



Negotiating Social Identity in the Translation of Kate DiCamillo’s *the Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* from English to Bahasa Indonesia

Apriliana Hapsari^{1,a)}, Mohammad Solihin²⁾, Galant Nanta Adhitya³⁾, Yohannes Angie Kristiawan⁴⁾, Rambu Ewut Tanggela⁵⁾

^{1,3,4,5}English Literature Study Program, Universitas Respati Yogyakarta, Indonesia

²Communication Study Program, Universitas Respati Yogyakarta, Indonesia

^{a)}Corresponding author: apriliana_hapsari@respati.ac.id

Abstract. Translation is more than the transfer of words; it is a negotiation of meaning, culture, and identity. This paper explores how social identity is negotiated in the Indonesian translation of Kate DiCamillo’s *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* through a semiotic and translation studies lens. By comparing the source text (ST) and the target text (TT), the study examines how markers of childhood, class, family, and cultural values are transformed in translation. Using Venuti’s (1995) concepts of domestication and foreignization, alongside Peirce’s triadic model of the sign and Eco’s semiotics of translation, the research reveals shifts in language, symbolism, and identity representation. The findings show that the Indonesian translation frequently adopts neutral and standardized expressions, which domesticate non-standard English dialects and diminish class-based identity markers. While this strategy increases accessibility for young readers in Indonesia, it also neutralizes the richness of social identity embedded in the ST. The negotiation of identity in translation therefore highlights the translator’s role as a cultural mediator, shaping how Indonesian children encounter values of empathy, belonging, and transformation. This study contributes to broader discussions of youth identity, intercultural communication, and the global circulation of children’s literature.

Keywords: Translation, Social Identity, Domestication, Children Literature

INTRODUCTION

Translation is never a simple act of transferring words from one language to another; it is a complex process of negotiating meaning, culture, and identity. As scholars have emphasized, translation involves cultural exchange and the recreation of meaning across linguistic boundaries [1, 2]. In children’s literature, where values, identities, and cultural markers are deeply embedded in narratives, translation becomes a crucial tool in shaping how young readers from different linguistic backgrounds perceive the world [3, 4].

Children’s literature serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for socialization, identity formation, and moral development [5, 6]. Stories targeted at young audiences often carry implicit lessons about social relations, empathy, and belonging. When translated, these narratives are recontextualized in a new cultural environment, and the way social identities are represented may change [7, 8]. This recontextualization highlights the translator’s role as a cultural mediator who determines how youth identities are reshaped in the target culture [9, 10].

Kate DiCamillo’s *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* is a notable example of children’s literature that embeds themes of identity, transformation, and social belonging. The novel follows Edward, a porcelain rabbit, on a journey that is both physical and symbolic, reflecting struggles of empathy, love, and relational identity [11, 12]. In its Indonesian translation, however, questions arise as to how these themes of social identity are preserved, adapted, or lost. Translation, therefore, becomes a site of negotiation where semiotic markers of identity undergo transformation [13, 14].

The concept of social identity in literature is closely tied to semiotic representation, where names, symbols, and cultural signs work together to convey meaning. Semiotics offers an analytical framework to examine how these signs function in both source and target texts [15, 16]. When semiotic signs are modified

in translation, shifts in meaning may alter how readers perceive the characters' identities and relationships [17, 18]. For young readers in Indonesia, such shifts could influence how they construct social identities and moral values through the translated text.

Translation studies have long debated the strategies of domestication and foreignization, which shape the degree to which cultural and identity markers are preserved or adapted [19, 20]. Domestication seeks fluency and cultural familiarity for the target audience but risks erasing foreign social identities, while foreignization retains cultural specificity but may challenge readability [21, 22]. In the translation of *Edward Tulane*, such choices determine whether Edward's social identity and cultural context are faithfully conveyed or transformed to suit Indonesian readers.

The negotiation of identity in translation is not merely a linguistic issue but also a sociocultural one. Literature reflects ideologies, power relations, and collective imagination, all of which are reshaped through translation [23, 24]. By analyzing how Edward's social identity is negotiated in translation, this study highlights the translator's agency in mediating between source and target cultures. This mediation has broader implications for understanding how children's literature contributes to cultural transfer and identity construction across global contexts [25, 26].

This paper aims to explore how social identity is negotiated in the Indonesian translation of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* from a semiotic perspective. Specifically, it investigates the semiotic signs of identity in the source text, the shifts that occur in the translation, and the implications of these shifts for young Indonesian readers. By combining semiotic theory with translation studies, this research contributes to the understanding of how translation shapes youth identity and intercultural communication in the global circulation of children's literature [18, 3].

