

An Accuracy Analysis of Translation in English-Indonesian Bilingual Children's Storybooks through Back-Translation

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the translation accuracy of the English-Indonesian bilingual children's storybook *Purple and Walter: Save the Trees* using the Back-Translation method to ensure its reliability for bilingual education. Employing a qualitative descriptive design with textual analysis, the research analyzed 65 linguistic units comprising sentences and dialogue segments following the four-step "circular" validation procedure (Forward Translation, Review, Blind Back-Translation, and Comparison) proposed by Yu et al. (2003). The data were further assessed using Nababan's (2012) translation accuracy framework. The findings indicate a high level of semantic consistency, with 0% (0 units) falling into Low Accuracy, 27.7% (18 units) categorized as Moderate Accuracy, 52.3% (34 units) as High Accuracy, and 20.0% (13 units) as Very High Accuracy. Results demonstrate that while the core message and narrative function remain stable (72.3% total High/Very High accuracy), Moderate Accuracy units reveal a consistent pattern of stylistic reduction, where descriptive intensity and double emphasis (e.g., "tiny little") are simplified for audience adaptation. This study concludes that the Back-Translation method serves as a rigorous "diagnostic filter" for detecting subtle meaning shifts that traditional direct comparisons may overlook. The high semantic reliability of the text confirms its effectiveness for literacy development, though a balance between readability and the preservation of stylistic richness is recommended for future bilingual materials.

Keywords: Back-translation; bilingual; storybooks

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INTRODUCTION

Translation is not just about changing words; it is a complex activity that requires both language skills and the art of arranging sentences effectively (Hanifah, 2018). In translation, experts use various techniques to solve the problem of finding the right meaning. For instance, translators might add or remove certain parts to make the text easier for the reader to understand without

changing the original message (Arju et al., 2025). Therefore, translation plays an important role in producing bilingual texts, including bilingual books that present the same sentences in two different languages.

According to Slavit and Mulhern (2003), bilingual books can be classified into five different types based on their language structure: 1) Books with the complete text in two languages, 2) Books published in different versions for each language, 3) Books that switch between languages, 4) Books in English, interspersed with words or phrases in another language and 5) Books available only in a language other than English. Given the variety of formats, bilingual storybooks have become an important pedagogical resource. In the context of education, these books allow students to discover new languages and cultures different from their own (Semingson, Pole, & Tommerdahl, 2015). Furthermore, using bilingual books is an effective strategy because it helps learners improve reading comprehension, especially at a basic level (Lived & Tactay, 2025).

To ensure these books are helpful, the translation must be high quality. According to Larson (1998), a good translation must be accurate, acceptable, and easy to read. In bilingual books, where both languages are printed side by side, it is crucial that the translation conveys exactly the same meaning as the original text. Pym (2010) also explains that a translation is successful when both texts share the same value in terms of their form and function.

However, many translations still face challenges, such as inaccurate meanings or structural shifts. Despite the pedagogical importance of bilingual storybooks, a significant gap exists in how their accuracy is evaluated. Traditionally, researchers rely on direct comparison between the source and target texts (Jumatulaini, 2020). While useful, this approach is often criticized for being subjective, as it relies heavily on the researcher's personal interpretation of equivalence (Baihaqi, 2021). Furthermore, many studies in children's literature focus on "readability" or "skopos" (purpose) but overlook the technical "semantic audit" necessary to ensure that the information remains stable across languages (Noerjanah, 2017).

There is a clear lack of empirical studies applying rigorous "quality control" frameworks like Back-Translation to children's literature. While back-translation is the gold standard in medical and scientific fields to prevent life-threatening miscommunication, its application in the literary and educational sectors remains under-researched (Yu et al., 2003). Without this "circular" validation, subtle meaning shifts which could lead to pedagogical misunderstandings in young learners often go undetected (Larasati, 2025).

This research introduces a different approach by using the Back-Translation method. This method, according to Pym (2014), acts like a "quality control" tool where a text is translated from language A to B, and then back to A again ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow A \rightarrow$). This method offers more objective data because it checks whether the original meaning can return to the first language without errors. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the Indonesian translation of the storybook *Purple and Walter: Save the Trees* accurately maintain the semantic meaning of the English source text when subjected to the Back-Translation procedure?
2. What specific linguistic elements or stylistic nuances are most susceptible to meaning shifts during the translation process from English to Indonesian?

