
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Problems of Translating Cultural Vocabulary: A Case Study on The Translation of Indonesian Folktales

Maharani Ratna¹✉, Althaf Auliawan², Maulida Safitri³

^{1,2,3}Diponegoro University, Vocational College, Culture and Information Department, Semarang, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Maharani Ratna, E-mail: maharanipatria@live.undip.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the translation strategies employed in rendering culturally-laden vocabulary from Indonesian into Japanese, focusing on the folktale "Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau". The objective is to identify the translation techniques used and analyze their effectiveness in conveying cultural nuances and meanings. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, analyzing 33 sentences containing cultural terms. The findings reveal several issues, including the loss of cultural meaning through the use of general terms, inaccurate adaptations, and a lack of supplementary explanations. The study concludes that a combination of transliteration, adaptation, and explanatory notes is crucial for accurately conveying the cultural richness of the source text. This approach ensures that the target audience grasps not only the literal meaning but also the cultural significance embedded within the original vocabulary.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Translation; Indonesian-Japanese Translation; Folktales; Cultural Vocabulary; Translation Strategies

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1. Introduction

Indonesian folktales hold a significant cultural and historical value, offering a glimpse into the rich traditions, beliefs, and values of Indonesia's diverse communities. Translating these narratives into other languages plays a crucial role in promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation, making them accessible to a wider audience and preserving them for future generations (S. Brentjes et al, 2015). However, the task of translating Indonesian folktales presents unique challenges, particularly when it comes to conveying the cultural vocabulary embedded within them. These terms, often deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts, can be difficult to render accurately in another language, as they may lack direct equivalents or carry different connotations. The challenge lies not only in finding appropriate linguistic substitutes but also in capturing the cultural essence and meaning behind these words, ensuring that the translated text remains faithful to the original while also resonating with the target audience.

Cultural vocabulary encompasses words and expressions that are deeply intertwined with a particular culture's traditions, beliefs, customs, and worldview (N. Mansurov et al, 2022). These terms often represent concepts or practices that are unique to that culture and may not have direct equivalents in other languages. The difficulty in translating cultural vocabulary stems from the fact that language is not merely a system of words but also a reflection of a culture's values, history, and social structures. A word's meaning is shaped by its cultural context, and when translated directly, it may lose its original connotations or even convey a completely different meaning in the target language. Furthermore, some cultural concepts may not exist at all in the target culture, making it challenging to find appropriate linguistic representations. This inherent link between language and culture makes the translation of cultural vocabulary a complex and nuanced process, requiring translators to go beyond literal equivalence and consider the cultural implications of their choices.

This research aims to identify the key challenges encountered when translating cultural vocabulary within Indonesian folktales and to propose effective strategies for addressing these complexities. This study will focus on "Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau," a captivating Indonesian folktale originating from West Sumatra. This tale recounts the tragic story of nine brothers cursed for their incestuous relationship with their half-sister, ultimately leading to a volcanic eruption that formed Lake Maninjau. This particular folktale was chosen for its rich cultural vocabulary related to Minangkabau customs, traditions, and beliefs, including specific kinship terms, social practices, and supernatural elements. The presence of these culturally embedded terms presents a compelling case study for examining the challenges and complexities involved in translating cultural vocabulary, as it requires careful consideration of not only linguistic equivalence but also cultural sensitivity and contextual understanding. Analyzing the translation of "Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau" will provide valuable insights into the strategies and adaptations employed by translators to convey the cultural richness of the original text while ensuring its accessibility and comprehensibility to a wider audience.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cultural Translation Theory

2.1.1. Skopos Theory

This theory emphasizes the purpose of a translation. In the context of cultural translation, Skopos theory stresses the importance of considering the translation's purpose and target audience. A translation intended for a general audience may require more cultural adaptation than one aimed at academics (Kyruchuk, 2018).

2.1.2. Domestication and Foreignization

Lawrence Venuti introduced the concepts of domestication and foreignization in translation. Domestication refers to a translation strategy that makes the target text more accessible to the reader by adapting foreign cultural elements to the target culture. Foreignization, on the other hand, retains foreign elements in the target text to introduce the reader to the source culture. In translating Indonesian folktales, the choice between domestication and foreignization will influence how cultural vocabulary is translated (Sun, 2003).

2.1.3. Cultural Turn in Translation Studies

The "Cultural Turn" in translation studies emphasizes the importance of cultural context in the translation process. This theory views translation not merely as a transfer of language, but also as a transfer of culture. Translators must understand both the source and target cultures to translate texts accurately and meaningfully (Tianzhen, 2009).