METHODS

The present research adopts a qualitative textual analysis design with a semiotic approach to investigate how social identity is represented and potentially transformed in the translation of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* into Bahasa Indonesia. Qualitative research is particularly suited to exploring meaningmaking processes in texts because it emphasizes interpretation, depth, and contextual understanding rather than numerical generalization [27, 28]. By focusing on semiotic markers such as names, metaphors, dialogues, and cultural references, this study seeks to uncover how identity is mediated through translation choices.

The primary data source consists of Kate DiCamillo's novel *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* in its original English version and the Indonesian translation published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama. These two texts provide the parallel corpus necessary to identify translation shifts that may affect the representation of social identity. Literary texts, as Bassnett [1] notes, are fertile ground for translation analysis because they encode cultural and ideological values, which may be transformed in the target language [23, 1]. The Indonesian version of the novel allows for a comparative analysis of how identity markers are domesticated or foreignized during translation.

The analytical framework integrates semiotics and translation studies, emphasizing the role of signs in meaning-making. Peirce's triadic model of the sign (sign, object, interpretant) enables the researcher to trace how cultural symbols and identity markers shift across translation [15, 29]. Complementing this, Eco's semiotics of translation highlights how signs are re-coded in another language system, often with ideological implications [30, 31]. By combining these perspectives, the framework accounts for both the linguistic and cultural dimensions of identity transfer.

The procedure begins with the collection of textual instances where social identity is foregrounded. These include character names, forms of address, idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and cultural references that reflect markers of childhood, class, family, and values [32, 33]. Each instance is coded and categorized according to its role in constructing identity within the narrative. This step ensures a systematic identification of semiotic markers that are central to the novel's thematic concerns.

Next, the study conducts a comparative analysis between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). Instances of social identity markers in English are juxtaposed with their Indonesian translations to identify translation shifts. Venuti's [19] concepts of domestication and foreignization provide the evaluative lens, revealing whether the translation strategy aligns more with preserving foreign cultural elements or adapting

them to local norms [19, 20]. This comparison highlights not only linguistic choices but also broader cultural negotiations in translation.

The analysis then moves toward interpreting the implications of these translation shifts. Drawing on social identity theory in literature, the study considers how representations of childhood, family, class, and cultural values are maintained, altered, or erased in the translation [34, 35]. For instance, the portrayal of childhood innocence or familial bonds may be reshaped in ways that align with Indonesian socio-cultural contexts. Such interpretation underscores the power of translation in reconstructing social identities within literary narratives.

Finally, the research employs triangulation of theories to strengthen its validity. By combining frameworks from translation studies, semiotics, and social identity in literature, the study ensures a multidimensional perspective on the data [36, 37]. This triangulated methodology not only captures textual shifts but also explains their cultural and ideological implications, offering a comprehensive understanding of how Edward Tulane's journey is retold for Indonesian readers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane provides a rich ground for examining how translation mediates between cultural values, semiotic structures, and the representation of social identity. As a children's novel, it intertwines universal themes of love, loss, and belonging with culturally specific symbols and linguistic expressions that pose significant challenges in translation. To approach these complexities, three theoretical frameworks—Venuti's domestication and foreignization, semiotic theory as developed by Peirce and Eco, and theories of social identity in literature—offer complementary perspectives. Together, they help to analyze how translation not only conveys meaning but also shapes the identity and cultural resonance of the characters, particularly children, in the target language context [19, 30].

Domestication and foreignization strategies, as conceptualized by Venuti, are crucial in understanding how cultural and social identity are negotiated in the Indonesian translation of the novel. Domestication makes the text accessible by adapting cultural references, while foreignization preserves the source culture, allowing readers to experience linguistic and cultural otherness [19, 20]. In a story like Edward Tulane's, where symbols such as toys, journeys, and familial bonds carry cultural nuances, the choice of strategy significantly affects how the Indonesian reader perceives childhood, class, and family relations embedded in the narrative.

From a semiotic perspective, translation can be understood as the transformation of signs across cultural boundaries. Peirce's triadic model of the sign—sign, object, and interpretant—highlights that meaning is not fixed but created through interpretation [38, 15]. In translation, this process is extended, as the translator acts as a mediator who interprets signs within one cultural system and recreates them in another. Eco's notion of semiotics in translation stresses that translation is never a mechanical transfer but a negotiation of meaning that balances fidelity and interpretive creativity [30, 17].