By addressing these questions, this study provides a deeper and more accurate analysis of how well children's stories are being translated, ensuring they serve as reliable tools for bilingual education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design specifically utilizing Textual Analysis within the framework of Library Research. While Library Research was the method used for initial data acquisition (selecting the bilingual book *Purple and Walter: Save the Trees* and identifying theoretical frameworks), the core analytical engine is Textual Analysis. This approach is necessitated by the nature of the primary data, which consist of 65 linguistic units (sentences and dialogue segments) rather than secondary summaries. Unlike general library research, this study performs a systematic, micro-linguistic interrogation of a specific text to describe and interpret how meaning is transferred from the Source Language (SL) to the Target Language (TL) without relying on statistical inference.

Data Source and Object of Research

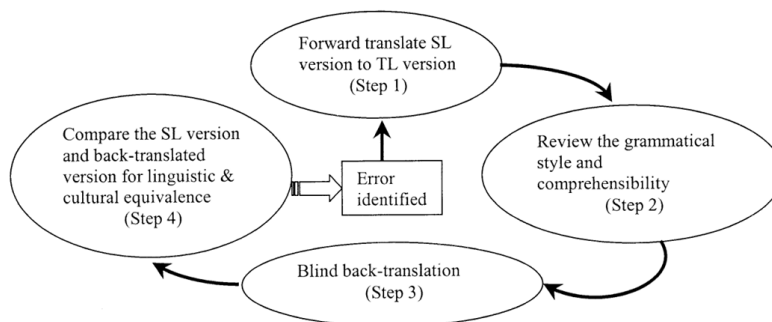
The object of this research is the Directional Equivalence between English and Indonesian texts. Data are sourced from bilingual children's storybook:

- Title: *Purple and Walter: Save the Trees* (Indonesian: *Ungu dan Walter Menyelamatkan Pepohonan*)
- Author: Swati Rajorla
- Translator: Clara Evi Citraningtyas
- Year: 2016
- ISBN: 978-93-81-59274-8

Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected and processed through a systematic four-step procedure by Yu et al. (2003):

FIGURE 1. Retrieved from Yu et al (2003)



- a. Step 1: Forward Translation Identification (SLT to TLT)
The researchers identified the original English Source Language (SL) and the existing Indonesian translation Target Language (TL) provided in the bilingual book.
- b. Step 2: Review for Comprehensibility
The Indonesian translation was reviewed for its grammatical style and naturalness within the target language context.
- c. Step 3: Blind Back-Translation
The Indonesian text was translated back into English (Back-Translated Version) by a translator who was "blinded" to the original English source text. This step is crucial to test if the Indonesian translation is "strong" enough to lead back to the original meaning.
- d. Step 4: Comparison and Tabulation
All three versions were tabulated into a comparison matrix to prepare for final analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The data in this study were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three concurrent processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. These stages were applied systematically to ensure methodological transparency in the selection, analysis, and interpretation of translation units

- a. Data Reduction
In this initial phase, the researchers conducted a purposive selection of the units of analysis from the bilingual storybook *Purple and Walter: Save the Trees*. The unit of analysis in this study is a sentence or dialogue segment, as it represents a complete semantic unit that enables accurate comparison of meaning across the Source Language (SL), Target Language (TL), and back-translated text. A total of 65 units were selected through comprehensive reading of the text, based on the following criteria: (1) the unit conveys a complete idea, (2) it has direct equivalence between SL and TL, and (3) it contains linguistic or stylistic features such as descriptive expressions, emphasis, or narrative function that allow meaningful evaluation of translation accuracy. This purposive approach ensures that the analysis focuses on representative and analytically relevant data, while avoiding fragmented or redundant elements.
- b. Data Display
The selected data were then organized into a structured comparison matrix to facilitate systematic analysis. Each unit was processed using the Back-Translation procedure proposed by Yu et al. (2003), which includes: (1) identifying the Source Language Text (SLT), (2) reviewing the Target Language Text (TLT) in terms of grammaticality and naturalness, (3) conducting a blind back-translation of the TL into English, and (4) comparing the back-translated version with the original SL. The results were displayed in a tabular format consisting of SL, TL, back-translation, and analytical notes. This display enables clear identification of equivalence patterns, including meaning preservation, reduction, or shift, and provides a transparent basis for subsequent evaluation. The table shows:

