11 data (32.35%), and followed by using idiom of similar meaning but in dissimilar form as much as 2 data (5.88%) then at the lowest, translation by omission with 1 data (2.94%).

4.3 Discussion

Afterwards, the analysis of the data extracted from the novel *Babel: An Arcane History* revealed numerous translation strategy idioms derived from Baker's theory. In this section, the writer presents a discussion that provides an overview of the research problem formulated based on data analysis and research findings. The findings indicate the presence of four types of idiomatic translation mechanisms within the analysed data. Each idiom has an implicit or hidden meaning implied in it. Hereinafter, the researcher identified 34 translation procedures as strategies employed by translators through an analysis of the two chapters in the novel.

After determining the proportion of data above, the researcher discovered that, out of the 34 data points, or 58.82% of the total gathered, the frequently used strategy employed by translators in chapters one and two to translate idioms was paraphrasing, as seen in 20 of the data points.

Figure 1 illustrates that the paraphrase strategy is the most prevalent strategy in idiom translation, whereas the strategy of similar meaning and form comes second. Then, with a similar meaning and a dissimilar form strategy and the last one, the omission strategy. These findings are in line with (Kovács, 2016); (Theda, 2022); (Wisudawanto, 2020)) found that the paraphrasing strategy was the most strategy used in translating literary works, and it was also supported by (Baker, 2007). The strategy of omission or ellipsis was hardly applied to the translation of idioms. The translator presumably considered the variation in cultural and semantic relationships between English and Indonesian while adopting the idiom translation approach.

Despite this, however, the translator has the freedom to choose the strategy when translating a literary work. As a quote utterly in *Babel* conveys the anecdote concerning translation stated in the novel, “An act of translation is always an act of betrayal.” The heavy weight for the feeling of devotion through loyalty rests on all decisions regarding which strategy the translator carries from their backbones overhead, an afterthought for discretion at the end.

5. CONCLUSION

The complexity of translating idioms necessitates carefully selecting a translation technique to ensure that the source language aligns with the target language. In literary works, such as novels, Baker’s idiom translation strategy is a widely recognised approach to translating idioms. Four strategies were implemented to translate idioms from the English novel “Babel; or the Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators’ Revolution” into the Indonesian novel *Babel; atau Pertumpahan Darah: Sejarah Gelap Revolusi Penerjemah Oxford* for this study. Among these, findings showed that the paraphrasing strategy emerged as the most frequently used strategy, demonstrating, besides a similar meaning and form strategy, the translator’s effort to ensure readability and accessibility while preserving the essence of the source language. Thus, findings appropriate to the translator’s choices reflect an equilibrium between adherence to the source language and modification of the target audience’s linguistic and cultural framework.

This study highlights the significance of understanding idiomatic expressions as cultural artefacts that necessitate linguistic and contextual sensitivity during translation. The research contributes to the broader field by exploring an alternative approach and offering insights into the nuanced decisions translators encounter when dealing with idioms in complex literary works, as the Indonesian language serves as a study topic.

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