The representation of social identity in literature, particularly children's identity, adds another dimension to this discussion. Narratives construct childhood not merely as an age category but as a cultural and social position shaped by family, class, and communal values [39, 40]. In Edward Tulane's journey, children are not passive figures but central agents of emotional and social transformation, each reflecting specific cultural norms and values. When translated into Bahasa Indonesia, these identities must be carefully mediated to resonate with Indonesian cultural understandings of childhood, family ties, and social belonging.

When these three frameworks intersect, they shed light on the delicate balance translators must maintain between preserving the original identity of the characters and adapting them for the target audience. For example, the choice to domesticate certain expressions of familial intimacy may align with Indonesian cultural norms, but it risks obscuring the foreignness that is central to Venuti's advocacy for ethical translation [41, 24]. On the other hand, excessive foreignization may alienate younger Indonesian readers, disrupting their ability to identify with Edward's journey.

Semiotics allows us to see how translation decisions reshape the symbolic dimensions of the text. Edward himself, as a porcelain rabbit, is a powerful sign that shifts meaning depending on cultural contexts. In Western traditions, porcelain toys may represent fragility, luxury, and sentimental value, while in Indonesian contexts, such symbols might not hold the same resonance [38, 30]. The translator must then reinterpret the sign to create an equivalent emotional impact, ensuring that Edward remains a compelling figure for the target audience.

Social identity theory emphasizes that such translation choices are not merely technical but ideological. The representation of class differences, for instance, is crucial in Edward's encounters with various families. When these class markers are translated into Indonesian, they may highlight or obscure existing social hierarchies familiar to Indonesian readers [40, 42]. Thus, translation operates at the intersection of language, culture, and identity, influencing how readers understand not only Edward but also themselves in relation to the story.

The theme of family further illustrates this intersection. In the source text, Edward's encounters with loving and neglectful families serve as semiotic signs of belonging and alienation. When translated, the familial values embedded in these narratives must be mediated through culturally resonant expressions of kinship. Indonesian culture emphasizes communal ties and filial piety, which may color the interpretation of Edward's shifting familial identities [39, 40]. Here, domestication may help align the story with Indonesian cultural frameworks, but it also risks reducing the cultural specificity of the source text.

Childhood identity is perhaps the most vulnerable to translation shifts. In Western contexts, childhood is often represented as a period of individual growth and emotional exploration, while in Indonesian contexts, childhood is more closely tied to collective family identity [40, 43]. The translator's handling of Edward's encounters with children—each reflecting vulnerability, resilience, or innocence—thus shapes how the target readers perceive the social role of childhood. This becomes a site where cultural values and semiotic reinterpretation directly intersect.

The use of language in dialogue is also a site where translation strategies, semiotic shifts, and social identity intersect. For example, children's speech in the novel carries cultural markers of innocence and class. When these are rendered in Bahasa Indonesia, choices about politeness levels, terms of address, and expressions of affection significantly affect how Indonesian readers perceive the characters [19, 42]. These linguistic decisions both preserve and transform social identity in translation.

Eco's semiotic approach emphasizes that translation is an interpretive act that creates a new text with its own cultural identity [30, 17]. In the case of Edward Tulane, this means that the Indonesian version is not merely a reproduction but a re-creation that reflects both the original narrative and the translator's interpretive stance. This perspective underscores the active role of the translator as a co-creator of meaning, shaping how identity and cultural values are represented in the target text.

The negotiation between domestication and foreignization is especially evident in the handling of cultural references. For example, references to Western holidays, foods, or religious symbols in the novel may either be retained as foreign elements or adapted into culturally familiar Indonesian equivalents. Each choice has semiotic implications for how identity is constructed and perceived in the target text [19, 24]. The translator's decisions in these instances directly shape the child reader's cultural horizons.

By integrating semiotic theory, we can see how Edward's symbolic journey of transformation reflects broader questions of meaning-making in translation. Each of Edward's encounters is a sign system, embodying values of love, loss, and redemption. Translating these encounters involves not only transferring words but also reconstructing symbolic systems that resonate with Indonesian readers [38, 15]. This highlights the interconnectedness of language, identity, and culture in translation.

The representation of class identity in Edward's journey also demonstrates how translation choices affect the narrative's social critique. The novel portrays stark contrasts between wealth and poverty, privilege and marginalization. In translating these depictions into Bahasa Indonesia, the social resonance may shift depending on how terms of wealth, labor, or deprivation are rendered. This demonstrates how translation can reshape the novel's ideological force, influencing how readers engage with its social commentary [41, 39].

