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Unveiling the Tausug Culture in Parang Sabil through Translation

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Abstract

Translation communicates through language and facilitates the spread of information and culture. It is a conscious semantic transfer of cultural items from one culture to another. In this paper, it aims to unveil the culture of the Tausugs, the people of Sulu, Philippines, in doing the jihad (holy war) through the translation of the parang sabil, a folk narrative song. Anchored on the interpretative theory of translation, this study translates the contemporary parang sabil titled *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* written in Bahasa Sug, a language spoken among the Tausugs, into English. Performed by the Tausug lady named Indah Anjam, *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* (The Story of War in Zambo) talks about the heroic act of Ustadz Habir Malik during the Zamboanga siege in 2013. By mobilizing the researchers' knowledge in Bahasa Sug, English, and Tausug history and culture, linguistic and cultural issues were addressed in the English translation to maintain the sense or culture of doing the Tausug jihad. The researchers faithfully expressed in the English translation the culture of the Tausugs by maintaining the identity of the Tausugs as Muslims, by showing that the Tausugs are in unity to defend their homeland and religion, and by projecting that they are brave warriors in defense of Islam. Hence, translating this particular Tausug parang sabil placed in its cultural context is an urgent work to do in order to enlarge our consciousness on Tausug culture and history.

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In Muslim Mindanao history, the Tausug (*Orang Suluk* in Malay) is one of the Muslim groups in the Southern Philippines recognized for their bravery and firm opposition to the infidels or non-Muslims. The Tausugs or *Bangsa Sug* are proud to say, “We were never conquered”. Before the arrival of the Spaniards, Sulu, or *Lupah Sug* for the Tausugs, already existed under the abode of Islam, thus the title *Sulu Darussalam*. The authority of the Sultanate of Sulu reached Mindanao, Palawan, and even in Sabah, Malaysia (Ingilan, 2018; 2015).

Sources in the Philippine history revealed that *Lupah Sug* is a reminder of the longest history of anti-colonial resistance in Southeast Asia. The Tausugs executed the localized jihad or holy war known as *parang sabil* for their *agama* (religion) and for the liberation of their *Lupah Sug* from those who conquer it. The term *parang sabil* may have been derived from the *Bahasa Sug parrang* which means to fight, and *sabil* from Arabic *fi sabilillah* (in the way of Allah), hence it literally means ‘to fight in the path of Allah’ (Tuban, 2020, p. 62). Sakili (1999) in Ingilan (2018) states that “*parang sabil*, also known in the Philippines as *sabilullah*, is considered one of the most misconstrued customs of the Tausugs”. After the action-packed Battle of Bud Dahu and Bud Bagsak, the Tausugs resorted to a type of guerilla warfare known as the *parang sabil*. Sakili (1999), and Majul (1999) emphasize that “practicing the *parang sabil* is not going amuck as popularly portrayed in films in the Philippines.” Sakili (1999) states that, “it was a religious and patriotic act directed against the combatants of *kafir* (infidels) or foreign invaders.” *Parang sabil* is the Tausug’s way of waging a holy war. It was waged as the last option of opposition against colonization.

For more than five hundred years, the *Bangsa Sug* fought to defend their homeland and to retain their *agama* or religion (Bara, 2015 in Ingilan, 2018, p.38). They carried on with their fight for independence upon the failure of the American invaders and the Philippine government to secure the assurance of improved life for the *Bangsamoro* or Muslims in the Philippines. As a response to this injustice and as embodiment of the continued sacrifice of the *Bangsamoro kamaasan* or ancestors, a Sama-Tausug leader, Nurulaji ‘Nur’ Misuari, founded the Moro National Liberation Front in 1972.

This opposition to foreign invaders is manifested in the Tausug folk narrative song popularly referred to as *parang sabil* which is performed with the accompaniment of *gabbang* (native xylophone), and *biyula* (native violin) in special gatherings in Tausug *kawman* or community (Tuban, 2020, p. 62). It is clear then that the term *parang sabil* is referred to as (1) holy war or (2) folk narrative song.

