

A Corpus-based Study of Reporting Verbs Translation in the 19th- and 21st-Century Detective Novels into Indonesian

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ABSTRACT

*Reporting verbs in narrative fiction are more than syntactic necessities; they function stylistically to convey tone, emotion, characterisation, and narrative pace. This study compares the use and translation of reporting verbs in two detective novels from different literary periods: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*, published in 1890, and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, published in 2003, along with their respective Indonesian translations published in the 21st century. Using AntConc and AntPConc, a parallel corpus application, this study analyses the taxonomy, frequency, translation shifts, and syntactic behaviour of reporting verbs in both source texts and their Indonesian translations. The findings reveal that neutral structuring reporting verbs dominate both source texts; the Indonesian translations tend to further neutralise reporting verbs, particularly in the translation of Doyle's novel. As a result, descriptive reporting verbs and stylistically marked verbs tend to decrease in both translation texts, reducing affective and interpersonal nuances embedded in characterisation. The study also finds that Brown employs more descriptive and metapositional verbs than Doyle, reflecting the faster pace and stronger interpersonal tension of modern thriller fiction. Additionally, the unique pattern of 19th-century "reporting verb + subject pronoun" is modernised to "subject pronoun + verb". These findings highlight that the translation of reporting verbs is not a neutral linguistic process but a form of stylistic mediation. The study contributes to corpus-based translation studies by demonstrating how diachronic stylistic features and characterisation are negotiated, normalised, and reconstructed in literary translation to mediate readability and narrative convention.*

Keywords: reporting verbs; translation studies; diachronic comparison; parallel corpus; characterisation; detective novels

INTRODUCTION

Reporting verbs have been explored by many researchers in narrative fiction (Mastropierro & Grabowski, 2024; Saldanha, 2011; Segundo, 2017). Reporting verbs are used to develop and reflect the character's emotions through the verbs used in delivering dialogue in literary works. Authors use reporting verbs to describe and reveal character intentions and shape readers' interpretations of events (Culpeper, 2014, p. 215; Rawlins et al., 2024). These verbs, such as said,

asked, cried, or whispered, not only introduce dialogue but also contribute significantly to describing the tone, pace, and psychological condition of characters in the narrative (Leech & Short, 2007, p. 233).

Reporting verbs, which are used to attribute direct or indirect speech to characters in literary works, have been widely explored in narrative fiction and stylistic studies (Bidasiuk et al., 2023; Cermakova & Fárová, 2024; Segundo, 2017). Cermakova and Fárová (2024) mentioned that the changes of these reporting verbs in the translation process may alter semantic nuance. This indicates that translators should preserve not only the way characters speak but also the stylistic function of reporting verbs. However, despite their importance, reporting verbs have received relatively limited attention in translation studies, which tend to focus more on broader stylistic or thematic issues than characterisation.

Furthermore, authorial style, culture, and time may affect the use of reporting verbs in literary works. Previous studies have explored reporting verbs within a single novel or literary tradition or a single translation direction to a certain language or culture (Mastropierro, 2020; Mastropierro & Grabowski, 2024). These studies examine stylistic patterns across authors from particular literary periods, such as speech bundles in the 19th century (Mahlberg et al., 2019). However, previous studies have rarely adopted a diachronic perspective on the translation of reporting verbs across literary periods. There is a lack of research examining whether authorial style, period, or narrative conventions influence the translation of reporting verbs. These gaps are critical, as the genre and authorial style have evolved (Hughes et al., 2012; K. Sun & Wang, 2022). The translation of 19th-century reporting verbs into modern Indonesian in the 21st century may reveal whether translators preserve historical stylistic features or adapt them to contemporary narrative conventions.

To address these gaps, this study investigates the translation of reporting verbs in two novels: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890) and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), along with their Indonesian translations in the 21st century. By comparing detective novels from different literary periods, this study focuses on direct reporting verbs since they reflect how the authors described the characters. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions: (1) What type of reporting verbs are used in the source texts? (2) How are these verbs translated into Indonesian? (3) How do translation shifts reflect changing stylistic and narrative conventions across literary periods? This study contributes to translation studies by integrating characterisation, diachronic stylistics, and literary translation analysis to better understand how narrative style is maintained or modulated in translation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

REPORTING VERBS AND CHARACTERISATION

Reporting verbs play an important role in fiction and non-fiction discourse (Floyd Moore, 2000; Jarkovská & Kučírková, 2020; Li et al., 2023; Mastropierro, 2020; Rawlins et al., 2024). In fiction, reporting verbs may describe the characters' emotions in literary works. As stated by Culpeper, characterisation may be constructed through direct authorial description, description by other characters, or by a narrator (Culpeper, 2014, pp. 114–115), including the way characters speak. Some researchers have explored the use of utterances, politeness markers, and a character's behaviour as indirect ways to build characterisation linguistically (Ardi et al., 2018; Espunya, 2024; Giordano, 2008, p. 187).

Unlike reporting verbs in non-fiction, Caldas-Coulthard proposes that there are at least three taxonomies of reporting verbs based on the function and role of the author (Caldas-Coulthard, 1994, pp. 305–306). The taxonomy of reporting verbs in fiction is: 1) speech-reporting verbs, including *neutral structuring*, *metapropositional*, and *metalingual verbs*. Neutral structuring verbs introduce the acts of speaking without evaluating or interpreting (i.e., say, tell, ask), and *metapropositional* verbs clarify the speaker's position or make the illocutionary explicit. Metapropositional verbs consist of assertive (i.e., explain), directive (i.e., urge), expressive (i.e., accuse), and *metalinguistic* (i.e., recount). 2) Descriptive verbs describe the speaker's manner and attitude. They consist of *prosodic* (i.e., yell) and *paralinguistic* (i.e., whisper). 3) Transcript verbs are *discourse-signalling* accompanying direct speech to indicate relationship to other parts of discourse (i.e., add, repeat, reiterate); therefore, they are not speech-reporting verbs. The present study uses Caldas-Coulthard's taxonomy of reporting verbs, which can be summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Reporting verbs taxonomy

