

Meaning Shifts in Translation: An Analysis of Adele's "Someone Like You" Lyrics as a Literary Text

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the differences in meaning that emerge in the process of translating Adele's song "Someone Like You" into Indonesian, focusing on its function as a literary text. The main objective is to identify and compare the nuances of meaning contained in the source language (English) and the target language (Indonesian), and to examine how translation affects emotional tone, style, and aesthetic quality. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, drawing on literary translation theory to analyze the lyrics line by line. Data were collected by repeatedly listening to the song and reading its lyrics to grasp both the overall message and the meaning of individual lines, and by comparing the source lyrics with an existing Indonesian translation. The findings show that shifts in meaning occur not only at the lexical level but also in cultural and emotional dimensions, which in turn shape how the target-language audience interprets the lyrics as a whole. Six representative lines were examined in detail, revealing that certain word choices carry emotional and cultural nuances that a literal rendering does not fully capture, particularly around expressions of settled life, emotional withdrawal, discomfort, and the duration of love. This study offers insight into the challenges of translating literary texts, particularly song lyrics, and underscores the importance of preserving both the beauty and the depth of meaning throughout the translation process.

Keywords: Adele; song lyrics; translation

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital technology and social media has made it possible for audiences worldwide to access songs and other creative content instantly through numerous online platforms. Among the many works shared across these platforms, songs occupy a prominent place, and English-language songs in particular reach listeners far beyond English-speaking communities. One example is "Someone Like You" by the British singer Adele Laurie Blue Adkins, released by XL Recordings on 24

January 2011, which has since been viewed more than 2.2 billion times on YouTube. Its audience includes many Indonesian listeners, most of whom have limited command of English, yet still engage with the song through translated lyrics circulated online.

Translation, as defined by Catford (1958, as cited in the source study [CHECK: the citation for this definition is inconsistently recorded in the source manuscript]), is understood as a process, whether written or spoken, that conveys an equivalent meaning from one language into another, involving both

the meaning tied to reality and the differences between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). Newmark (1988) argues that the primary goal of translation is to achieve equivalence of meaning between source and target texts while preserving the author's intent. Sager (1994) adds that shifts in meaning or form often occur during translation, yet the core message of the original text should remain intact even when the target language's structure differs; equivalence, in this sense, does not mean sameness but the preservation of the same message.

Song lyrics, as a hybrid of linguistic and musical elements, add further complexity to this process, since idioms, metaphors, and culturally embedded expressions frequently resist direct translation. "Someone Like You," a song centered on loss and heartbreak, exemplifies this challenge: its emotional resonance is widely recognized across cultures, yet existing Indonesian translations of its lyrics have not been systematically examined for the extent to which they preserve the song's emotional, cultural, and aesthetic nuances alongside its literal meaning.

This study addresses that gap by closely comparing selected lines of "Someone Like You" with their existing Indonesian translation, identifying points where meaning shifts at the lexical, cultural, or emotional level, and analyzing the translation techniques underlying

these shifts, particularly literal translation and adaptation. By treating the lyrics as a literary text rather than a purely linguistic sample, the analysis foregrounds the interaction between semantic accuracy and emotional authenticity in translated song lyrics.

This study aims to analyze the differences in meaning that arise in translating the lyrics of "Someone Like You," to identify the factors that contribute to these shifts, and to offer recommendations for translators facing similar challenges in rendering literary texts, particularly song lyrics. By clarifying how and why meaning shifts occur, this study seeks to contribute to translation studies by highlighting strategies for preserving the authenticity and emotional nuance of source texts in translated song lyrics.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, following Sugiyono's (2016) view of qualitative research as a method that observes phenomena naturally, with the researcher functioning as the primary instrument for data collection, and with conclusions drawn only after the data have been thoroughly analyzed. The object of the research is the song "Someone Like You" by Adele, and the data consist of its English lyrics together with an existing Indonesian translation. Data were collected through observation, namely by repeatedly listening to the song and reading its lyrics until the

intended meaning of the song as a whole, as well as of each individual line, was clearly understood; this process also involved considering the translated lyrics from a contextual standpoint to ensure that the resulting analysis was accurate not only grammatically and aesthetically but also in terms of meaning. The primary instrument in this study is the researcher, who identified lines in which the Indonesian translation showed a shift or inaccuracy in meaning relative to the English source. Data analysis was carried out by comparing selected lines of the source lyrics with their existing translation, examining the translation techniques applied, namely literal translation and adaptation, and evaluating the extent to which each rendering preserved the lexical, cultural, and emotional meaning of the original lyrics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparison of the source lyrics of "Someone Like You" with their existing Indonesian translation identified six lines in which the target-language rendering, while grammatically acceptable, does not fully preserve the lexical, emotional, or cultural nuance of the source text. In line with copyright restrictions on reproducing song lyrics, the discussion below refers to each excerpt descriptively rather than quoting the lyrics verbatim, and focuses on the type of meaning shift involved, its relation to translation theory, and a more precise alternative rendering. The excerpts are grouped into three thematic categories: shifts in lexical and semantic precision, shifts in emotional register and tone, and shifts in figurative

and cultural meaning.