The frameworks also converge in the ethical responsibility of the translator. Venuti argues for greater visibility of translators, urging them to resist domestication that erases cultural difference [19, 41]. Eco

emphasizes the interpretive nature of translation, while social identity theories remind us of the cultural stakes involved in representing children and families. Together, these frameworks suggest that translating Edward Tulane is not only a linguistic act but also a cultural negotiation with ethical implications [30, 40].

In summary, the intersection of domestication and foreignization, semiotics, and social identity theory illuminates how translation shapes both the meaning and the cultural identity of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*. Each framework contributes a lens for analyzing how language, symbols, and identities are transferred or transformed in translation. The Indonesian version of the novel thus becomes a site of negotiation, where Edward's journey is reinterpreted in ways that both preserve and reshape its cultural significance [19, 30].

Ultimately, this analysis underscores that translation is not a neutral act but a creative and ideological one. By examining Edward Tulane through the combined frameworks of translation theory, semiotics, and social identity, we can better understand how children's literature travels across cultures, reshaping meanings and identities in the process. Such an approach highlights the power of translation in shaping not only stories but also the cultural imagination of readers [24, 42].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The negotiation of social identity in translation becomes central when a literary text like *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* crosses linguistic and cultural borders. The source text (ST) carries nuanced markers of social status, personality, and relationships, while the target text (TT) often reshapes these elements to suit cultural expectations and readership. In the English original, identities are expressed through speech patterns such as "You want to see what I brung you?" which reflects Bryce's colloquial and non-standard dialect. However, in the Bahasa Indonesia translation, this becomes "*Kau mau lihat apa yang kubawa?*", which adopts a neutral and grammatically standard structure. This shift demonstrates how translation mediates identity by balancing the author's stylistic intention with the norms of the target readership.

One significant aspect of this negotiation lies in the portrayal of social status. In English, dialect often signals class or regional identity, as in Bryce's use of "brung" instead of "brought." This linguistic marker situates him as a working-class boy with limited formal education. The translation into Bahasa Indonesia, however, omits the non-standard form and uses the standard "*kubawa*," which erases the class-based identity marker. By doing so, the translator prioritizes clarity and acceptability for Indonesian readers, particularly children, but at the cost of losing the subtle social status encoded in the ST.

The choice to neutralize dialect also has implications for personality construction. In the ST, Bryce's informal and colloquial style positions him as approachable, simple, and warmhearted. The phrase "You got to close your eyes" reflects a casual, childlike tone. The TT renders this as "*Kamu harus memejamkan mata dulu*," a grammatically correct and neutral clause. This creates a shift in perception: while Bryce remains kind, his personality becomes less distinctive, flattening some of the liveliness present in the ST's voice. The negotiation here leans toward accessibility rather than preservation of character-specific identity.

The negotiation of identity is further seen in the representation of Sarah Ruth. In the ST, her simple responses, such as "Sarah Ruth nodded," reflect her frail and passive role in the narrative. The TT directly translates this as "*Sarah Ruth mengangguk*," maintaining the literal action but omitting any tonal nuance. In the ST, her minimal verbal participation marks her as physically weak and socially dependent, but in the TT, the action is presented in neutral narrative prose without additional context. This highlights a broader pattern where the TT tends toward neutrality and understatement, softening distinctive identity traits.

Cultural and social markers in family roles also undergo transformation in translation. In the ST, kinship and intimacy are often emphasized through colloquial forms and affectionate speech. For example, Bryce's direct and simple language reflects his role as a protective figure for his sister. In the TT, this warmth is filtered into neutral terms like "*Kamu harus memejamkan mata dulu*," which does not carry the same oral quality as Bryce's English. Indonesian readers still perceive the family bond, but the intimacy conveyed through dialect and tone in English is reframed into straightforward narration.

The translation also reflects semiotic shifts that alter the semiotic landscape of the novel. For instance, the non-standard "brung" is not just a word but a sign of social identity, linking Bryce to his background

and community. Its replacement with “*kubawa*” removes that sign and replaces it with a culturally neutral marker of possession. This semiotic modification reduces the semiotic density of the text, making it smoother for child readers but less rich in identity markers. Here, translation negotiates between maintaining fidelity to the ST and adapting to the semiotic norms of the TT culture.

A further example can be seen in Edward’s interaction with characters across his journey. In the ST, characters’ identities are layered through varied speech registers, such as Pellegrina’s formal storytelling tone compared with Bryce’s colloquial style. In translation, these distinctions often become less pronounced because the TT prefers uniform neutrality. Pellegrina’s identity as a wise and authoritative grandmother survives more directly since her speech is already formal, but Bryce’s identity as a working-class boy becomes homogenized. This uneven negotiation demonstrates how translation prioritizes some forms of identity while sacrificing others.