Taxonomy	Sub-category	Examples
Speech-reporting verbs		
Neutral Structuring		say, tell, ask, enquire, reply, answer
Metapropositional	assertive	remark, explain, agree, assent, accept, correct, counter
	directives	urge, instruct, order
	expressive	accuse, grumble, lament, confess, complain,
Metalinguistic		Narrate, quote, recount
Descriptive verbs		
Prosodic		cry, intone, shout, yell, scream
Paralinguistic	voice qualifier (manner)	whisper, murmur, mutter
	voice qualification (attitude)	laugh, giggle, sign, gasp, groan
Transcript verbs		
Discourse signalling	relation to others	repeat, echo
	part of discourse	add, emend
	discourse progress	pause, go on, hesitate, continue

(Source: Caldas-Coulthard, 1994, p. 306)

Adopting the categorisation proposed by Caldas-Coulthard, Segundo (2017) explored the reporting verbs used as a stylistic device in constructing the characterisation of Ralph Nickleby in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839). This study has encouraged researchers to consider how translators preserve characterisation in translation from different literary traditions. Furthermore, discourse structure, pragmatic intention, stylistic voice, and reporting verbs play an important role in literary texts, where even minor lexical shifts can alter how characters are perceived by readers (Culpeper, 2014; Espunya, 2024). Thus, this leads to an analysis of how translators translate the reporting verbs.

A growing body of research has recently explored the translation of reporting verbs across languages. For instance, Mastropiero (2020) examined how translators mediate reporting verbs in Italian, while Nádvorníková (2020) analysed how lexical translators of French, English, and Czech literary fiction employed lexical variation. Similarly, researchers like Wang and Xin (2024) have highlighted how the word “say” translates into Chinese. However, these works mostly focused on translations involving European languages, and there remains limited research on the

translation of reporting verbs from English into Asian languages, particularly from a diachronic stylistics perspective. In fact, each language and culture may have a different form of reporting verb style (Sakita, 2002, p. 2).

Moreover, Leech and Short (2007) stress the importance of stylistics in fiction, especially regarding speech presentation. Reporting verbs can reflect personality, emotional state, or power relations. For example, “*shouted*” might denote urgency or authority, while “*murmured*” might imply silence. Translators often negotiate these meanings, which may alter character dynamics in translation (Mastropierro & Grabowski, 2024). Thus, the translation of reporting verbs should consider the functions of these verbs. A reporting verb may function to attribute reported speech to a speaker, gloss the quoted discourse, and provide interpretative value beyond the words uttered by the character (Mastropierro, 2020; Mastropierro & Grabowski, 2024).

CORPUS LINGUISTICS AND TRANSLATION

Since Baker's seminal work in 1993, the application of corpus linguistics in translation studies has grown significantly. It allows researchers to analyse, quantify, and compare linguistic features across translated and source texts (Laviosa, 2008; Williams, 2009). In particular, the use of parallel corpora comprising source texts and Target Texts provides empirical information about translation phenomena. McEnery and Xiao (2007) emphasise the role of parallel and comparable corpora in contrastive analysis, highlighting their use in identifying regularities and variations in translated texts. Corpus-based translation studies have enabled researchers to investigate patterns of language use empirically, moving beyond intuition to systematic observation (Laviosa, 2011, p. 13; Zhai & Xu, 2023).

Corpus tools facilitate the exploration of lexical frequency, variation, concordances, collocation, and translation shifts across large datasets. These tools help researchers to analyse the stylistic and linguistic behaviour of translators (Segundo, 2016a; Y. Sun & Liu, 2025). Scholars have increasingly applied corpus stylistics to literary translation, using quantitative methods to investigate subtle stylistic phenomena such as character voice, speech presentation, and translator intervention (Lanlan et al., 2025; Szczygłowska, 2024). However, most studies focus either on general translation universals or on single-language comparisons. This highlights the need for further research that integrates stylistic analysis with corpus methodology to explore how character and narrative voice are conveyed or transformed in translation (Gomez-Castejon, 2012).

Several studies have employed corpus-based approaches to analyse the frequency and function of reporting verbs in literary texts and their translation. M. Baker (2000), Williams (2009), and Laviosa (2014) advocated for the use of parallel corpora to track translation patterns and stylistic shifts systematically. Corpus stylistics has allowed scholars to move beyond syntactic complexity related to translation styles (Y. Sun & Liu, 2025). In recent years, Mastropierro and Grabowski (2024) statistically examined the avoidance of repetitive reporting verbs in translations from English into Italian and Polish.

Despite these advances, most researchers have applied corpus-based methods to single-period literary works (Mahlberg et al., 2019; Y. Sun & Liu, 2025). Only a few studies focus specifically on diachronic analysis (P. Baker, 2023; Hilpert, 2016; Rahim et al., 2021). However, these studies mainly focus on diachronic variation within the same language. Moreover, the application of corpus-based translation studies to genre-specific literature, such as detective novels, is still underexplored—especially in contrasting works from different periods or authors with distinct narrative voices. Detective novels are ideal for diachronic studies because they

feature past events with present investigation through a “double narrative” (Leitch, 2020). Diachronic corpus analysis will inform how the differences in literary stylistics are translated. Therefore, this study focuses on the comparison of the stylistic use of reporting verbs in the 19th and 21st centuries and the translation in the 21st century.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of the study, the sources of data were two influential detective novels in English from different centuries and their Indonesian translations in the 21st century. The first novel is *The Sign of Four* (later called TSF), featuring Sherlock Holmes, written by Arthur Conan Doyle (later called ACD), published in 1890, and its translation into Indonesian, *Empat Pemburu Harta* (later called EPH), translated by Daisy Dianasari and Sendra B. Tanuwidjaja, published by PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2015 (Doyle, 2015). The second novel is *The Da Vinci Code* (later called TDVC), written by Dan Brown (later called DB), published in 2003, and its Indonesian translation, *The Da Vinci Code* (TDVC-Id), translated by Isma B. Koeslamwardi, published by PT Serambi Ilmu Semesta in 2004 (Brown, 2004). These novels were selected because they represent different literary periods, authorial styles and narrative conventions, providing a diachronic contrast within the same genre. Both detective novels are internationally recognised and widely read and translated across generations (Worthington, 2005, p. 3), as is Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (Driscoll, 2022).