TABLE 1. Back-Translation Analysis

Step 1: Forward Translation (SLT: ENG to TLT: IND)	Step 2: Review (Grammar & Comprehensibility)	Step 3: Blind Back-Translation (IND back to ENG)	Step 4: Comparison & Equivalence (Original SL vs. Back-Translated)
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c. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

In the final stage, each data unit was evaluated using Nababan’s (2012) translation accuracy framework to determine the degree of semantic equivalence. The assessment was based on the comparison between the original SL and the back-translated version, which reflects how well the meaning is maintained through the translation process. Each unit was then classified into one of three accuracy levels identified in this study: Very High Accuracy (13 units), High Accuracy (34 units), and Moderate Accuracy (18 units). The frequencies of each category were calculated to obtain the overall distribution of translation accuracy. The conclusions were drawn by identifying recurring linguistic patterns that influenced these classifications, such as the simplification of descriptive intensity, lexical substitution, and cultural adaptation. This step ensures that the findings are empirically grounded and analytically derived from the systematic procedures applied in the previous stages.

Technique of Assessing Translation Accuracy

This research uses the theory of Nababan (2012) for translation quality assessment. The assessment focuses on the accuracy aspect, which measures how well the meaning from the Source Language is transferred into the Target Language. The accuracy is categorized as:

- a. Very High Accuracy → The meaning is fully conveyed without any distortion.
- b. High Accuracy → The meaning is transferred completely with no alteration.
- c. Moderate Accuracy → Main meaning is preserved but some details or emphasis are lost.
- d. Low Accuracy → Meaning is inaccurately transferred or significantly distorted.

FINDINGS

The analysis of 65 linguistic units comprising sentences and dialogue segments from the bilingual book *Purple and Walter: Save the Trees* indicates a high level of accuracy. As shown in Table 1, the majority of the data fall into the High and Very High categories, with no instances of Low Accuracy detected. The classification of translation accuracy is presented in the following distribution:

TABLE 2. Distribution of Translation Accuracy Levels

Accuracy Category	Total Units	Percentage (%)
Low Accuracy	0	0 %
Moderate Accuracy	18	27.7 %
High Accuracy	34	52.3 %
Very High Accuracy	13	20.0%
Total Analysis	65	100 %

The data reduction process revealed that High Accuracy (52.3%) is the most frequent category. This indicates that while the back-translated version showed slight lexical variations, the core message remained stable. Very High Accuracy (20%) was achieved when the back-translation was virtually identical to the original Source Language Text (SLT), while Moderate Accuracy (27.7%) identifies units where the primary meaning was preserved but stylistic intensity was diminished.

The following sections present representative examples from the three accuracy levels identified in this study: Moderate Accuracy, High Accuracy, and Very High Accuracy.

1. Moderate Accuracy

Source Language (SL): “A tiny little ant can’t help me fight a strong and powerful elephant,” cried Squirty.

- a. Step 1 – Forward Translation (SL → TL): “Seekor semut kecil tidak akan bisa membantuku melawan gajah yang kuat,” teriak Squirty.

In this first stage, the original English sentence is translated into Indonesian. Grammatically, the Indonesian sentence is correct and natural. The structure of the sentence remains clear and easily understandable for Indonesian readers, particularly children. However, some stylistic features from the original sentence are simplified in the translation.

For example, the phrase “tiny little” in English uses two adjectives to emphasize the extremely small size of the ant. In the Indonesian translation, this double emphasis is simplified into a single adjective, “kecil” (small). Similarly, the phrase “strong and powerful” is reduced to “kuat” (strong) in the Indonesian version.

- b. Step 2 – Review

During the review stage, the Indonesian sentence is evaluated in terms of readability, grammatical accuracy, and naturalness. The sentence is considered appropriate for the target audience because it is clear, simple, and consistent with common Indonesian storytelling language for children.

However, the review also reveals that the translation slightly reduces the expressive intensity of the original text. Repetition of adjectives such as “tiny little” and “strong and powerful” is often used in children’s literature to create emotional emphasis and

dramatic effect. This stylistic element is partially lost in the translation.

- c. Step 3 – Blind Back-Translation (TL → English): “A small ant will not be able to help me fight a strong elephant,” shouted Squirty.

The Indonesian sentence is then translated back into English by a translator who does not have access to the original English text. This “blind” process ensures that the evaluation focuses solely on how well the meaning survives through the translation chain.

