

Cultural issues in translating Indonesian words into English in Perahu Kertas Novel

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Abstract

A novel is a literary work that frequently uses cultural items. Therefore, translating a novel requires specific strategies. This paper aims to investigate (1) aspects of translating cultural words in the Perahu Kertas novel and (2) the acceptability of the translated version of the cultural words. This descriptive qualitative research collected the data using a note-taking technique. The collected data were then analyzed using the textual comparison theory (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012). This study has revealed that aspects of translating cultural words in the novel are cultural equivalence, literal translation, expansion of meaning, omission elements, remaining, and transformation. These aspects have successfully presented the cultural items from SL into TL and effectively maintained cultural items in the SL by not translating the items in the TL.

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INTRODUCTION

A novel is a cultural product that uses a specific language (Schwarz & Liebl, 2013) to denote distinction from other literary works using another language (Abboud-Haggar, 2010). The story of a novel represents human real life and thus, it depicts human activities, behavior, and culture. Such a phenomenon triggers the writer to select a certain language that expresses the identity, condition, behavior, feeling, and culture (Rizka, 2020), in this case, are the authors and main characters. Moreover, the author's use of typical jargon or dialects and specific features of literary texts aims to arouse readers' emotions and entertain them when reading the plot (Jones & A, 2016; Katan, 2015). All of these elements are stick to the characters' life and are artistically marshaled. The jargon and dialects are probably

not found in any other dialects or languages because language is unique.

Language reflects cultural concepts of a society (Suyitno, 2017) in various linguistic elements, such as semantic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic, and semiotic levels (Abboud-Haggar, 2010; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014). These elements are found in a novel, and when they are well structured, the author can successfully provoke the readers' emotion when reading the novel. It is no wonder that the author will pick specific vocabulary to present a distinctive culture and denote the characters' emotions, feelings, social status, and cultural identity (Šabec, 2017). A language can be somewhat different from other languages in terms of grammatical, morphological, phonological, pragmatic, and lexical aspects; such a phenomenon creates linguistic variations that

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directly relate to social factors, culture, or geographical distance (Saad et al., 2021). Therefore, translating a novel from one language into another language is quite challenging because it requires various aspects, including cultural aspects as they tightly bounded the language used in a certain novel.

Many studies have explored culture-bound strategies as this topic is one of the pivotal aspects in creating a communicative translation. Translating cultural work from one language to another language is inherently problematic because of cultural differences. Therefore, (Houghton & Al-Asswad, 2014) propose several strategies employed to translate cultural words from Japanese to Arabic in an English Foreign Language class. The strategies can mediate cultural differences of the three languages and enable readers of the target language (TL) to achieve sense of the cultural work. Instead of focusing on lexical and grammatical correction, emphasizing information paraphrases, clarification, and confirmation will provide communicative translation, explicitness, and clarity of proposition without eliminating sense of the source language (SL). Moreover, this paper proposes cultural similarity and difference identification to reveal meaning distribution. This study is akin to a study by (Alireza, Sepora, & Mahadi, 2015) who believed that translator was cultural mediators who transmitted cultural differences between the SL and TL by employing several strategies.

Different types of literary work require different strategies to reveal cultural problems and create clarity in translation. (Honarvar & Rahimi, 2011) propose that deletion and reduction strategies cannot significantly fix cultural problems in humor translation. Instead, adaptation, compensation, and alliteration can fix cultural barrier of humor and maintain the sense of humor in the TL. Translating literary works will always be complex because they contain cultural elements required to be effectively translated (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012). They revealed that there were several strategies employed by Petru Comarnescu and Margareta Sterian to translate negations in a novel by Eugene O'Neill. They were omission

elements, literal translation, cultural equivalence, expansion of meaning, and transformation. These strategies could cope with translating negations from English to Romanian in which their different negations contained different syntactic, semantic, and the pragmatic levels.