The *parang sabil* as a folk narrative song was also played on public radio in Jolo. The *parang sabil* may have the *aaaa* or *aabb* rhyme scheme but without a fixed meter. It uses the recurring refrain or the repetition of melody, which is fast

in tempo and is passionately sung on the spot by the singers (Asain, 2006). The stories in the parang sabil share the same plot: an offense has been committed against a believer, threatening the survival of the community of believers and which the offended party feels obliged to defend by dying in the path of Allah. Among the Tausug parang sabil were: (1) *Parang Sabil hi Baddun* – The Parang Sabil of Baddun (Mercado, 1963), (2) *Parang Sabil hi Abdulla iban Isara* -The Parang Sabil of Abdulla and Isara (Rixhon , 1973), (3) *Parrang Sabil Kan Apud* -The Parang Sabil of Apud (Kiefer , 1973), (4) *Kissa Kan Panglima Hassan* -The Story of Panglima Hassan (Tuban, 1977), (5) *Parang Sabil hi Sakili*-The Parang Sabil of Sakili (Tuban, 1977), (6) *Parang Sabil hi Mahmud* -The Parang Sabil of Mahmud (Tuban, 1992), and (7) *Parang Sabil hi Maharadja Untung* -The Parang Sabil of Maharadja Untung(Tuban, 1992). The rhyme, rhythm, and the fast-paced, melismatic singing style of the male and female singers of *parang sabil* in an ensemble of *biyula* and *gabbang* give delight to the Tausug *kawman*. But in 1974, the military mayor banned the singing of the *parang sabil* on the public radio of Jolo as it was only then that the Philippine government authorities unearthed that the abhorrence was perpetuated not only exclusively against the Spaniards but was directed also against any colonial authority that lorded over the *Lupah Sug* from the Spanish era to the present “central” government (Rixhon, 2010 in Ingilan, 2018, p. 38).

To unveil the culture of the *parang sabil*, this translation project aims to translate the Tausug parang sabil titled *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* (The Story of War in Zambo) performed by Indah Anjam into English using the interpretative approach. *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* (The Story of War in Zambo) tells about the heroic act of Ustadz Habir Malik, an MNLF commander from Basilan, during the Zamboanga siege in 2013. The three-week siege was attributed to the refusal of Zamboanga City Mayor Maria Isabelle ‘Beng’ Climaco to let the MNLF headed by Ustadz Habir Malik to raise its flag on its founding anniversary, on the basis that such an act was unconstitutional (Velo, 2017). A sum of 32 people (9 civilians, 5 police officers, and 18 soldiers) were killed, and 238 people (57 civilians, 167 soldiers, and 14 police officers) were wounded (Sinapit, 2013).

The *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* was uploaded on Youtube last November 19, 2014 by Hush Hamid (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ppyC_MjICA), a Tausug from Sulu. This was performed by Indah Anjam on a wedding in Kampung Sukang Luyang, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. Indah Anjam, a Tausug, is one of the most requested singers during special occasions in Tausug *kawman* in Sulu and Sabah. Her performance is often requested by the parents of the bride during wedding (Hush Hamid, personal communication, April 26, 2018).

The translation of this Tausug *parang sabil* into English is deemed necessary in order to understand the culture of *parang sabil*. For Okeogu (2017, p.195), “Translation communicates through language and facilitates the spread of information and culture.” Mba (1996, p.1) sees “translation as a conscious semantic transfer of cultural items from one culture to another.”

Materials and Methods

This translation study employed the interpretative approach in translating the *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* into English. After watching the video for a couple of times, the researchers transcribed the 20-minute *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* performed by Indah Anjam in Bahasa Sug. To check the accuracy of the transcription, the researchers sought the help of native speakers of Bahasa Sug who are now living in Davao City, and Zamboanga City.

To achieve our aim in this project, the researchers used the interpretative theory of translation (ITT) also known as theory of meaning developed by Danila Seleskovitch, Marianne Lederer and their counterparts at Ecole Supérieure des Interpretes et Traducteurs, University of Paris. ITT states that “the meaning contained in the original text has to be understood and reformulated in the second language. It upholds equivalence in translation rather than one-to-one meaning” (Lederer, 1994, p.51). It is built upon four pillars: (1) command of the native language, (2) command of the source language, (3) command of relevant world and background knowledge, (4) command of interpreting methodology. ITT offers a guideline for the treatment of cultural features: Sense, awareness of the things meant by the speaker, is not contained in any given language or text but arises from cues given by the text and cognitive complements. The cognitive complements include knowledge of the world, of time and place, of the circumstances out of which a speech arises, knowing who the speaker is and who the listeners are. With ITT as our framework, we then proceeded to translating the *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* into English.

Bahasa Sug, the researchers’ first language, is the language used in *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo*. Bahasa Sug is a member of the East Mindanao (EM) subgroup of the Central Philippine group of languages (Pallesen, 1985). The Bahasa Sug, the rightful term for the language of people of Sulu (Bangahan, 2015) was, for long time, the means of communication of the Sulu Sultanate with varying entities and areas under its rule since 15th century. The Bahasa Sug, spoken by 900,000 people (Ashley, Olson, & Soderberg, 2012), serves as the lingua franca in the Sulu archipelago and neighboring islands.

In translating the *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* to English, we focused on the meaning of the lyrics and not taking the music into account (Franzon,

2008). In interpreting the meaning of the *parang sabil*, we used our knowledge in Bahasa Sug and English. Living in a Tausug community in Mindanao for decades had helped the researchers in unveiling the Tausug culture in the *parang sabil*.