This study adopts a corpus-based comparative approach. This study focuses exclusively on speech reporting using bilingual parallel corpora structures. LF Aligner was used to align sentence pairs between the English novel and its Indonesian translation (Farkasandras, 2023). The aligned outputs were then converted into plain text (.txt) files in both English and Indonesian to construct bilingual parallel corpora. The corpus data consisted of aligned excerpts from each novel and its translation (Figure 1). The aligned files were then analysed using AntPConc version 1.2.1, released in 2017, to identify parallel translations of reporting verbs (Anthony, 2024). Corpus tools, AntConc and AntPConc, were employed to collect information on how reporting verbs were used across languages.

The comparative analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the English source texts were used as comparable corpora to analyse variations in the use of reporting verbs across authors and literary periods. Second, each English source text was compared with its Indonesian translation to investigate how reporting verbs were translated and shifted in the target texts.

Line	KWIC
1	"Perhaps you are right, Watson," he said.
2	"This is unworthy of you, Holmes," I said.
3	"Look at his long letters," he said.
4	"Major Sholto was a very particular friend of papa's," she said.
5	"It appears to be normal," I said.
6	"Do not fear, Sahib," he said.
7	"This is too bad of you, McMurdo!" he said.
8	"I cannot understand it," he said.
9	"The treasure is gone!" he said.
10	"I wish you particularly to notice these footmarks," he said.
11	"You have slept soundly," he said.
12	"It is for Mr. Thaddeus Sholto that I am anxious," she said.
Line	Reference
1	"Mungkin kau benar, Watson," katanya.
2	"Kau benarbenar kurang ajar, Holmes," kataku.
3	"Lihat hurufhurufnya yang panjang," katanya.
4	"Mayor Sholto teman baik Papa," katanya.
5	"Tampaknya normal," kataku.
6	"Jangan takut, Sahib," katanya. "tak perlu ada yang tahu bahwa Anda sudah membunuhnya.
7	"Sayang sekali, McMurdo!" katanya.
8	"Aku tidak mengerti," katanya.
9	"Hartanya hilang!" katanya.
10	"Tolong perhatikan jejakjejak ini dengan lebih teliti," katanya.
11	"Kau tidur nyenyak sekali," katanya.
12	"Aku justru mengkhawatirkan Mr. Thaddeus Sholto," katanya.

FIGURE 1. The result of AntPConc of pairing the reporting verb "said"

The analysis focuses on the identification, classification, and frequency distribution of reporting verbs. Reporting verbs were categorised according to Caldas-Coulthard's reporting verb taxonomy (Caldas-Coulthard, 1994). The corpus tools AntConc and AntPConc were used to extract concordance lines, generate frequency lists, and perform side-by-side comparison between English and Indonesian segments. This enabled the tracking of consistent or varied translation patterns of reporting verbs. Systematic comparisons were conducted for both intra-lingual variation (between the two English texts) of two detective novels and inter-lingual translation shifts in the target language. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted on how reporting verbs function as stylistic devices and how their translation affects tone, characterisation, and pacing in detective fiction across different eras.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the reporting verbs of two detective/thriller English novels from different centuries and their translation into Indonesian in the 21st century. In this section, the reporting verbs between the two novels - TSF by ACD and TDVC by DB - from different eras will be compared, along with their translation into Indonesian. Firstly, the information about the corpus data in the source texts (ST) was compared based on Type-Token Ratio (TTR) and Standardised Type-Token Ratio (STTR), as shown in Table 2, as well as the TTR and STTR of the target texts (TT) –EPH and TDVC-Id (Table 3). Then, the comparison of reporting verbs in the source language is made among different eras. Finally, the comparison of reporting verbs in the target language and source language for both novels is presented.

Table 2 and Table 3 show the corpus information for both novels in the source and target languages, respectively. Table 2 shows that TSF has a higher TTR, which may indicate higher lexical diversity compared to Brown's novel. However, the 19th-century novel is shorter as it only has 43,770 words total (tokens). Meanwhile, TDVC featuring Robert Langdon and Sophie Neveu

is three times longer, with 142,530 tokens. Similarly, the corpus of the translation in Indonesian, as the TT shown in Table 2, also indicates that the translation texts keep the ratio of ST and TT.

TABLE 2. Corpus Information of Source Text Novels

No	ST Novel	Publication	Author	Type	Token	TTR	STTR
1	<i>The Sign of Four (1890)</i>	19th-century	Arthur Conan Doyle	5,376	43,770	12.28	21.68
2	<i>The Da Vinci Code (2003)</i>	21st-century	Dan Brown	11,120	142,530	7.80	24.40

TABLE 3. Corpus Information of Target Text Novels

No	TT Novel Title	Publication	Translator	Type	Token	TTR	STTR
1	<i>Empat Pemburu (2015)</i>	21st-century	Daisy	5,094	34,973	14.57	24.44
2	<i>The Da Vinci Code (2004)</i>	21st-century	Isma Koesalamwardi	10,740	129,399	8.30	24.30

Table 3 shows that the translation texts of the two novels also show a similar ratio between type and token (TTR). The TTR of the translation of Doyle's novel reaches 14.57, which is higher than the source text. It may indicate that the translation has a higher lexical density than the source text. Similarly, the translation of Brown's novel also has a higher TTR, which reached 8.30 compared to the source text.

Since the 19th- and 21st-century novels have different numbers of tokens, the Standardised Type-Token Ratio (STTR) gives a better comparison by dividing the corpus per 1,000 or 10,000 words (see M. Baker, 2000, for details). The comparison of STTR across the corpus shows that the 21st century has higher language diversity, reaching 24.40% compared to 21.68% in the 19th-century novel. However, both translation novels released in the 21st century indicate similarity in lexical diversity; the STTR of the translation of Doyle's novel is 24.44%, slightly higher than the translation of Brown's novel, 24.30%. It means the translator of Doyle's novel makes more language variation in the target language, while the translator of TDVC is relatively faithful to the source language.

COMPARISON OF REPORTING VERBS IN SOURCE LANGUAGE TEXTS

In this section, the quantitative data of reporting verbs in the source texts of TSF and TDVC were compared to see the frequency and stylistic preferences related to the type of word used as reporting verbs. Table 4 shows the type and frequency of reporting verbs in ST novels that were used as direct quotations. In total, there were 45 types of reporting verbs found in these two novels that were categorised into three taxonomies and six sub-categories based on Caldas-Coulthard (1994). These categories not only differentiate the grammatical roles of reporting verbs but also highlight their function in shaping characterisation, interpersonal dynamics, and narrative tone. The classification and comparison of the reporting verbs in these two novels can be seen in Table 3.