The back-translated version shows that the essential meaning of the sentence remains intact. The ant is still described as small, and the elephant is still described as strong. However, the expressive repetition present in the original sentence does not reappear in the back-translated version.

- d. Step 4 – Comparison

When comparing the three versions (SL, TL, and back-translated text), several small reductions in descriptive intensity become apparent:

“Tiny little” → “small”

“Strong and powerful” → “strong”

Although these changes do not alter the central meaning of the sentence, they reduce the emotional emphasis and stylistic exaggeration typical of children’s storytelling. Because the core message remains accurate but some expressive elements are simplified, this data unit is categorized as Moderate Accuracy.

TABLE 3. Analysis of Moderate Accuracy in Back-Translation

Step 1: Forward Translation (SL: ENG to TL: IND)	Step 2: Review (Grammar & Comprehensibility)	Step 3: Blind Back-Translation (IND back to ENG)	Step 4: Comparison & Equivalence (Original SL vs. Back-Translated)
SLT: “A tiny little ant can’t help me fight a strong and powerful elephant,” cried Squirty. TLT: “Seekor semut kecil tidak akan bisa membantuku melawan gajah yang kuat,” teriak Squirty.u	The translation is grammatically correct. "Tiny little" is simplified to "kecil" (small), and the redundant "strong and powerful" is condensed to "kuat" (strong).	“A small ant will not be able to help me fight a strong elephant,” shouted Squirty.	Accuracy: Moderate. The back-translation loses the double emphasis of "tiny little" and "strong and powerful" found in the SLT.

2. High Accuracy

Source Language (SL): Suddenly, Purple felt something wriggling beneath his quilt.

- a. Step 1 – Forward Translation (SL → TL): Tiba-tiba, Ungu merasa ada yang menggeliat di bawah selimut.

In the first step, the English sentence is translated into Indonesian. This translation shows that the main meaning of the source sentence is successfully kept in the target language. The sentence structure in Indonesian sounds natural and is easy for readers to understand, especially children.

The word "Suddenly" is translated as "Tiba-tiba", which has the same function of showing a sudden event. The verb "felt" is translated as "merasa", which accurately describes Purple's sensory experience.

The word "wriggling" is translated as "menggeliat." This word is a good choice because it describes small, unstable movements, which matches the English meaning.

The word "quilt" is translated as "selimut." Although a "quilt" is technically a specific type of layered blanket in Western culture, using "selimut" in Indonesian is more natural and easier for Indonesian children to understand. This choice shows a cultural adaptation that keeps the basic meaning of the source text.

b. Step 2 – Review

In the review stage, the Indonesian translation is checked for readability, naturalness, and grammatical accuracy. The results show that the sentence has no grammar mistakes and sounds very natural in Indonesian.

The sentence structure is simple and clear, which fits the style of children's storybooks. Using the word "menggeliat" effectively describes the mysterious movement under the blanket, helping to build a sense of curiosity in the story. Additionally, the order of information stays the same as the source text, showing that the translator maintained the narrative flow without making big changes.

c. Step 3 – Blind Back-Translation (TL → English): Suddenly, Purple felt something wriggling under the blanket.

At this stage, the Indonesian sentence is translated back into English by a translator who has not seen the original text. The goal is to see if the meaning stays the same after the translation process. The results show that the main meaning is preserved. The activity Purple experiences feeling something move under the bedcovers—is still clearly described.

d. Step 4 – Comparison

When comparing the three versions (SL, TL, and Back-Translation), there are some small differences in word choice:

"Beneath" became "under"

"Quilt" became "blanket"

These differences do not change the main meaning because these words are very similar in the context of the story. In many cases, "beneath" and "under" can be used interchangeably. Similarly, "quilt" and "blanket" both refer to something used to cover the body while sleeping.

Because the meaning, narrative function, and atmosphere are well-preserved despite small vocabulary differences, this data is categorized as High Accuracy. This shows that the translation process successfully kept the main message of the source text

TABLE 4. Analysis of High Accuracy in Back-Translation

Step 1: Forward Translation (SL: ENG to TL: IND)	Step 2: Review (Grammar & Comprehensibility)	Step 3: Blind Back-Translation (IND back to ENG)	Step 4: Comparison & Equivalence (Original SL vs. Back-Translated)
SLT: Suddenly, Purple felt something wriggling beneath his quilt. TLT: Tiba-tiba, Ungu merasa ada yang menggeliat dibawah selimut.	Clear and grammatically sound. "Quilt" is translated as "selimut" (blanket), which is a culturally appropriate equivalent in Indonesia.	Suddenly, Purple felt something wriggling under the blanket.	Accuracy: High. "Beneath" and "under" are synonymous, as are "quilt" and "blanket" in this context.