Results and Discussion

The *parang sabil* is primarily done in defense of *agama* Islam, thus showing *tawheed* (oneness) in *Allahu taala* (Allah, the highest). This trait which reveals the Muslim identity of the Tausugs is seen in the story of war in Zamboanga, in which we faithfully translated to English.

The Bangsa Sug were first exposed to Islam in the 13th century through the influential Tuan Mashaika (Majul, 1973 in Bara, 2015). Islam was intensified in *Lupah Sug* (Sulu) with the advent of Sayyid Abubakar, and the Bangsa Sug were eventually admitted to *ummat al Islamiyah* 'Islamic community' (Ingilan, Jubilado, & Dumanig, 2015, p. 148). The use of Arabic expressions in the *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* (The Story of War in Zambo) revealed their identity as Muslims or followers of Islam. Some of these Arabic expressions were *bismillah* and *alhamdulillah*. Our background in Arabic language helped us in doing the literal translation of these expressions. Then, we considered the context in the source text as to how these Arabic expressions were used. In translating these Arabic expressions to English, we retained the use of Allah, the Arabic term for God, to maintain the character of the Tausug as Muslims. For Muslims, Allah is never translated to God for Allah cannot be compared to any deity. For example, the Arabic expressions *bismillah* translated as "In the name of Allah" and *alhamdulillah* "praises to Allah" in the following:

Tagnaan in <i>bismillah</i>	I will start in the name of Allah
sunud <i>alhamdulillah</i> .	Then, with praises to Allah.

These lines describe one feature of *parang sabil*. It started with a prayer with the mention of Arabic expression, *bismillah* (In the name of Allah) which is the first line of *Al Fatiha* (The Exordium), the first *surah* (chapter) of Qur'an. This feature of Tausug *parang sabil* is similar also to *shair*, a Malaysian literary genre (Rixhon, 1974).

The Tausugs are united in their advocacy to have their own government since 1972. In the folk narrative song, we encountered the terms *bangsa Muslim* and *bangsa Islam* to refer to the Muslims in Mindanao who have been clamoring

for independence. To contextualize it, we used *Bangsamoro* in our translation to refer to *bangsa Muslim* or *bangsa Islam* as seen in the stanzas 6 and 7.

(6) In planu mahugut pa nag paawn higit. Bangsa Islam gawgut Kunu umatu bang maglagut.	It was a concrete and careful plan. The Bangsamoro was firm and would fight until death.
(7) Kailu bangsa Muslim yakkalan sin UN.	Oh the Bangsamoro was deceived by the UN.

We decided to use *Bangsamoro* in the English translation since this is the identity given to the Muslims in the Philippines. The term *Bangsamoro* is derived from two words: *bangsa* (nation) and *moro* (Muslim), thus translates to Muslim nation. *Bangsamoro*, an identity given by the Spaniards after the Moors of Spain, is also recognized by the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). Nur Misuari, the leader of MNLF has been constantly invited to represent the *Bangsamoro* in the meetings of OIC (Bara, 2015).

The Tausugs have high respect to their leaders as revealed in the use of *maas* and *ustadz* as seen in the stanzas 13 and 43.

(13) Maas nag-ordir madtu kan Ustadz Habir. Bisan magparang sabil laung niya ayaw kaw sumurindil.	The maas gave an order to Ustadz Habir. Maas ordered, “Do the act of parang <i>sabil</i> , do not surrender.”
(43) Ustadz Habir gagandilan iban tau Basilan. Bang sin Tuhan dulan dayang Zamboanga lanjalan.	Ustadz Habir was a warrior who hailed from Basilan. If Allah permits, Ustadz Habir would proceed to Zamboanga.

The Tausug title *maas* literally means old, matured. But for the Tausugs especially the members of the Moro National Liberation Front, *maas* means head of the family. In this folk narrative song, Nur Misuari is regarded as the

maas or the highly respected head of MNLF. This is the title of Misuari known to many Tausugs as well as other Muslim groups in Mindanao who are members of the MNLF.

Another title is *ustadz*, a respected Arabic language and Islamic teacher. We cannot just translate *ustadz* to teacher in English because the title *ustadz* means that he is not just teaching the language of Islam, but also living the traditions of Islam. Translating *ustadz* to teacher changes the meaning of the word. In this folk narrative song, Ustadz Habir Malik, a commander of MNLF from Basilan as shown in stanza 43, is well loved by the Tausugs and regarded as hero who fought the enemies in defense of Islam.

In the *Kissa Sin Pagbunu ha Zambo*, it is noticed that the Tausugs gave high regard to the warriors as seen in the stanzas 23 and 24.