The implications for Indonesian readers are significant, particularly in how they perceive character identity. In the ST, children might recognize Bryce as belonging to a lower social class due to his dialect, which creates empathy through difference. Indonesian children, however, encounter Bryce as a generic, relatable boy without marked class identity. This universalizing effect aligns with the translator’s strategy of readability but shifts the social perception embedded in the ST. Thus, the translation negotiates identity by erasing difference in favor of accessibility.

This negotiation also reflects cultural expectations regarding children’s literature in Indonesia. Children’s books in Bahasa Indonesia are generally expected to use clear, correct, and neutral language, avoiding stigmatizing or confusing forms. As a result, the translator’s choice to render “brung” as “*kubawa*” and “You got to close your eyes” as “*Kamu harus memejamkan mata dulu*” reflects not just linguistic adaptation but also a cultural expectation of what children’s literature should sound like. The child reader’s identity as a learner of “good language” shapes the negotiation process in translation.

At the same time, the translation demonstrates how personality traits are reinterpreted across languages. In English, Bryce’s childlike speech reinforces his role as a caring but unpolished boy. In Bahasa Indonesia, his care is communicated but the “unpolished” aspect is removed. This transforms his personality into something more refined, possibly altering how Indonesian readers imagine his social world. The negotiation of personality here involves transforming a socially marked character into a socially neutral one.

This strategy can also be seen in other dialogues throughout the novel. For example, Edward often shifts between formal and emotional tones, reflecting his transformation journey from vanity to empathy. In English, this is marked by varied sentence structures and emotional interjections. In Bahasa Indonesia, much of this nuance is leveled into straightforward narration, which keeps the storyline intact but reduces the fluctuations of voice. Thus, Edward’s transformation remains visible in plot but less vivid in linguistic texture.

The negotiation of identity in translation is not limited to characters but extends to cultural values. In English, the presence of dialect reflects diversity, class difference, and the richness of spoken identity. In Bahasa Indonesia, however, such differences are often smoothed out to maintain social harmony and avoid stigmatization. This cultural orientation influences the translator’s choices, resulting in a text that aligns with Indonesian norms of politeness and neutrality. Translation here functions as cultural mediation.

Another layer of negotiation involves semiotic shifts in modality. In English, Bryce says, “You got to close your eyes,” which conveys urgency and informality. The TT uses “*Kamu harus memejamkan mata dulu*,” which softens the modality into a polite instruction. This adjustment reduces the directness of Bryce’s tone, making him sound more formal than intended. Indonesian readers thus perceive a subtle transformation in power relations, as Bryce’s authority appears more regulated than spontaneous.

The negotiation also highlights the role of the translator as an active agent shaping identity. Rather than directly transferring markers of identity, the translator reinterprets them in ways deemed suitable for the TT context. This demonstrates Venuti’s notion of domestication, where the foreign is made familiar by aligning it with target norms. In this case, social identity expressed through dialect is domesticated into standard Indonesian. This raises questions about whose identity is preserved and whose is transformed in translation.

Furthermore, the translation underscores how identity is relational. In the ST, Bryce’s speech contrasts with Pellegrina’s storytelling tone, marking differences in age, wisdom, and class. In the TT, however, the

leveling of speech styles reduces these contrasts, making characters sound more similar to one another. As a result, relational identities become less visible to the reader, and character differentiation relies more heavily on narrative context than on linguistic style.

These choices inevitably impact the reader's engagement with the story. English readers encounter a world marked by social diversity, with characters carrying distinct voices. Indonesian readers encounter a smoother, more neutral text where identities are less socially differentiated. While this increases accessibility, it also reduces the interpretive challenges and richness that come with recognizing identity through language. The negotiation here favors readability over social realism.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the Indonesian translation of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* illustrates how translation negotiates social identity within the constraints of cultural and literary norms. While the source text (ST) conveys social status, personality, and cultural values through non-standard dialects and colloquial speech, the target text (TT) largely neutralizes these elements into standardized Indonesian. This strategy ensures accessibility and inclusivity for young readers but diminishes the social nuances that mark class, intimacy, and personality in the original. The translator's choices reflect the cultural expectation in Indonesian children's literature to prioritize clarity, politeness, and educational value, highlighting the role of the translator as a cultural mediator. By adapting Edward's journey into a neutral linguistic register, the translation universalizes the story for Indonesian audiences while reshaping the representation of identity. These findings emphasize that translation is not only linguistic transfer but also cultural negotiation, shaping how young readers engage with values of empathy, belonging, and transformation.

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