Shifts in Lexical and Semantic Precision

The first category concerns lines whose source wording carries a specific denotative or connotative nuance that the existing translation narrows or loses. The line describing the addressee's life as having become settled, for instance, is rendered with a general Indonesian verb for settling, which loses the source expression's closer association with a stable, marriage-like life stage; a fuller equivalent would specify a settled and secure family life rather than settling in a general sense.

A related shift appears in the line referring to something the speaker was unable to give the addressee, which she reports the addressee's new partner has provided instead. The source wording here points to something intangible, closer to emotional care or love, rather than to material possessions. The existing translation's word choice risks being read as material items, so a more precise rendering would foreground intangible or emotional support rather than "things" in a material sense.

A further example involves a line contrasting how love sometimes endures and sometimes causes pain. The source expression indicates that love lasts, in the sense of persisting over time, rather than being eternal or everlasting. The existing translation's choice of an Indonesian word implying permanence overstates this duration; a more accurate equivalent would convey love that lasts a long time, without implying it is unending.

These three examples show that lexical equivalence in song-lyric

translation cannot rely solely on the closest dictionary meaning of individual words. As Newmark (1988) argues, equivalence must be assessed at the level of overall meaning and authorial intent rather than word-for-word correspondence, and as Sager (1994) notes, some shift in form is unavoidable provided the core message is preserved; in these three lines, however, the shift affects not only form but also the emotional weight of the message, since notions of stability, emotional giving, and duration are each softened or altered by the translator's word choice.

Shifts in Emotional Register and Tone

The second category concerns lines in which the target-language wording changes the emotional intensity or register of the source line. One example is a rhetorical question about why the addressee behaves in a particular guarded way; in context, this behavior reflects emotional withdrawal or avoidance rather than shyness or embarrassment in the everyday sense. The existing translation opts for an Indonesian word closer to social embarrassment, which narrows the meaning to a milder, more literal reading; a preferable equivalent would convey being emotionally closed off or withdrawn.

A second example concerns a line in which the speaker expresses a strong negative feeling about arriving somewhere unannounced. In context, this feeling is closer to discomfort or unease than to hatred in its literal sense. The existing translation's use of a strong

Indonesian verb for hatred slightly overstates the emotional intensity of the line; a softer equivalent expressing discomfort or reluctance would more accurately reflect the speaker's tone.

In both cases, the shift is not a matter of factual inaccuracy but of emotional calibration: the translated lines remain comprehensible, yet the intensity conveyed differs from that of the source. This supports Catford's (1958) view, discussed in the introduction, that translation involves conveying an equivalent meaning rather than a literal one; here, equivalence would require adjusting register so that the emotional weight of the target line matches that of the source line, rather than mapping the closest literal Indonesian word.

Shifts in Figurative and Cultural Meaning

The third category concerns a line combining an unusual, non-literal expression with a reference to a cherished shared past. The source phrasing figuratively conveys being emotionally captivated or held by unexpected, joyous memories of an earlier time in the relationship. The existing translation renders this more literally, which weakens the sense of being emotionally tied to those memories and shifts the line toward a plainer description of surprise; a more idiomatic equivalent would evoke being emotionally bound to sweet memories of a golden past, preserving the figurative quality of the source line.

This example illustrates why literal translation alone is insufficient for figurative or culturally loaded lines: a

technique of adaptation, adjusting the expression to a natural equivalent in the target language and culture, is needed to retain the emotional and aesthetic effect of the original figure of speech. Taken together, the three categories of shift discussed above indicate that translating song lyrics as literary texts requires a combination of literal translation, applied where source and target expressions align closely, and adaptation, applied where cultural or figurative distance requires a more flexible rendering. No single technique is sufficient on its own, and the translator's judgment in selecting between them line by line is central to preserving both the meaning and the emotional depth of the source text.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyze the differences in meaning that arise in translating the lyrics of Adele's "Someone Like You" into Indonesian, to identify the factors underlying these shifts, and to offer recommendations for translators of literary song lyrics. The findings show that a translated song can never achieve complete equivalence with its source text; a translator can only approximate the original as closely as possible without reaching full accuracy. Across the six lines examined, shifts in meaning were found at the lexical level, in emotional register, and in figurative or cultural expression, indicating that these dimensions must be considered together rather than in isolation when translating literary song lyrics.

These findings indicate that there is no single, rigid method suitable for translating song lyrics; instead,

translation must be adapted to the background and context underlying each song, and translators require flexibility in choosing between literal translation and adaptation on a line-by-line basis. Future research is recommended to extend this analysis to a larger corpus of translated song lyrics, or to compare multiple published Indonesian translations of the same song, in order to develop more systematic guidelines for preserving emotional and cultural nuance in song-lyric translation.

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