TABLE 4. Category of Reporting Verbs in the Source Language novels (ST)

No.	Taxonomy of Reporting Verbs	Type	<i>The Sign of Four</i> (TSF)		<i>The Da Vinci Code</i> (TDVC)		
			Freq	%	Freq	%	
1	Neutral	said	216	59.83	459	54.64	
2		told	0	0.00	17	2.02	
3		asked	24	6.65	73	8.69	
4		answered	41	11.36	8	0.95	
5		replied	1	0.28	31	3.69	
6		inquired	0	0.00	1	0.12	
7	Metapropositional: Assertive	remarked	17	4.71	0	0.00	
8		exclaimed	7	1.94	9	1.07	
9		explained	4	1.11	9	1.07	
10		argued	0	0.00	5	0.60	
11		corrected	0	0.00	3	0.36	
12		insisted	0	0.00	3	0.36	
13		clarified	0	0.00	2	0.24	
14		admitted	0	0.00	1	0.12	
15		observed	2	0.55	0	0.00	
16		hazarded	1	0.28	0	0.00	
17	Metapropositional: Directive	demanded	0	0.00	32	3.81	
18		commanded	0	0.00	7	0.83	
19		urged	0	0.00	4	0.48	
20		ordered	0	0.00	3	0.36	
21		suggested	2	0.55	0	0.00	
22	Metapropositional: Expressive	grumbled	0	0.00	8	0.95	
23		growled	1	0.28	0	0.00	
24	Prosodic	snapped	1	0.28	7	0.83	
25		cried	22	6.09	6	0.71	
26		stammered	1	0.28	6	0.71	
27		yelled	4	1.11	5	0.60	
28		shouted	2	0.55	4	0.48	
29		called	0	0.00	23	2.74	
30		fired	0	0.00	5	0.60	
31		bellowed	0	0.00	2	0.24	
32		ejaculated	2	0.55	0	0.00	
33		interjected	0	0.00	1	0.12	
34	Paralinguistic	whispered	3	0.83	58	6.90	
35		sighed	0	0.00	24	2.86	
36		muttered	1	0.28	1	0.12	
37		gasped	1	0.28	4	0.48	
38		sobbed	0	0.00	1	0.12	
39		hesitated	0	0.00	1	0.12	
40		tittered	0	0.00	1	0.12	
42		wheezed	1	0.28	0	0.00	
43		Discourse Signalling	repeated	4	1.11	3	0.36
44			added	2	0.55	11	1.31
41	intruded		0	0.00	1	0.12	
45	reiterated		1	0.28	1	0.12	
Total			361	100.00	840	100.00	

Table 4 shows that ACD used only 24 types with 361 tokens of reporting verbs. In contrast, DB used 39 types with 840 tokens of reporting verbs. The neutral verbs, such as “said,” “told,” and the structuring verbs “replied” and “answered,” appear as the most frequently used in both novels. These verbs function primarily to introduce speech without adding evaluative meaning, allowing readers to focus on the dialogue itself. This category achieves the highest frequency, at 78.12% in TSF and 70.12% in TDVC. This high frequency reflects a narrative convention in English fiction, as these verbs indicate less authorial interference in describing characters’

emotions explicitly as they speak. The word “said” dominates reporting verbs in both novels, comprising 59.83% in TSF and 54.58% in TDVC. Then, “asked” and “answered” have the second position; however, they have different distributions. Moreover, Doyle’s narrative exhibits a greater frequency of “answered” (11.36%), reflecting a more formal, structured turn-taking pattern characteristic of 19th-century dialogue. Brown, on the other hand, tends to use “asked” (8.68%) and “replied” (3.69%), indicating a slightly more dynamic and interrogative mode of interaction in his thriller narrative.

The second group is metapositional verbs, which reveal the propositional content or the speaker’s stance or illocutionary act explicitly. This category shows significant stylistic contrasts between Doyle and Brown. Doyle used a limited range of assertive (8.59%), directive (0.55%), and expressive verbs (0.28%), with a total of 9.42%. In contrast, Brown’s novel displays more variation in the use of metapositional assertive (3.81%), directive (5.48%), and expressive verbs (0.95%), with a total of 10.74%. Metapositional directive verbs—such as demanded, commanded, ordered, and urged—reflect characters exerting control, urgency, or authority. These verbs are absent in TSF. Brown’s characters in TDVC are more frequently placed in tense or high-stakes interactions where power relations must be explicitly marked.

Then the third category is descriptive verbs, particularly those that capture the prosodic and paralinguistic dimensions of speech. The difference in style of the authors becomes more apparent. Doyle used expressive prosodic verbs (8.86%), such as “shouted”, “yelled”, and “ejaculated”. Interestingly, verbs like “ejaculated” and “hazarded” reflect the idiosyncratic language of Victorian fiction, which were used uniquely in TSF. Brown, on the other hand, used modern, dynamic verbs, such as “commanded”, “fired”, “argued”, and “interjected”, which were never used by ACD in the 19th century. Brown also exhibits a greater variety of paralinguistic verbs (10.71%), including “whispered”, “sighed”, and “gasped”, which indicate a more cinematic and emotionally intimate narrative. Overall, ACD used 10.52% descriptive verbs, while DB used 17.74% with more variation. The last taxonomy is discourse-signalling verbs, which indicate a relation in the discourse. The use of these verbs is quite similar: 1.94% in TSF and 1.90% in the TDVC novel. The choices reflect that DB applied fast, suspense, and clarity as characteristics of contemporary thrillers. Interestingly, reporting verbs like “answered”, “cried”, and “remarked”—frequently used in TSF—are significantly reduced or nearly absent in TDVC. Then, the remaining distribution of reporting verbs reveals meaningful contrasts between ACD and DB as authorial style.

There is an interesting finding related to the structure of the 19th-century grammatical style. ACD used an inverted reporting structure, with verbs followed by a pronoun as the subject. This structure usually appears after a direct quotation, which is not found in the present novel (see Figure 2).