2.2. Problems in Translating Cultural Vocabularies

In general, there are common challenges encountered when translating cultural vocabulary, such as:

2.2.1. Lexical Gaps

The absence of direct equivalents in the target language for specific cultural terms in the source language. This often occurs with words or phrases deeply rooted in the source culture's customs, traditions, or beliefs.

2.2.2. Cultural Context Differences

The varying cultural contexts associated with certain terms or expressions. A word may have different connotations or implications depending on the cultural setting, making it difficult to convey the same meaning across cultures.

2.2.3. Interpretation of Meaning

The subjective interpretation of culturally loaded terms. Meaning can be influenced by individual perspectives, cultural background, and prior knowledge, leading to potential discrepancies in understanding between the source and target audiences. This is particularly relevant for folktales, which often carry symbolic or allegorical meanings embedded within their cultural context.

This research investigates the challenges of translating cultural vocabulary in Indonesian folktales, focusing on lexical gaps, cultural context differences, and interpretation of meaning. The theoretical framework draws upon several key concepts in translation studies. Skopos theory (Kyruchuk, 2018) highlights the importance of considering the translation's purpose and target audience, suggesting that translations for a broader audience may necessitate greater cultural adaptation. Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization offer a framework for analyzing the strategic choices translators make in navigating cultural differences, impacting how cultural vocabulary is rendered in the target language. The "Cultural Turn" emphasizes the role of cultural context in translation, recognizing that translating cultural elements involves not just linguistic transfer but also conveying cultural meaning.

The case study will analyze the translation of specific Indonesian folktales, examining how these theoretical concepts manifest in practice. It will explore how translators address lexical gaps, negotiate cultural context differences, and manage the subjective interpretation of culturally loaded terms. By analyzing specific translation choices, the study aims to reveal the strategies employed to bridge cultural divides and effectively convey the rich cultural tapestry woven within Indonesian folktales. The analysis will consider the target audience and the overall purpose of the translation, aligning with the principles of Skopos theory. Furthermore, the study will identify instances of domestication and foreignization, examining how these strategies impact the accessibility and

cultural authenticity of the translated folktales. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in translating culturally rich texts and offer insights into best practices for navigating cultural nuances in literary translation.

2.3. Domestication and Foreignization

The Domestication and Foreignization theory, developed by Lawrence Venuti, provides a framework for analyzing translation strategies based on their orientation towards the target culture. Domestication aims to minimize the foreignness of the source text, making it more accessible to the target audience. This strategy often involves replacing culturally specific terms with more familiar equivalents in the target language. Conversely, Foreignization seeks to retain the foreignness of the source text, highlighting cultural differences and challenging the target audience's expectations. This approach often involves transliteration or borrowing of terms, along with explanatory notes (Venuti, 2012).

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate the challenges and strategies involved in translating cultural vocabulary within Indonesian folktales. The case study will focus on a folktale originally written in Indonesian and its corresponding translations in Japanese. The selection of folktales will prioritize those featuring prominent cultural elements, such as unique customs, traditions, beliefs, or social practices. The translations chosen for analysis will represent diverse approaches to cultural adaptation, potentially including examples of both domestication and foreignization strategies. "The primary data source for this study is the Indonesian folktale "Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau" from West Sumatra, translated into Japanese by Maulida Safitri (third author). A detailed textual analysis will be conducted, comparing the original Indonesian text and Safitri's Japanese translation to identify how cultural terms and expressions are handled in the translation process. The analysis will focus on instances of lexical gaps, cultural context differences, and interpretation of meaning, as outlined in the literature review. Specific examples of translation choices will be extracted and categorized based on the strategies employed to address cultural challenges. "Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau" was chosen for this study due to its rich cultural content specifically tied to the Minangkabau culture of West Sumatra. The narrative incorporates unique customs, beliefs, and social structures, presenting a compelling case study for examining the complexities of translating culturally-laden vocabulary. Furthermore, Safitri's translation provides a readily available and complete translated version, facilitating a direct comparison and analysis of translation choices."

The analysis will be guided by the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review, including Skopos theory, domestication and foreignization, and the "Cultural Turn" in translation studies. These theoretical lenses will provide a framework for interpreting the translation choices observed in the case study and understanding the underlying motivations and implications of these choices. The analysis will also consider the target audience and the overall purpose of the translation, aligning with the principles of Skopos theory. Secondary sources, such as scholarly articles and books on translation studies, cultural studies, and Indonesian folklore, will provide additional context and support for the analysis. These sources will help to situate the findings within the broader field of translation studies and contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural context surrounding Indonesian folktales.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