Translating one language into another language requires different techniques to deal with different problems because translating a SL into the TL does not merely consider the meaning equivalency but also cultural values (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012). Cultural items can be translated using the textual comparison to result in translation appropriateness (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012). Textual comparison consists of five major aspects: omission of elements, literal translations, cultural equivalence, expansion of meaning, and transformation/creation (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012). Omission of elements refers to omitting some parts from the SL in the TL. This strategy is chosen if the available translation strategies cannot appropriately translate the SL in the TL. Literal translation is used when the SL and TL have precisely equal meaning and structure of two items. The next strategy is cultural equivalence that refers to translating a cultural word of SL to the cultural word of TL. This strategy helps readers portray the translated concept in with a familiar concept that she has without eliminating the essence of the SL. This is crucial because a foreign culture definitely has a concept that does not exist in the reader's culture. The following strategy is expansion of meaning by modifying the SL and adding additional words to render the meaning of the SL and make the translated version more understandable. Moreover, the modification and addition in the words, phrases, clauses, sentences, grammatical levels, and semantic levels is done when it is necessary to create more acceptable translation. The last strategy is transformation or localization. This strategy allows a translator to clarify a word by creating descriptive meaning or paraphrasing the word to avoid losing the essential meaning of the SL.

Many studies have explored culture bound strategies as this topic is one of the pivotal aspects

in creating a communicative translation. Translating cultural work from one language to another language is inherently problematic because of cultural differences. Therefore, (Houghton & Al-Asswad, 2014) investigated several strategies employed to translate cultural words from Japanese to Arabic in an English Foreign Language class; (Alireza et al., 2015) and (Gurtueva & Arslan, 2013) explored the roles of translators as cultural mediators who transmitted cultural differences between the SL and TL by employing several strategies; (Honarvar & Rahimi, 2011) proposed strategies of adaptation, compensation, and alliteration to fix cultural barriers of humor and maintain the sense of humor in the TL; (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012) examined several strategies employed by Petru Comarnescu and Margareta Sterian to cope with translating negations from English to Romanian in which their different negations contained different syntactic, semantic, and the pragmatic levels. To date, only two studies conducted translation analyses of Perahu Kertas novel by Dee Lestari translated by Tiffany Tsao under the Paper Boat. The first study by (Bonita, 2021) investigated wordplay in the novel and revealed four types of wordplays: phonology, lexical development, play-on-antonym, and punning repetition. The second study by (Prasinda, 2018) explored the equivalence and acceptability of translating the figurative language in the Paper Boat novel. The study discovered that the majority of the translated version of the figurative language is acceptable.

The previous studies indicate that the investigation of cultural items in the translation of the Perahu Kertas (Paper Boat) novel has not been conducted yet. The previous studies did not specifically investigate the cultural items employed in the translated version of the novel. The findings of this study are expected to provide rich-theoretical perspectives in the translation studies, particularly dealing with culturally bound translation. It can be derived that investigating cultural words in the translation of the Perahu Kertas novel is interestingly conducted. The major objective of this study was to (1) investigate aspects in translating cultural words in the Perahu Kertas

novel and (2) examine the acceptability of the translated version of the cultural words. To answer the formulations, this study employed the theory of textual comparison by (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012).

METHODS

This qualitative research explored strategies in translating cultural words in the Perahu Kertas novel and examined the acceptability of the translated version. The data sources of this research were Perahu Kertas novel by Dee Lestari and the Paper Boat novel, the translated version, by Tiffany Tsao. The data were collected using the note taking technique through several steps: (1) reading the original novel, (2) reading the translated version, and (3) classifying the data based on the textual comparison elements. The collected data were analyzed using the textual comparison theory by (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012). Finally, the research findings were presented in table and descriptive discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores aspects in translating the cultural words in the Perahu Kertas novel and examines the acceptability of the translated version of the cultural words.

