

Translation Procedures of Cultural Elements in the Poem *Takkan Hilang*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the translation procedures of cultural elements in the Malay poetry collection *Takkan Hilang* by Abdul Ghafar Ibrahim and its English translation by Harry Aveling. The main focus of the study is to identify the categories of cultural elements present in the source text and to analyse the translation procedures employed in transferring these cultural elements from Malay as the source language into English as the target language. This study is guided by the theoretical framework proposed by Peter Newmark (1988), particularly his categorisation of cultural elements and translation procedures. A qualitative approach is employed using text analysis of 61 poems in the source language and their corresponding 61 translated poems. The data are analysed systematically by identifying cultural elements based on the categories of ecology, material culture and artefacts, social culture, as well as organisations, customs, activities, and concepts. The findings indicate that *Takkan Hilang* is rich in Malay cultural elements and that various translation procedures are employed to preserve the meaning and cultural values of the source text. Among the procedures identified are cultural equivalence, functional equivalence, modulation, synonymy, couplet, literal translation, as well as reduction and expansion. In conclusion, the appropriate selection of translation procedures plays a crucial role in preserving cultural elements and ensuring that the poetic message can be effectively understood by target readers without compromising the originality of the source meaning.

Keywords: Cultural elements; translation procedures; Malay poetry, source language; target language

INTRODUCTION

Catford (1965) defines translation as a linguistic operation involving the process of replacing text from a source language with an equivalent text in a target language. Meanwhile, Puteri Roslina Abdul Wahid (2012) expands on this foundational concept by stating that translation is an intricate activity of interpreting a text and reproducing it contextually within the target language. The significance of this field has become increasingly dynamic due to the widespread need for translation across various modern disciplines. Today, the scope of translation is no longer limited to conventional written texts, but progressively extends to visual, technical, artistic, and cultural mediums.

As the domain expands, the act of transferring meaning becomes inherently intertwined with cultural nuances. In relation to this, Nida (1993) posits that translating cultural elements is far more challenging than translating the literal linguistic structures between the source language and the target language. This difficulty arises because language does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it is deeply embedded within the fabric of society. To understand this complexity, Taylor (1974) defines culture as a complex whole that encompasses everything done, thought, and created by humans as members of society. Meanwhile, Goodenough (1964) views culture as a totality of knowledge, where language serves as the primary representation of this knowledge within human cognition. Consequently, several aspects must be rigorously scrutinized when discussing the intersection of language and culture, particularly the symbiotic relationship between culture and linguistics in the context of source-to-target language transfer. This critical approach is vital to effectively fulfill the unique cultural demands and expectations of the target audience.

This intricate relationship between language, culture, and translation is vividly reflected in literary works, particularly poetry. *Sajak* (modern Malay poem) is a form of modern poetry that is free from any rigid structural rules in its formation, including stanzas, lines, diction, and rhythm. Historically, Za'aba (1965) defines *sajak* as a contemporary form of rhymed composition in the Malay language, marking a shift from traditional poetic constraints. Furthermore, *sajak* represents an aesthetically crafted form of language, where in every word within its stanzas epitomizes the author's intellectual wisdom and the preservation of cultural tradition. Furthermore, modern poetry serves as a significant platform for conveying critical messages or philosophical information to society. In relation to this, Umma (2018) asserts that the cultural elements contained within a *sajak* play a vital role as a dynamic medium for transmitting such profound information and societal values to the audience, making the translation of these poems a vital cross-cultural endeavor.

Peter Newmark (1988) explains that cultural elements can limit the translation process if a significant cultural gap exists between the source language and the target language. Therefore, the translation process must be conducted meticulously and deeply, given that not all cultural elements in the source language have exact equivalents within the culture of the target language. This need for meticulousness becomes even more critical in the translation of modern poetry that is rich with manifestations of Malay culture, ensuring that the same aesthetic and emotional impact is experienced by the target readers. A translator's failure to transfer the intended semantic impact not only compromises the quality of the text but also risks causing conceptual misunderstandings between the original author and the readers. It is this cross-cutting issue that drives the present study to analyze the translation procedures for cultural elements in the Malay poetry book *Takkan Hilang* and its translation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Nurul Asma Akmal Md Din, Awang Azman, and Awang Pawi (2020) examines the cultural equivalences in English used to translate Malay cultural elements, as well as analyzes the translation methods applied in the process of translating Malay proverbs into English. This study is guided by Newmark's (1988) categories of cultural elements to identify the cultural nuances present in the translation of these proverbs. The research approach utilizes a qualitative method, supported by a comparative method, to achieve the first and second research objectives. The findings demonstrate that Malay proverbs contain various significant cultural elements.