The data in this study consists of sentences appearing in the translation of the story "Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau" originating from Indonesian as the source text and translated into Japanese as the target text. Out of the 33 data points obtained, 11 do not contain culturally-laden vocabulary. Therefore, this study only collected 22 sentences for further analysis. Based on the analysis, it was found that out of the 33 sentences in the story "Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau," several contain cultural vocabulary, with the following analysis sample:

Data 1

Source Text (ST)	: Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau
Target Text (TT)	: ブジャン・センピラン マニンジャウ湖の伝説
Cultural Vocabulary	: Bujang

The text above is the title of the folktale that is the object of this study. The cultural vocabulary identified is "Bujang". In translating the title, the translator attempted to maintain the pronunciation of "Bujang." Therefore, it was written using Katakana

characters. However, a problem arises in the resulting translation, namely the loss of the cultural meaning of "Bujang." The translator did not translate nor provide a special note regarding the word, choosing instead to preserve the original pronunciation. This has drawn criticism, as the cultural meaning intended by the author is lost in the Japanese translation. Literally, "Bujang" means an adult unmarried male. However, in Minang culture, the word connotes a man who is mature in age, unmarried, has mature thinking, and possesses a brave spirit. As a solution, the translator should ideally provide a footnote describing the cultural meaning of the word so that the author's original message is still conveyed to the reader. Alternatively, the translator's decision not to translate "Bujang" can be considered an appropriate strategy, as Japanese readers will become acquainted with culturally-laden vocabulary, simultaneously introducing them to Minang culture.

Data 2

ST : Sejak orang tua mereka meninggal, mereka diasuh oleh seorang paman yaitu Datuk Limbatang.

TT : 両親が亡くなってから、彼らはリンバタン様という叔父に育てられました。

Cultural Vocabulary : Datuk

The word "Datuk" is translated as sama (様) in Japanese. This translation reduces accuracy, despite both being honorifics used to show respect. In Minang culture, "Datuk" represents deep respect for customary leaders, community figures, and elders; it acknowledges social status and an individual's contributions to society; signifies politeness and etiquette; and embodies authority and wisdom. Sama, on the other hand, is a polite and formal term of address generally used for those of higher social standing, customers, or strangers. Consequently, there are differences in the level of formality, emotional closeness, and cultural meaning between the two words. Therefore, translating "Datuk" as sama is not entirely accurate, as it fails to fully capture the nuances and cultural significance of the title. As a solution, the translator could add a brief explanation such as "Datuk is an honorary title in West Sumatra."

Data 3

ST : Para warga pun menggelar perayaan adat dan pertandingan silat.

TT : 村人たちは伝統的な祝賀行事と武芸大会を催す。

Cultural Vocabulary : Silat

The word "silat" in the source text is translated as bugei taikai (武芸大会) in Japanese, which literally means martial arts competition. In Japanese culture, bugei taikai refers to a tournament where practitioners of various martial arts, such as kendo, judo, aikido, or other traditional martial arts, compete to demonstrate their skills. These competitions are usually held on both small and large scales, from local to national, and even international levels. "Silat" however, is a martial art from Indonesia. In this case, the translator has failed to translate "silat" accurately into Japanese, as the word has lost its original meaning. As a solution, it is recommended that the translator use the transliteration technique, translating it as shiratto (シラット). This is recommended because it preserves the authenticity of the word, avoids ambiguity, and introduces a new term. In addition to transliteration, adding a brief explanation of "silat" in a footnote or glossary could also be considered. This explanation could cover the origins, characteristics, and cultural significance of "silat."

Based on the data processing of vocabulary, several other culturally-laden terms were found, such as bersilat (to practice silat), *uda* (older brother), *engku* (a respectful title), *restu* (blessing), etc. In addition, several place names were found, such as "Sumatera Barat", which was simply translated as nishi sumatora (西スマトラ). For Japanese readers familiar with Indonesia, this translation is considered sufficient, as they already know that Sumatra is part of Indonesia. However, for readers who are not familiar, it is recommended to add the name Indonesia, making it Indonnesia nishi sumatora (インドネシア西スマトラ). Furthermore, there are also several proper names that appear in the story, such as Kukuban, Siti Rasani, Sani, etc. When translating proper names, the translator has two options: retain the original name from the source text or change the name to one with a similar nuance in the target language. For example, the name Kukuban could be changed to Takeshi or Haruto, as both have a strong and mature nuance. Siti Rasani could be changed to Sakura or Yumi, as both have a graceful and beautiful impression. Also, the name Sani could be changed to Hana or Rina, as both have a familiar feel. Overall, the problem with translating culturally-laden vocabulary

in the data is the inaccuracy in conveying the meaning and cultural nuances contained in the original vocabulary into Japanese. This discrepancy is caused by the improper selection between the transliteration and adaptation translation techniques and the loss of cultural context, resulting in an incomplete understanding by Japanese readers.