Aspects in Translating Cultural Words in the Perahu Kertas Novel

This study has revealed 104 data of cultural aspects in Perahu Kertas novel classified into six aspects; five aspects agree with major aspects in translating cultural items (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012), while the other one is a new phenomenon occurring in the novel. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Aspects in Translating Cultural Items in Perahu Kertas Novel

Major Aspects	Frequency	Percentage
Cultural equivalence	50	48.07%
Literal translation	22	21.15%

Expansion of meaning	12	11.53%
Omission elements	7	6.73%
Remaining	7	6.73%
Transformation	6	5.76%
TOTAL	104	100%

Table 1 denotes that the most dominant aspect used in *Perahu Kertas* novel is cultural equivalence for 50 data (48.07%). The translator selects this aspect the most because *Perahu Kertas* contains a lot of words typically indicating Indonesian culture that is probably not found in English. Thus, the use of cultural items would allow readers understand the concept in the TL.

	SL	TL
(1)	“Santailah sedikit, Bu Noni . Legalisasi STTB ke sekolah aja gua belum sempat”	“ My dear Madam Noni , try to relax. I haven’t even sent the official copy of my high school transcript—”

Noni is very talkative to Kugy and assigns her many things to do immediately. Hearing such instructions, Kugy use the word *bu* to show a satire that Noni is like a lady boss who orders a lot of jobs. The word *bu* in the SL is used to address to a woman with a higher and respected social status, such as occupation (KBBI Daring, 2016). To bring the equivalent meaning in the target language, the translator uses the phrase *my dear Madam Noni*. The word *madam* is a formal and polite form to refer to an honored woman (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Moreover, the word *madam* is combined with the word *dear* to greet someone in a formal way. Thus, the translator tries to provide an equal meaning of *bu* in the SL into *dear madam* in the TL to indicate an honored lady who acts like a boss and assigns many things to someone. The use of the word *madam* indicates exaggerating meaning to highly honor Noni because she is a teenager who should not be addressed with the word *madam*. The choice of this word brings equal meaning from the word *Bu* in the SL.

Another example of cultural equivalence is presented in the following examples.

	SL	TL
(2)	“ Beli! Apa kabar?”	“Keenan! Brother! What’s up?”
(3)	Hidup Mas Itok! seru Eko.	Long live Mr. Itok! cried Eko.
(4)	... ujar Ibu Ayu berseri, adik ipar Pak Wayan sekaligus ibu kandung dari Agung.	... said Auntie Ayu , Agung’s mother and Uncle Wayan’s sister-in-law.”
(5)	“Mungkin ini saja yang sebaiknya kamu bawa, vent, ”	“Maybe you should bring these ones with you, child, ”

Examples (2)-(5) show that the addressees are translated based on the culture of English. The word *Beli* in data (2) is translated into *brother* in the target language. This cultural equivalence has successfully brought transferred the equal meaning between the SL and TL. The same case also occurs in data (4) which obviously translates the words *Ibu* and *Pak* into *Auntie* and *Uncle* in data. This translation is appropriate because addressing old lady and man in Indonesia can use the words *Ibu* and *Pak*. The word *vent* in data (5) also is simply translated into *child*, which brings equal meaning. The word *mas* in data (3) is derived from Javanese and could mean *brother* or indicate a young man. However, the translator prefers the *Mr.* to translate this word. It is assumed that *mas* in this context is more appropriately translated into *Mr.* to refer to a cinema staff.

The second-highest occurrence of major aspect in translating cultural items is the literal translation. This aspect aims to translate a term in a SL exactly the same as that in the TL (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012). The examples of this aspect are found in the following data.

(6)	“supaya jij bisa belajar di pesawat.”	“So you can study on the plane.”
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The word *jij* in data (6) is derived from a Dutch and refers to a pronoun *you*. Therefore, the word *jij* is literally translated into *you* in English to bring the same meaning.

Another type of aspect used in translating the novel is expansion of meaning. This phenomenon is denoted by the following data.

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| (7) | Dia yang mencarikan tempat kos bagi Kugy, menyiapkan jemputan... | It was Noni who had found Kugy a room in the same student boarding house where she was staying. It was Noni who had arranged to pick her up from the station. |
|-----|---|--|

Data (7) show that the phrase *menyiapkan jemputan* is translated into a complete sentence. The translator prefer using the aspect of expanding the meaning because it broadens the meaning from the SL to the TL (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012). The phrase *menyiapkan jemputan* can be literally translated into *preparing the pick-up*. However, the translator prefers expanding the meaning to bring clearer context from the SL.