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
skin just above the ear. "It looks like a thorn,"	said I. "	It is a thorn. You may pick it
d, well-defined muddy discs. "This is not a footmark,"	said I. "	It is something much more valuable to us.
e detective force of London." "I shall bring him, then,"	said I. "	It is one now. I ought to be
d could not get away." "But that is mere speculation,"	said I. "	It is more than that. It is the
had been. "This is all an insoluble mystery to me,"	said I. "	It grows darker instead of clearer." "On the
nds well. He has evidently picked up the scent again,"	said I. "	Ah, then he has been at fault too,"
in the hands of your eldest brother." "Right, so far,"	said I. "	Anything else?" "He was a man of untidy
one out it's just what I have come for,"	said I. "	Go on!" yelled the voice. "So help me
this too palpable clue." "There is credit, and to spare,"	said I. "	I assure you, Holmes, that I marvel at
ordecai Smith, and so been led to their hiding-place,"	said I. "	In that case I should have wasted my

FIGURE 2. The use of reporting verbs followed by the subject in TSF

Among 216 uses of “said” as a direct reporting verb, instead of ‘subject pronoun + said’, there are 36 times “said I” and 47 times “said he” used by ACD. DB just used “subject” + “said” following direct quotation.

COMPARISON OF REPORTING VERBS TRANSLATION IN TARGET TEXTS

In the first section, both novels indicate different authorial styles of reporting verbs between the 19th and 21st centuries. The question is: how do the translators treat these differences? This section presents a comparative analysis of reporting verb taxonomy between two English-language detective novels and their Indonesian translations (EPH and TDVC-Id). The comparison between source and target texts can be seen in Table 5.

TABLE 5. The Comparison of Reporting Verbs in the Source Language and Target Language Novels

No	Reporting Verb Taxonomy	Source Text		Target Text	
		TSF	TDVC	EPH	TDVC-Id
1	Neutral Structuring	78.12	70.12	83.93	70.36
2	Metapositional	9.42	10.74	9.42	10.71
	Assertive	8.59	3.81	9.42	8.21
	Directive	0.55	5.48	0.00	1.90
	Expressive	0.28	0.95	0.00	0.60
3	Descriptive Verb	10.52	17.74	4.99	14.17
	Prosodic	8.86	7.02	3.32	3.33
	Paralinguistic	1.66	10.71	1.66	10.83
4	Discourse Signalling	1.94	1.90	1.39	2.50
	Deleted	-	-	0.28	2.26
Total Percentage		100	100.00	100	100

Table 5 shows that the most frequent category in all texts (source and target texts) is neutral structuring verbs. In the source texts, TSF contains 78.12% and TDVC 70.12% of these verbs. Interestingly, the proportion rises in the EPH, with TSF reaching 83.93% in Indonesian, indicating a tendency toward neutralisation in Indonesian. The translators prefer to use Indonesian general

verbs like “kata” (Back Translation/BT: ‘said’) and “menjawab” (‘answered’), even in translating expressive verbs. However, this trend is less applied in the TDVC-Id translation, which retains a similar level (70.36%) to its source.

For details, the word “said” in TDVC is translated into various reporting verbs in Indonesian, as displayed in Figure 3.

No	Source	Text: TDVC	No	Target Text: TDVC
2	"Pain is good, monsieur," the man	said.	2	"Rasa sakit itu baik, Monsieur," ujar si lelaki besar.
3	"Monsieur Langdon?" a man's voice	said.	3	"Monsieur Langdon?" kata suara seorang lelaki.
12	"Yes?" Fache	said.	12	"Ya?" tanya Fache.
30	"PHI?" everyone	said.	30	"PHI?" semua berkata.
35	"Hey, Mr. Langford," a muscle-bound man	said.	35	"Hei, Pak Langford," seorang berotot bertanya.
51	"Bonsoir," he	said.	51	"Bonsoir," dia menyapa selamat malam.
74	"Right," Teabing	said.	74	"Benar," sahut Teabing.
76	"Of course," she	said.	76	"Tentu saja."
86	"Heavens!" Teabing	said.	86	"Ya Tuhan!" seru Teabing.
152	"No good," Gettum	said.	152	"Tidak bagus" jawab Gettum.
165	"And your sister," Langdon	said.	165	"Kakak perempuanmu." Lanjut Langdon.
166	"You slipped out quietly," a voice behind him	said.	166	"Kau diam-diam keluar," suara di belakangnya terdengar.
417	"The chalice," he	said, "resembles a cup or vessel, and more important, it resembles the shape of a woman's womb."	417	"Chalice" sambung Langdon, "mirip dengan cawan atau bejana, dan lebih penting, itu menyerupai bentuk rahim perempuan."
480	"And with it," Langdon	said, "the location of the Holy Grail."	480	"Dan, bersama itu juga," tambah Langdon, "lokasi Holy Grail."

FIGURE 3. The result of pairing the reporting verb "said" in TDVC by DB (2003) & TDVC (translated 2004)

Figure 3 displays that the word "said", as a neutral structuring reporting verb, was translated into *ujar* ‘uttered’, *kata* ‘said’, and modulated into metapropositions, such as *menyapa* ‘greeted’ and *seru* ‘called’. The verb said is also modulated into discourse signalling, such as *lanjut* ‘continued’ and *sambung* ‘added’. This modulation happened in both texts, TSF and TDVC. Besides, the translator also made it explicit in line no. 12 that “said” is modulated into *tanya* ‘asked’ because it has a question tone.

Then, there are different phenomena in the translation of metapropositional reporting verbs. The translator of TSF only translated them into assertive, which slightly increases from 8.59% to 9.42% in the EPH translation (see Table 5). This shows that the translator has generally retained factual or explanatory reporting. However, directive and expressive verbs from TSF were absent in the Indonesian version, reduced to 0.00%. This suggests a stylistic flattening, where speaker authority or emotional expression is softened or modulated into a neutral structuring reporting verb in the target language (see Figure 4). The word "suggested" is modulated into the *kata* ‘said’ in Indonesian, which belongs to a neutral reporting verb.

1	"Perhaps they stood here for some time," I	suggested.	"Mungkin mereka berdiri di sini selama beberapa saat," kataku.
2	"Someone calls him a soul concealed in an animal," I	suggested.	"Ada yang mengatakan mereka jiwa yang terkurung dalam tubuh hewan," kataku.