3. Very High Accuracy

Source Language (SL): “Hey! Who are you and what are you doing in my bed?” cried Purple.

- a. Step 1 – Forward Translation (SL → TL): “Hey, siapa kamu dan apa yang kamu lakukan di tempat tidurku?” teriak Ungu.

In the first step, the English dialogue is translated into Indonesian. This translation keeps the question structure and the emotional expression found in the source text.

The exclamation “Hey!” is kept in the same form because this expression is also commonly used in Indonesian to get someone's attention suddenly.

The question “Who are you?” is translated as “siapa kamu,” which directly conveys the same meaning. Similarly, the second question “what are you doing in my bed?” is translated as “apa yang kamu lakukan di tempat tidurku?”

Additionally, the possessive form “my bed” is translated as “tempat tidurku.” Using the suffix “-ku” in Indonesian is the correct way to show ownership in an informal context, especially in dialogue.

- b. Step 2 – Review

In the review stage, the Indonesian sentence is analyzed for grammar accuracy, naturalness, and suitability for a children's story. The results show that the sentence is very natural and easy for readers to understand.

The structure of the dialogue is well-maintained. The two questions asked by Purple are presented clearly and in order. This helps keep the feeling of surprise and curiosity felt by the character. Furthermore, using the word “teriak” to translate “cried” is appropriate here because it conveys a loud, emotional voice.

- c. Step 3 – Blind Back-Translation (TL → English): “Hey, who are you and what are you doing in my bed?” shouted Purple.

At this stage, the Indonesian sentence is translated back into English by a translator who has not seen the original source text. The results show that the structure and meaning are almost exactly the same as the original.

The questions asked by Purple remain the same in both order and meaning. This shows that the Indonesian translation is strong enough to return the original meaning through the back-translation process

- d. Step 4 – Comparison

When the Source Language and Back-Translation versions are compared, both sentences are almost identical. The only small difference is in the reporting verb: “cried” became “shouted.”

However, in the context of a children's story, both words describe speaking with a loud voice and strong emotion. Therefore, this difference does not change the meaning or the emotional intensity of the dialogue.

In addition, the sentence structure, the form of the questions, and the overall meaning are perfectly maintained. No information is lost, no extra meanings are added, and there are no significant structural changes.

Because the meaning, structure, and communication function are almost identical to the source text, this data is categorized as Very High Accuracy. This shows that the translation process successfully kept the original message accurately without any distortion

TABLE 5. Analysis of Very High Accuracy in Back-Translation

Step 1: Forward Translation (SLT: ENG to TLT: IND)	Step 2: Review (Grammar & Comprehensibility)	Step 3: Blind Back-Translation (IND back to ENG)	Step 4: Comparison & Equivalence (Original SL vs. Back-Translated)
SLT: “Hey! Who are you and what are you doing in my bed?” cried Purple. TLT: “Hey, siapa kamu dan apa yang kamu lakukan di tempat tidurku?” teriak Ungu.	Grammatically correct and natural dialogue. "Cried" is translated as "teriak" (shouted/cried out).	“Hey, who are you and what are you doing in my bed?” shouted Purple.	Accuracy: Very High. The structure and meaning remain almost identical across both versions.

The results demonstrate that the Back-Translation method is effective for identifying subtle shifts in meaning that may not be immediately visible when comparing only the source and target texts. Three main patterns were observed:

- 1) Moderate Accuracy: Occurs when expressive elements such as repetition, descriptive adjectives, or stylistic emphasis are simplified during translation. The

main idea remains intact, but the emotional or stylistic intensity may be slightly reduced.

- 2) High Accuracy: Occurs when the meaning and narrative function are preserved, even though small lexical differences appear. These differences typically involve synonyms or cultural adaptations that improve naturalness in the target language.
- 3) Very High Accuracy: Occurs when the back-translated sentence closely matches the original source text in terms of structure, meaning, and tone. In these cases, the translation achieves near-perfect equivalence.