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| (8) | Singkatnya, Noni adalah seksinya. | In short, Noni had designated herself as Kugy's personal assistant. |
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Another example of expanding the meaning is presented in data (8). The sentence *Noni adalah seksinya* can be literally translated into *Noni becomes busy*. However, the translator prefers putting more words to give additional meaning and clarify the context of the SL. Finally, it is expected the readers will understand what the speaker is saying.

This study has found that the aspect of omission is not frequently used by the translator to translate the book. In fact, this aspect is only used for 6.73%. This finding indicates that the translator avoids this type and prefers using other aforementioned aspects to bring equal and clear meaning.

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| (9) | Ada suara dewasa berceletuk pelan dari belakang, "Kak Kugy." Terdengar penekanan pada kata "Kak" . | "Koogster?" said their mother. She looked up from her book, eyebrow raised. "Also, it should be Kak Kugy." |
|-----|---|--|

Data (9) shows that the sentence *Terdengar penekanan pada kata "Kak"* is not translated into the TL. It is assumed that the translator does not consider this part is not important, and the meaning does not change though some part are deleted (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012).

Another aspect rarely used is the remaining. This aspect indicates that the translator does not change or translate from the SL to the TL.

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| (10) | " <i>Nee</i> , Keenan. Jangan bebani kopermu dengan buku. Biar Oma yang kirim semua bukumu ke Jakarta." | " Nee , Keenan," his oma said. "Don't weigh down your suitcase with books. When you get to Jakarta, I'll send it to you." |
|------|--|---|

Data (10) clearly denotes that the words *Nee* and *Oma* in the SL are not translated in the TL. The translator prefers using the original word in the SL to show that the character in the novel uses another language in the conversation.

This study has also found one aspect, namely remaining, which is not found in the theory of aspect in translating cultural items (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012). It is assumed that this aspect is employed by the translator to present cultural items from another culture, not only English. The examples of remaining aspect are as follows.

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| (11) | " Bruinebonen soep dan kaas brodje. Sesuai pesananmu. Oma kan niet ferget, vent. Oma selalu pegang janji." | " Bruinebonen soep and kaasbroodje. That's what you wanted, wasn't it? Oma vergeet dat niet, child—your oma doesn't forget. I always keep my promises." |
|------|---|--|

Another example of remaining is shown data (11). The words *Bruinebonen soep* and *kaas brodje* in the SL remain the same in the TL. It can be assumed that the translator does not translate the names of food because it is considered a proper name.

Moreover, the translator does not transform the word *oma* as presented by data (10) and (11). She prefers using the original word in the SL into

the TL. In fact, the translator could probably translate the word *oma* into grandmother. It is assumed that the translator considers using the word *oma* as it is an address for an elderly. However, this case does not occur to another case as presented in data (2)-(5).

The least used aspect in translating cultural items is transformation. This aspect aims to clarify a word by creating descriptive meaning or paraphrasing the word to avoid losing the essential meaning of the SL (Apostolatu & Apostolatu, 2012).

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| (12) | <p>“Hari gini... janur kuning udah nggak ngaruh! Sebelum BENDERA KUNING berdiri, kompetisi tetap terbuka! Haha!”</p> | <p>“Who cares about wedding vows these days? Before the death rites are read, anything is fair game!” The woman who said this laughed.</p> |
|------|--|---|

In Indonesia, the way to express laughter in a written form is by writing *haha*. This expression is commonly used on chats or social media status. However, the translator prefers using translate in a complete sentence for this expression by saying *The woman who said this laughed*. This part is used to clarify the meaning and the context of the whole story. Therefore, readers could get the intact meaning when the character speaks this sentence.