Research by Ahmad Jalaluddin Al-Islami et al. (2021) investigates the cultural elements of faunal ecology across both texts and analyzes the translation procedures implemented to render these specific ecological components. This study adopts Newmark's (1988) taxonomy for cultural categories, supplemented by Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model for ecological translation strategies. To gather research data, a qualitative methodology underpinned by content analysis was deployed. The empirical results reveal that applying a couplet (a combination of two procedures) to translate the flora and fauna ecology within the Quran serves as the most effective method. Consequently, this study highlights that judicious selection of translation procedures significantly enhances accuracy and reduces translational errors.

Nurhazlina Husin et al. (2024) conducted a study on students' practical texts, focusing on identifying social cultural elements within the source passages of *Amali Terjemahan 2* (Translation Practical 2) and analyzing the translation procedures used by students to translate the identified social cultural elements. Furthermore, this study utilizes Peter Newmark's (1988) framework for both the categories of cultural elements and the translation procedures applied. This research adopts a qualitative approach, analyzing the translation of social cultural elements in the students' practical translation work. Ultimately, the findings indicate that errors occurred in the translation of social cultural elements within the students' translations.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach, a research method that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon through data in the form of words, experiences, and observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of this study, the research materials are analysed to identify cultural elements and the translation procedures employed in the translation of modern poetry. The cultural elements identified in the source text are

classified according to Newmark's (1988) categories, namely ecology, material culture, social culture, social organisations, customs, activities and concepts, as well as gestures and habits. Subsequently, the cultural elements found in the translated text are analysed based on the translation procedures proposed by Newmark (1988), which comprise 18 different translation procedures.

For the purpose of data collection and analysis, this study employs a text analysis method. According to Mohd Shaffie (1991), text analysis is a method used by researchers to obtain relevant data and evidence for addressing the research questions. The corpus selected for this study is the poetry collection *Takkan Hilang* by Abdul Ghafar Ibrahim and its English translation by Harry Aveling. The analysis of both texts enables the researcher to examine the cultural elements embedded in the poems and to identify the translation procedures used in transferring these elements from Malay into English.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 43 cultural elements were identified in the poetry collection *Takkan Hilang* and analysed according to the translation procedures and cultural categories proposed by Newmark (1988). The findings indicate that the translator employed various translation procedures to transfer cultural elements from the source language to the target language, thereby preserving meaning and facilitating comprehension among target readers. However, not all 18 translation procedures suggested by Newmark (1988) were utilised in the translation of cultural elements. Instead, the translator selected only certain procedures deemed most appropriate to the context, function, and requirements of the poetic text. This selection demonstrates that the use of translation procedures is selective in nature and depends largely on the type of cultural element being translated.

The most frequently used translation procedure was literal translation, accounting for 15 instances, which included cultural elements related to ecology (7 instances), artefacts (4 instances), social culture (2 instances), and social organizations (2 instances). This represents 34% of the total data analysed. The predominance of this procedure indicates the translator's tendency to preserve both the form and meaning of the source text, particularly when the cultural elements have direct equivalents in the target language and do not create ambiguity in meaning.

Subsequently, the functional equivalent procedure accounted for 10 instances, representing 23% of the total data. This procedure was applied to cultural elements related to social culture (6 instances), ecology (2 instances), and artefacts (2 instances). The use of this procedure reflects the translator's effort to preserve the function and role of the source-language cultural elements, enabling them to be understood more clearly by target readers, particularly in cases where no direct cultural equivalent exists in the target language.

The procedures with the lowest percentages were couplets (5%) and synonymy (2%), which were applied only to social and artefact-related cultural elements. The use of the couplet procedure demonstrates the translator's strategy of combining two translation procedures simultaneously in order to preserve the cultural meaning of the source text while adapting it to the context of the target language. Meanwhile, the use of the synonymy procedure indicates that the availability of near-equivalent lexical items facilitates the translation process. This procedure is commonly employed when a single translation procedure is insufficient to convey the cultural meaning accurately.

Literal Translation

Procedure that translates a text from the source language into the target language while preserving its original structure and meaning. According to Newmark (1988), literal translation operates at all linguistic levels, whereby each word is translated individually and each sentence is translated as a whole. The use of this procedure ensures that the original cultural values are preserved while clarifying the meaning for the target readers.

Table 1 Example of Literal Translation

Source Language (SL)	Target Language (TL)	Cultural Element
Rukun islam ketiga (s9, b21)	<i>Third pillar of islam</i> (s9, b21)	Social Organisation

The literal translation procedure is applied to the phrase *rukun Islam ketiga*, which is translated as *the third pillar of Islam*. In this translation, each element of the source language is assigned a direct equivalent in the target language without requiring any structural or perspectival changes. The word *rukun* is rendered as *pillar*, *Islam* is retained as *Islam*, and *ketiga* is translated as *third*, thereby preserving both the denotative meaning and the semantic relationship between the two languages. Furthermore, this phrase does not require cultural adaptation because the concept of the *Pillars of Islam* is a religious notion that is universally understood by Muslim communities worldwide, including within English-language discourse. Therefore, the use of the literal translation procedure in translating this cultural element related to social organisation, concepts, and customs helps to avoid any risk of semantic distortion in the transfer of religious concepts.