FIGURE 4. The result of pairing the reporting verb "suggested" in TSF by ACD (1890) & EPH (translated 2015)

Similarly, the number of assertive verbs rises from 3.81% to 8.21% in the TDVC-Id. On the other hand, directive verbs decrease from 5.48% to 1.90%, and expressive verbs decrease from 0.95% to 0.60%. The decrease in directive verbs indicates that some of these directive reporting verbs are modulated. For instance, the word “demanded” is mostly translated into *tanya* ‘asked’,

which belongs to a structuring verb (see Figure 5). However, some of these words are also translated into *meminta* 'requested', a synonym of demanded and *menyuruh/perintah* 'commanded', which still belong to metapropositional.

	Source Text (English)		Target Language (Indonesian)
1	"But . . . why?" Langdon	demanded.	1 "Tetapi . . . mengapa?" tanya Langdon.
2	"Why would I run!" Langdon	demanded.	2 "Mengapa saya harus lari!" tanya Langdon.
3	"Descendez," Sophie	demanded.	3 "Descendez," Sophie menyuruh pengemudi itu untuk turun.
4	"What's happening?" the manager	demanded.	4 "Ada apa?" tanya manajer itu.
5	Do we have a search warrant yet?" Collet	demanded.	5 "Kita sudah dapat surat penggeledahan?" tanya Collet.
6	What? Teabing	demanded.	6 Collet.
7	"What's wrong?" Sophie	demanded.	7 "Apa?" tanya Teabing.
13	"Open the safe," Fache	demanded.	13 "Ada apa?" usut Sophie.
14	"Set it down," Silas	demanded.	14 "Buka lemari itu." Fache meminta .
15	"Let him go," Langdon	demanded.	15 "Letakkan di bawah," perintah Silas.
16			16 "Lepaskan dia," pinta Langdon.

FIGURE 5. The result of pairing the reporting verb "demanded" in TDVC by DB (2003) & TDVC (translated 2004)

Figure 5 shows that the translator modulated the metapropositional verbs that reflected the speaker's attitude and intention, explicitly changing a structural reporting verb into *tanya* 'asked'. However, in lines 3, 14, 15, and 16, the translator kept the translation as directive reporting verbs.

Moreover, the translation of descriptive verbs that describe how the characters' mood, voice, and body language are conveyed in the utterance. Descriptive verbs—especially prosodic (e.g., cried, shouted) and paralinguistic (e.g., whispered, sighed, gasped)—play a key role in indicating speaker mood, volume, and emotion. In the source texts, both TSF and TDVC use these verbs meaningfully: TSF has 8.86% prosodic and 1.66% paralinguistic, while TDVC has 7.02% and 10.71%, respectively. In the translations, a divergence emerges. In EPH, prosodic verbs drop to 3.32%, and paralinguistic verbs remain at 1.66%. This suggests a reduction in auditory and affective cues, potentially leading to flatter character voices because these reporting verbs were modulated into a metapropositional taxonomy, which shows the illocutionary force of the utterance explicitly. Notably, the verbs like "ejaculated" and "hazarded" used by ACD reflect the richness that presents challenges in translation due to shifts in modern usage and acceptability. These words are translated into *sembur* 'blurted' (see Figure 6). On the other hand, the TDVC-Id translation preserves the paralinguistic texture, with prosodic verbs at 3.33% and paralinguistic verbs at a near-equivalent 10.83%. This preservation may reflect greater attention to the cinematic and psychological realism in Brown's novel, supporting readers' visualisation of the scene.

KWIC
"Simple!" I ejaculated.
"Thank God!" I ejaculated from my very heart.
Reference
"Sederhana!" semburku.
"Terima kasih, Tuhan," semburku dengan setulus hati.

FIGURE 6. The result of pairing the reporting verb "ejaculated" in TSF by DB (1890) & EPH (translated 2015)

The translation of Discourse-signalling verbs—like continued, added, reiterated—is relatively stable across all versions (around 1.3–2.5%). Interestingly, Table 5 indicates an increase in discourse signalling, as some reporting verbs were modulated into discourse signals. Therefore, the number of discourse signalling verbs tends to increase in TDVC-Id since there is some modulation.

Last but not least, the omission of certain reporting verbs for approximately 2.26% of the total (19 instances) from TDVC. These include neutral structuring verbs such as said (9 instances), asked (3), and replied (1); a directive verb (commanded); as well as descriptive verbs, including “stammered”, “called”, “sighed”, and “fired” (2 instances). The omission of these verbs in the Indonesian translation accelerates the pace of dialogue and creates a sense of immediacy and dramatic intensity in the narrative style of modern thrillers. In contrast, this strategy is only applied to a single reporting verb, “asked,” in EPH. It indicates that the translator maintains the style of the ST.

TABLE 6. The Comparison of Reporting Verbs Taxonomy in the Source Language and Target Language of TSF

No.	Reporting Verb Taxonomy	Freq. ST	Target Language (TT)								Total TT
			Neutral	Metapositional			Descriptive		Disc. Sig	Del	
				Assert	Direc	Expr	Prosod	Par			
1	Neutral Structuring	282	278	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	282
2	Metapositional										
	Assertive	31	19	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	31
	Directive	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Expressive	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
3	Descriptive Verb										
	Prosodic	32	1	20	0	0	11	0	0	0	32
	Paralinguistic	6	1	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	6
4	Discourse Signalling	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	7
	Total	361	303	34	0	0	12	6	5	1	361

Remark: ST: Source Text

TABLE 7. The Comparison of Reporting Verbs Taxonomy in the Source Language and Target Language of TDVC

No.	Reporting Verb Taxonomy	Freq. ST	Target Language (TT)								total TT
			Neutral	Metapositional			Descriptive		Disc. Sig	Del	
				Assert	Direc	Expr	Prosod	Par			
1	Neutral Structuring	589	563	7	0	0	0	0	6	13	589
2	Metapositional										
	Assertive	32	0	32	0	0	0	0	0	0	32
	Directive	46	27	2	16	0	0	0	0	1	46
	Expressive	8	0	0	0	5	0	3	0	0	8
3	Descriptive Verb										
	Prosodic	59	0	27	0	0	28	0	0	4	59
	Paralinguistic	90	0	1	0	0	0	88	0	1	90
4	Discourse Signalling	16	1	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	16
		840	591	69	16	5	28	91	21	19	840

Tables 6 and 7 indicate that both Indonesian translations tend to neutralise the reporting verbs. This can be seen from the increase in neutral structure type and the reduction in the number of other types of reporting verbs in the target texts. For instance, the words “cried and shouted, are translated into *kata* ‘said’ or *menjawab* ‘answered’ (see Table 8). Translations of TDVC generally maintain verb simplicity, aligning with Brown’s original tone, but the emotion was occasionally intensified (e.g., snapped translated as *membentak*).