(23) Ustadz Habir malanu imatu ha mga satru. In marihang nagbahu dayang mataud nagkahalu.	Ustadz Habir, who was pure, fought the enemies. The dead bodies became stinky, dear, and were rotten.
(24) Ustadz Habir marurug pa Barbara simud. Kabayan nadahpug sabab titimbakan makusug.	Ustadz Habir was brave who entered Barbara. Houses were burned down because of the cannon shots.

We carefully thought of the English equivalent of the Tausug adjective *malanu* that means clean or pure. But in the stanza 23, we believe pure is more appropriate since it describes the character and intention of a true *sabil* (martyr).

Another adjective used to describe Ustadz Habir is *marurug*. We decided to translate it to brave since the context tells that he entered Barbara, a Tausug community in Zamboanga City given that the place was under fire. *Marurug* may also mean 'handsome' but in the stanza 24, it does not fit to the context, hence we used brave.

The bravery of the Tausugs was clearly manifested in the folk narrative song. They did not withdraw from the fight though the enemies, the government soldiers, had been attacking them with bazookas, and mortars, as seen in the stanzas 26 and 27.

(26) Bazooka giyमित pa Hall of Justice. Sambil pa mga pulis way na kunu nakapag-upis. Anduh dayang.	The government soldiers used bazooka to the Hall of Justice. Even the police were not able to hold office. Oh dear.
(27) Manga pulis nagpustu duun ha LTO. Murtal bang hikadtu gammayan makahilu.	The police positioned in the LTO. When the mortar was sent, the situation became chaotic.

Translating bazooka to English was not a problem for us since this word is an English word borrowed by the Tausug to refer to a light portable antitank weapon consisting of an open-breech smoothbore firing tube that launches an armor-piercing rocket and is fired from the shoulder.

What made us confused is the word *murtal* in the source text. We read several times the text and we realized that *murtal* refers to mortar, a big gun which fires missiles high into the air over a short distance. The Tausugs usually pronounce some English words with the final lateral retroflex /ɾ/ to lateral liquid /l/ such as mortar to *murtal*, mayor to *miyul*, governor to *gubnul*, sir to *sil*.

Even during the American occupation in the Philippines, the bravery of Tausugs was vividly seen in the *parang sabil* titled *Kissa kan Panglima Hassan* (The Story of Panglima Hassan). Armed with *budjak* (blades of iron, brass, or steel), *barung* (a leaf-shaped blade), and *kalis* (sword with waves), the Tausugs of Sulu protected their homeland by fighting the American soldiers who had their guns, cannons, and ammunitions. Ingilan (2018, p.38) explains that “the Tausugs performed the *parang sabil* under the ideology of *martabbat* (honor), *darál Islam* (space), and *tawheed* (oneness)”.

The Tausug *parang sabil* such as the *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* (The Story of War in Zambo) is still a cry for independence and love of Islam among the Bangsa Sug. It epitomizes the beliefs and values of the Tausug.

Conclusion

This project aims to translate the *Kissa sin Pagbunu ha Zambo* into English to expose the culture of Tausug *parang sabil* to the non-Muslims. By applying the interpretative theory of translation, we attempted to adapt the Tausug cultural elements into the English translation. We made sure that we faithfully expressed in the English translation the culture of the Tausug *parang sabil* by maintaining the identity of the Tausugs as Muslims, by showing the Tausugs are united to defend their homeland and religion, and by projecting that they are brave warriors in defense of Islam.

The use of *Allah* in the English translation reveals the Muslim identity of the Tausugs. The use of *Bangsamoro* in the target language tells the character of the Tausugs in the Philippines that they are united in their struggle for freedom. The Bangsamoro is headed by *maas* and *ustadz* as seen in the English translation. These Tausug leaders are respected by the *Bangsamoro* for these leaders are *marurug* (brave) and *malanu* (pure).

Performed in special events, the *parang sabil* functions not just to give entertainment but also to instruct the audience specially the young Tausug to treat the *sabil* (one who performs the jihad) as heroes who did not surrender amidst the strong forces of the enemies as evidently manifested in the use of bazooka and mortar of the government soldiers. By doing all these, we maintain the sense of doing the Tausug *parang sabil* in the English translation.

This study, a good reference material in translation, history, and peace and development studies, covered only the *parang sabil* of the Tausug. In order to enlarge our consciousness on Muslim culture in Mindanao, it is suggested to examine also the folk narrative songs about jihad of other Bangsamoro such as the Meranaw of Lanao, Maguindanao of Cotabato, Kagan of Davao, and Sama of Tawi-tawi.

This paper does not only shed light on the culture of Tausug in doing jihad, but more importantly, it contributes to the ongoing conversations on Muslims in the Philippines.

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