DISCUSSION

Semantic Preservation and Functional Equivalence

The dominance of High and Very High accuracy (totaling 72.3%) demonstrates that the translator successfully applied functional equivalence. According to Larson (1998), the goal of translation is to communicate the same message using the natural forms of the target language. In this study, Very High Accuracy was most common in culturally neutral sentences with straightforward structures. For example, the sentence *"To his surprise, a tiny squirrel peeked up"* was back-translated as *"He was very surprised when a squirrel peeked out,"* showing that even with minor structural shifts, the semantic core remains perfectly intact.

Stylistic Reduction and Audience Adaptation

The 18 units (27.7%) classified as Moderate Accuracy reveal a consistent pattern of descriptive simplification. The textual analysis identified that the translator frequently reduced descriptive adjectives or idiomatic expressions to ensure readability for the target audience of children.

A prime example is the translation of *"tucked in bed"* into *"bersiap untuk tidur"* (preparing for sleep). The back-translation *"getting ready for bed"* clearly shows the loss of the specific English nuance of being "snugly covered." This supports the theory of Audience Adaptation in children's literature, where linguistic simplicity is often prioritized over stylistic richness to ensure the text remains accessible to young readers (Noerjanah, 2017). While this results in a "flatter" narrative, it prevents the cognitive overload that might occur with complex literal translations.

The Role of Back-Translation as an Analytical Tool

Following the procedure by Yu et al. (2003), the back-translation method acted as a "diagnostic filter" in this study. It revealed that shifts in meaning were almost exclusively lexical rather than structural. By performing a "blind" back-translation, the researchers were able to detect that Indonesian words like *"gembira"* often back-translate to the more general *"happily"* rather than the specific *"cheerfully."* This confirms that back-translation is not merely a validation tool for quality control, but a systematic analytical method that enhances the transparency of translation evaluation in qualitative research.

CONCLUSION

Based on the accuracy analysis of the bilingual children's storybook *Purple and Walter: Save the Trees*, this study concludes that the Indonesian translation demonstrates a high degree of semantic consistency and overall reliability. The findings show that 72.3% of the 65 analyzed linguistic units fall into the High and Very High Accuracy categories, indicating that the translation successfully preserves the core meaning, narrative function, and communicative intent of the English source text. The absence of Low Accuracy cases further confirms that the translated text does not produce significant semantic distortion, and therefore can be considered a dependable resource for bilingual learning. These results also validate the effectiveness of the Back-Translation method as a systematic tool for assessing translation accuracy, as the original meaning can be consistently reconstructed through the circular translation process.

However, in addressing the second research question, the study reveals that meaning shifts still occur, particularly at the level of stylistic and expressive elements. The Moderate Accuracy category (27.7%) shows that descriptive intensity, repetition, and emotional emphasis are the most vulnerable to reduction during translation. Expressions such as "tiny little" and "strong and powerful" are simplified into more general forms like *kecil* and *kuat*, reflecting a tendency toward lexical generalization and audience-oriented adaptation. While these shifts do not alter the essential meaning, they reduce the stylistic richness and emotional nuance of the original text. This indicates that challenges in translating children's literature are not primarily semantic, but rather involve maintaining the balance between accuracy and expressive equivalence.

The implications of these findings are significant for both translation studies and educational practice. From a theoretical perspective, this study highlights the importance of Back-Translation not only as a quality control mechanism but also as an analytical framework that provides a more objective and transparent evaluation of translation accuracy. In the context of translation teaching, the findings suggest that Back-Translation should be integrated as a pedagogical strategy to enhance students' metalinguistic awareness and sensitivity to meaning shifts. Translation training should also emphasize the need to preserve not only referential meaning but also stylistic features, particularly in literary texts intended for children.

From an educational standpoint, the results confirm that bilingual storybooks with high semantic accuracy can effectively support literacy development, vocabulary acquisition, and cross-linguistic understanding. Nevertheless, the tendency toward stylistic simplification suggests that educators and publishers must carefully balance readability with expressive quality to maintain the narrative engagement of young readers. Therefore, bilingual materials should undergo systematic evaluation using rigorous methods such as Back-Translation to ensure both linguistic accuracy and pedagogical effectiveness. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that while high semantic equivalence is achievable, maintaining stylistic richness remains a key challenge, underscoring the need for a more balanced approach in translating and utilizing bilingual children's literature.

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