4.2. Discussion

Accurate translation is crucial for conveying messages and cultural nuances effectively to readers from different cultural backgrounds. The translation of culturally-laden terms presents a unique challenge, particularly in literary works like "Bujang Sembilan: The Legend of Lake Maninjau," which is rich in Minangkabau cultural elements. This discussion aims to analyze the problems encountered in translating cultural terms from this story into Japanese and to offer solutions for improving the quality of the translation, ensuring that Japanese readers can fully grasp the cultural meanings and nuances embedded within the narrative. Transliterating words like "bujang" into Japanese can pose a challenge for readers unfamiliar with Minangkabau culture. If the translator chooses not to translate the word but instead writes it in Katakana, it becomes a sequence of unfamiliar sounds that are difficult to remember, rather than conveying meaning. Furthermore, the title mentions "Bujang Sembilan," which actually refers to nine brothers. If this phrase is transliterated, the complete meaning it carries may become fragmented or even lost. While place names like "Danau Maninjau" can be transliterated, it would be better to provide geographical or cultural information to the reader. Terms like "Datuk," an honorific title in Minangkabau culture, will not be understood by Japanese readers if merely transliterated. Without additional explanation, the meaning and cultural value of such terms are lost. Consequently, Japanese readers struggle to understand the social dynamics and hierarchy within the story. This demonstrates the importance of adaptation or providing supplementary explanations for cultural terms. A more culturally sensitive translation strategy is necessary to bridge cultural differences and enrich the reading experience, thus achieving a comprehensive understanding of the story. Accurate translation transfers not only words but also cultural meaning and nuances. Therefore, the transliteration approach needs to be reconsidered and balanced with other, more effective strategies. By providing context and explanations, Japanese readers can better appreciate the rich culture embedded in the story. Adapting names and terms can also be a solution to enhance reader comprehension and engagement.

This study, which focuses on the problems of translating cultural terms in Indonesian folklore into Japanese, differs from Enriquez's research (A Study on Translation Strategies used in Visayan Folktales, 2019) (A Study on Translation Strategies used in Visayan Folktales, 2019), which examines translation strategies in Visayan folktales into English. Enriquez analyzes various translation techniques employed, while this study identifies specific problems such as transliteration hindering comprehension, the loss of cultural nuances due to literal translation, and ambiguity of meaning due to a lack of cultural context. This difference in focus demonstrates that while folklore translation faces universal challenges like transferring cultural meaning, it is also influenced by the specific language and cultural pair involved. This study contributes to a broader understanding of folklore translation by highlighting the problems that arise in translating from Indonesian to Japanese, particularly regarding Minangkabau cultural terms in the story "Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau". These findings complement Enriquez's research and provide additional insights for translators working with different language and cultural pairs. Furthermore, this study differs from Khusnia et al.'s research, which analyzes translation techniques for cultural terms in the novel "Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk" into English. This difference in both the object of study and the target language results in distinct perspectives. While Khusnia et al. identify the employed translation techniques, this study reveals the problems encountered when translating Minangkabau cultural terms into Japanese, such as transliteration hindering comprehension and the loss of cultural nuances. These findings complement Khusnia et al.'s research by providing insights into the challenges of translating cultural terms within different linguistic and cultural contexts. This study also highlights the importance of considering the specific language and cultural pair involved when selecting effective translation strategies.

The translation of the story "Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau" into Japanese faces several challenges, including the transliteration of names and cultural terms that hinders comprehension, the loss of cultural nuances in the translation of idioms, and the lack of cultural context that obscures meaning. To address these issues, it is recommended to employ adaptation strategies for names, provide additional explanations for cultural terms, and implement a more contextual and culturally sensitive translation approach so that the meaning and cultural nuances can be fully conveyed to Japanese readers.

5. Conclusion

Translating the folktale "Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau" into Japanese requires careful strategies to fully convey the meaning and cultural nuances to the reader. Transliteration, although commonly used, has proven to potentially hinder readers' understanding of proper names and cultural terms specific to Minangkabau culture. Literal translation of idiomatic expressions can also eliminate the cultural nuances and meanings embedded within them. The lack of cultural context further exacerbates the

problem, making essential terms vague and difficult to understand. Therefore, name adaptation, providing additional explanations, and employing a more contextual and culturally sensitive translation approach are crucial for bridging cultural gaps and enhancing the quality of the translation. This research is limited to analyzing the problems and solutions in translating "Bujang Sembilan: Legenda Danau Maninjau" into Japanese. Further research could expand upon this study by examining Japanese readers' reception to these various translation strategies through reception studies.

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