Functional Equivalence

Functional equivalence is employed when the translation process involves a word or phrase that carries a specific cultural element in the source language but lacks a corresponding cultural equivalent in the target language. In such cases, the translator focuses on the function or role of the cultural element rather than its form or characteristics. This approach enables the preservation of the value, purpose, and essential information intended for the target readers, even when the original cultural form cannot be fully replicated.

Table 2 Example of Cultural Equivalence

Source Language (SL)	Target Language (TL)	Cultural Element
Manusia menjemur, menyidai dan menyangkut pakaian padanya (s20,b6)	<i>People Wash and dry their clothes hang them on coat hangers</i> (s20,b6)	Social Culture
Telekung (s20,b10)	<i>Prayer veil</i> (s20,b10)	Material Culture

The functional equivalence procedure is applied in the translation of the social cultural element *manusia menjemur menyidai*, which is rendered as *people wash and dry*. In this context, *menjemur* and *menyidai* refer to the practice of drying clothes on a clothesline or drying rack, either outdoors or in areas exposed to sunlight. The translator chooses the phrase *wash and dry*, which is more general and readily understood by readers beyond the source-language community. This is because the translator focuses on conveying the primary function of the activity, namely the process of managing and caring for clothes after they have been washed. Although there is a difference in meaning between *menjemur menyidai* and *wash and dry*, both expressions maintain a clear functional relationship, as they describe activities associated with post-laundry clothing care.

The next example of the functional equivalence procedure can be seen in the translation of the material cultural element *telekung* as *prayer veil*. A *telekung* is a garment worn by Muslim women when performing prayers. According to *Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat (2005)*, *telekung* refers to a covering garment used to cover a woman's body during prayer. However, the translator renders it as *prayer veil*, which refers to a head covering used in a religious context (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2020). The choice of this equivalent demonstrates the use of the functional equivalence procedure, as the translator prioritises the function of the cultural item as attire worn during worship rather than preserving its exact form and physical characteristics. Although *prayer veil* does not fully represent the concept of *telekung*, which denotes a complete prayer garment for Muslim women, the translation successfully conveys the primary function of the cultural item to target readers. Therefore, the use of the functional equivalence procedure enables readers to understand the role of the *telekung* in Islamic religious practice, even though certain aspects of its original cultural meaning are not fully retained.

Couplet

Translation procedure that combines two or more translation procedures within a single translation. According to Mochamad Zaka Al Faris (2016), the application of the couplet procedure involves the simultaneous use of two translation techniques as a translation strategy.

Table 3 Example of Couplet

Source Language (SL)	Target Language (TL)	Cultural Element
Kain sarung (s20,b10)	Sarong (s20,b10)	Material Culture

The table above illustrates the use of the couplet procedure in the translation of a material cultural element, namely *kain sarung*, which is translated as *sarong*. In translating this term, the translator combines two translation procedures: reduction and naturalisation. The reduction procedure can be identified through the omission of the word *kain* from the source language, while only the element *sarung* is retained in the target language. Subsequently, the naturalisation procedure is employed when the term *sarung* is adapted to conform to the spelling and pronunciation conventions of English, resulting in the form *sarong*. This adaptation is evident in the change of the vowel *u* to *o*, making the term more compatible with the linguistic conventions of the target language. The application of these two procedures enables the cultural element embedded in the term *kain sarung* to be preserved while producing a translation that is more concise and easily understood by target readers. Therefore, the translation of *kain sarung* as *sarong* demonstrates the use of the couplet procedure through the combination of reduction and naturalisation, achieving a balance between the preservation of cultural elements and the comprehensibility of the target text.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the translation of cultural elements involves the use of several main translation procedures, namely literal translation, functional equivalence, and couplet procedures. The literal procedure is used when a cultural element has a close equivalent in the target language and is able to preserve both the structure and original meaning. The functional equivalence procedure is applied when there is no exact cultural equivalent, focusing instead on the function or role of the cultural element in its original context. This approach helps target readers understand the intended meaning even if the original cultural form cannot be fully retained. In addition, the couplet procedure involves the combination of two or more translation techniques within a single translation unit. This combination enables the translator to preserve cultural elements while enhancing the comprehensibility of the target text. Overall, the appropriate selection of translation procedures is crucial in ensuring that cultural elements are effectively transferred between the source language and the target language. The findings indicate that balancing meaning accuracy and reader comprehension is a key aspect in translating cultural elements.

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You can dedicate this section to give recognition and acknowledgement to those involved in your project

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