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| (13) | <p>“Nggak sopan, bener-bener nggak sopan! Gua cuma dianggap kuli dorong mobil...,” sambil menggerutu bangun. Kugy</p> | <p>“This is rude! Just plain rude,” Kugy grumbled as she got out of bed. “Who do you think I am? Treating me like some car-pushing coolie—”</p> |
|------|--|--|

Another example of transformation is presented in data (13). The writer clarifies the SL by adding a sentence *Who do you think I am?* in the TL. The sentence *Gua cuma dianggap kuli dorong mobil* is literally translated into *Treating me like some car-pushing coolie*. Adding another sentence in this context gives an emphasizing meaning that the character is feeling humiliated with the treatment received. It is assumed that the absence of the

sentence *Who do you think I am?* will result in less emphasizing meaning of being humiliated.

Acceptability of Translated Version of Cultural Words

Translating literary work is different from translating non-literary work because both of them use different language style (Katan, 2015). Therefore, translating literary work requires certain strategies to create equivalent results. The use of aspects in translating cultural words has successfully transformed the translated version.

First, the translator has successfully conceptualized the cultural items from Indonesian into English by considering the cultural custom. This is crucial because the translator should always consider the cultural needs of the TL; thus, the translation work will lead to effective language used with accepted culture (Ndhlovu & Botha, 2017).

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|------|---|---|
| (14) | <p>“Kapan mulai beres-beres, Gy? Buku-buku lu yang banyak banget itu dipaket aja ke Bandung, nggak usah bawa sendiri.”</p> | <p>“But when will you be done packing? And don’t bring your gajillion books with you.”</p> |
|------|---|---|

Data (11) denotes an example of transforming the culture of SL into the culture of TL by choosing the right word. In Indonesian, the phrase *banyak banget* indicates a big number of an item, and in this context, the phrase *banyak banget* indicates a huge number of an object. Thus, choosing the word *gajillion* will create the same meaning and sense of huge in number. The result will be different if the translator chooses the word very many or huge. Thus, readers get sense that the character, in this Noni, exaggerates thing she is talking about. This strategy has successfully resulted in equivalent meaning to maintain existing norms in the SL (Mukhamedov, 2020; Ndhlovu & Botha, 2017). This is pivotal because literary work can be enjoyed if it the whole meaning is preserved.

Second, the translator has successfully maintained cultural items in the SL by not translating the items in the TL. This strategy aims

to show that the characters are from different cultures and speak different languages.

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| (15) | “Ja, Oma” | “Ja, Oma,” |
|------|-----------|------------|

Keenan, the male main character in the novel, is a Dutch descent. In this scene he is talking to his grandmother who is a Dutch and lives there. To show this culture, the writer of the novel uses several Dutch words. The translator considers that maintaining this aspect will show the readers of the translated version that the characters are coming from another culture, namely Dutch.

Remaining the terms in SL also indicates the uniqueness of these concepts. Moreover, it is assumed that the translator could not find the equal word with equivalent meaning.

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| (16) | Warung nasi dengan dinding bambu itu tampak padat. | The bamboo-walled warung was packed to bursting. |
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The words *warung* in data (16) is not translated into another word. The translator could probably translate the word *warung* into food shop or small food stall. However, she prefers using the word because in Indonesia the word *warung* refers to a small food stall which sells food with cheap price and is mostly visited by low middle-low class. This scene narrates that Kugy, as a student who lives modestly, invites Keenan to have lunch. She chooses the *warung* where she usually eats in. Maintaining the word *warung* in the TL has successfully brought the original context of this scene.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed two major findings. First, there are six aspects in translating cultural words in *Perahu Kertas* the novel. They are cultural equivalence, literal translation, expansion of meaning, omission elements, remaining, and transformation; successively from the highest to the least used. Moreover, this study has found that the use of these aspects enables the translator to successfully conceptualize the cultural items from Indonesian into English by considering the cultural

custom and effectively maintain cultural items in the SL by not translating the items in the TL.

Due to limited time, this study only investigates aspects in translating cultural items in *Perahu Kertas* the novel. Therefore, further studies can investigate other literary works to gain wider and deeper understanding of the translation for cultural items. Furthermore, further studies can examine how the employed aspects in translating cultural words in the novel significantly helps readers understand the novel.

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