TABLE 8. The Comparison of Reporting Verbs Taxonomy in the Source Language and Target Language of TSF

Type of Reporting Verbs	Translation of the Reporting Verb in Target Language			
ST	TT EPH		TT TDVC	
Neutral Structuring				
said	<i>kata</i> ‘said’ <i>bunyi</i> ‘sounded’ <i>tanya</i> ‘asked’ <i>jawab</i> ‘answered’	<i>seru</i> ‘exclaimed’ <i>menurut</i> ‘complied’ <i>bisik</i> ‘whispered’	<i>kata</i> ‘said’ <i>berkata</i> ‘said’ <i>tanya</i> ‘asked’ <i>bertanya</i> ‘asked’ <i>jawab</i> ‘answered’ <i>sahut</i> ‘replied’ <i>ujar</i> ‘uttered’	<i>terdengar</i> ‘sounded’ <i>seru</i> ‘called’ <i>menyapa</i> ‘greeted’ <i>tambah</i> ‘added’ <i>sambung</i> ‘continued’ <i>lanjut</i> ‘continued’
told			<i>kata</i> ‘said’ <i>berkata</i> ‘said’	<i>memberi tahu</i> ‘told’
asked	<i>tanya</i> ‘asked’		<i>tanya</i> ‘asked’ <i>bertanya</i> ‘asked’	<i>gugat</i> ‘demanded’
answered	<i>kata</i> ‘said’ <i>jawab</i> ‘answered’		<i>jawab</i> ‘answered’ <i>menjawab</i> ‘answered’	
replied	<i>jawab</i> ‘answered’		<i>kata</i> ‘said’ <i>jawab</i> ‘answered’	<i>menjawab</i> ‘answered’ <i>balas</i> ‘replied’
inquired			<i>tanya</i> ‘asked’	
metapositional				
remarked	<i>kata</i> ‘said’ <i>tulis</i> ‘written’	<i>komentar</i> ‘commented’		
exclaimed	<i>seru</i> ‘exclaimed’		<i>seru</i> ‘exclaimed’	
explained	<i>jelaskan</i> ‘explained’		<i>menjelaskan</i> ‘explained’	<i>jelas</i> ‘explained’
argued			<i>bantah</i> ‘argued’	<i>membantah</i> ‘argued’
corrected			<i>mengoreksi</i> ‘corrected’	<i>memperbaiki</i> ‘corrected’
insisted				
clarified			<i>menjelaskan</i> ‘explained’	
admitted			<i>mengaku</i> ‘admitted’	
observed	<i>kata</i> ‘said’			
hazarded	<i>kata</i> ‘said’			
demanded			<i>kata</i> ‘said’ <i>tanya</i> ‘asked’ <i>bertanya</i> ‘asked’ <i>usut</i> ‘investigated’	<i>perintah</i> ‘commanded’ <i>pinta</i> ‘requested’ <i>meminta</i> ‘requested’ <i>menyuruh</i> ‘commanded’
commanded			<i>perintah</i> ‘commanded’	<i>memerintah</i> ‘commanded’
urged			<i>kata</i> ‘said’ <i>membantah</i> ‘argue’	<i>desak</i> ‘urged’
ordered			<i>perintah</i> ‘commanded’	
suggested	<i>kata</i> ‘said’			
grumbled	<i>geram</i> ‘growled’		<i>menggerutu</i> ‘grumbled’ <i>gerutu</i> ‘grumbled’	<i>menggumamkan</i> ‘muttered’
growled	<i>sergah</i> ‘snapped’			
descriptive verb				
snapped			<i>bentak</i> ‘snapped’ <i>membentak</i> ‘snapped’ <i>sergah</i> ‘snapped’	
cried	<i>kata</i> ‘said’ <i>seru</i> ‘exclaimed’	<i>jerit</i> ‘cried’	<i>seru</i> ‘exclaimed’ <i>berseru</i> ‘exclaimed’	<i>berteriak</i> ‘shouted’
stammered	<i>tergagap</i> ‘stammered’		<i>bentak</i> ‘snapped’ <i>marah</i> ‘scolded’	<i>tergagap</i> ‘stammered’
yelled	<i>teriak</i> ‘shouted’	<i>berteriak</i> ‘shouted’	<i>bentak</i> ‘snapped’	<i>teriak</i> ‘shouted’
shouted	<i>teriak</i> ‘shouted’		<i>teriak</i> ‘shouted’	
called			<i>seru</i> ‘exclaimed’ <i>berseru</i> ‘exclaimed’	<i>memanggil</i> ‘called’ <i>panggil</i> ‘called’
fired			<i>seru</i> ‘exclaimed’	<i>berteriak</i> ‘shouted’

			<i>berseru</i> 'exclaimed'	
bellowed			<i>berseru</i> 'exclaimed'	<i>berteriak</i> 'bellowed'
ejaculated	<i>sembur</i> 'blurted'			
interjected			<i>menyela</i> 'interjected'	
whispered	<i>bisik</i> 'whispered'	<i>berbisik</i> 'whispered'	<i>bisik</i> 'whispered'	<i>berbisik</i> 'whispered'
sighed			<i>mendesah</i> 'sighed'	<i>desah</i> 'sighed'
muttered	<i>menggumamkan</i> 'muttered'		<i>menggumamkan</i> 'muttered'	
gasped			<i>seru</i> 'exclaimed'	<i>tersengal</i> 'panted'
sobbed			<i>terkesiap</i> 'gasped'	
hesitated			<i>terisak</i> 'sobbed'	
tittered			<i>ragu-ragu</i> 'hesitated'	
wheezed	<i>kata</i> 'said'		<i>terkikik</i> 'tittered'	
discourse signal				
repeated	<i>kata</i> 'said'	<i>ulang</i> 'repeated'	<i>mengulang</i> 'repeated'	
added	<i>tambah</i> 'added'		<i>tambah</i> 'added'	<i>menambahkan</i> 'added'
intruded			<i>terdengar</i> 'sounded'	
reiterated	<i>tanya</i> 'asked'		<i>mengulang</i> 'repeated'	

DISCUSSION

The findings show the translation of reporting verbs is not only shaped by lexical transfer but also by broader stylistic and narrative negotiations. Across both ST and TT, neutral reporting verbs dominate, suggesting that authors and translators prioritise the clarity and directness of narrative flow. This supports Caldas-Coulthard's (1994) view of it as a "default narrative strategy" in literary texts, where neutral reporting verbs are used to organise dialogue with minimal authorial intrusion (Nádvorníková, 2020). However, the increased use of neutral reporting verbs in Indonesian translation also indicates a tendency toward stylistic normalisation, which may affect characterisation since they have less stylistically loaded forms. It implies that the translators prioritise fluency and readability over stylistic variation. This shift is called "domestication" by Munday (2012).

At the same time, the findings support Mastropierro and Grabowski (2024) that translators tend to avoid repetition by varying the translation of neutral verbs in the target language. As a result, some neutral reporting verbs are translated into other types. This suggests that translators try to negotiate between two stylistic pressures to clarify interpersonal relations or reinforce clarity of dialogue. The slight increase in assertive verbs in the Indonesian translations indicates that translators may strengthen interpersonal explicitness. Similarly, Mastropierro (2020) noted that translators overuse assertive reporting verbs in Italian translations.

The diachronic comparison reveals that changes in reporting verbs are closely related to stylistic differences between authors, but also to shifting translational norms across literary periods. These findings confirm that reporting verbs shape narrative voice, characterisation, and interpersonal stance in both source and target texts (Caldas-Coulthard, 1994; Mastropierro & Grabowski, 2024; Urzha, 2018). Moreover, they suggest that reporting verbs function as micro-stylistic markers where translators actively negotiate between fidelity, readability, and genre conventions.

The changes in characterisation can be seen in the translation of metapropositional verbs. The TDVC source text uses more directive verbs compared to TSF, a reflection of the action-oriented, fast-paced narrative style characteristic of modern thrillers. These are reduced in both translations. This supports the observation by Laviosa (1998) that translated texts may show a “levelling out” effect, where expressive richness in the source is neutralised in the target text. However, neutralisation of directive reporting verbs may weaken power relations and character dynamics, indicating that translators often prioritise narrative fluency over interpersonal precision.

The treatment of descriptive reporting verbs provides deeper insight into how translators mediate literary style across periods. In TSF, the reduction of prosodic verbs results in a loss of affective nuance. The style of 19th-century fiction is reflected in the use of "ejaculated" and "hazarded" by ACD. It shows similar findings to Segundo (2016b) on Victorian stylistics. In contrast, the Indonesian translation tends to normalise toward contemporary readability. Moreover, TDVC shows an opposite pattern for paralinguistic verbs; the increase in the translation could reflect the translator's attempt to preserve suspense and emotional immediacy. Similarly, Mastropierro (2020) found that the increase in descriptive verbs may affect readers' perception of emotions and character relationships in translated texts. These findings also pointed out that these novels come from different literary conventions.

Another important pattern is related to the deletion of reporting verbs, which may affect the stylistic choice that accelerates dialogue and creates immediacy in literary works. As discussed by House (2015), the omission may contribute to a more dynamic target text. The translation of TDVC-Id maintains the style of modern literary works in the translations, which prioritise pace and dramatic impact. In contrast, this strategy is only minimally applied in the translation of TSF. By contrast, the translator of EPH maintains more structurally complete dialogue forms, preserving the formal narrative and structured prose style of 19th-century literature. This is also supported by the comparison of STTR; both the source and target languages of the ACD novel show higher STTR. As stated by Culpeper, the type-token ratio shows language diversity; the closer the TTR is to 100%, the richer the diversity (Culpeper, 2014, p. 188). Thus, translators should reduce the use of omission and modulation since both techniques may alter characterisation and stylistic function.

Overall, the study demonstrates that reporting verbs operate as micro-stylistic markers through which translators negotiate characterisation, readability, and historical narrative convention. This study confirms that the translation of reporting verbs is not a neutral process, but rather reflects broader linguistic, literary, and cultural norms. Translation variation, as stated by Mastropierro and Grabowski (2024), is implemented to avoid repeating the reporting verbs in the translation. The findings extend previous studies by showing that translation shifts in reporting verbs are shaped not only by language differences but also by diachronic literary norms. Consequently, the translation of reporting verbs should not be viewed as a purely lexical issue, but as part of a broader process of stylistic mediation that may reconstruct character voice and norms in modern translations for stylistic purposes. Therefore, the findings support Chesterman (2014) that Translation Universals are not uniform phenomena but operate differently to mediate conventions and stylistic features of the target language.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the evolving role of reporting verbs in detective fiction and their impact on narrative style in translation. The contrast between Doyle's stylistically rich and varied verbs and Brown's minimalist approach reflects broader shifts in literary style over a century. The analysis reveals that TSF relies on a broader and more expressive set of reporting verbs, contributing to a nuanced and emotionally rich narrative. On the other hand, TDVC, employing variation, maintains a tighter, more streamlined stylistic approach aligned with modern suspense fiction. Moreover, the Indonesian translations reveal contradictory approaches: translators of TSF tend to maintain the voice, while those working on TDVC are more aligned with the source tone. This research emphasises the need for translators' sensitivity to authorial voice and the stylistic function of reporting verbs in maintaining character in translated literature. It offers information on how such verbs are translated into Indonesian and what shifts occur when rendering characterisation and narrative voice across time, language, and literary tradition.

This study is limited to two novels and their Indonesian translation, which may not represent patterns across genres or language pairs. The focus is on frequency and functional categorisation without considering translator ideology, editorial intervention, or comparison among characters. In addition, the corpus size is relatively small, which may limit the transferability of the findings.

Implications for further research could expand the corpus to include more authors, genres, and translation directions to validate these patterns. Further research may also explore the impact of reporting verb translation on reader perception and characterisation, or integrate computational and statistical approaches for more robust generalisation.

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