

A Study of Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) and Translation Strategies in *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth*

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate culture-specific items (CSIs) within the novel *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth* and to analyze the translation strategies implemented by the translator when dealing with these culturally specific items. Employing a qualitative methodology, this study primarily emphasizes content analysis. The texts under study are the 2015 South East Asian Writers ("S.E.A. Write") Award-winning Thai novel, *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth* by Veeraporn Nitiprapha, alongside its English translation by Kong Rithdee in 2018. The research framework draws upon Nida's (1964) cultural categories and Newmark's (1988) translation strategies, providing a theoretical lens to examine the translator's approaches to managing the non-equivalence between English and Thai. Findings revealed that the highest frequency among culture-specific items is attributed to material culture, followed by ecological, social, linguistic, and religious cultures, respectively. Among the 18 identified translation strategies, the most frequently employed was a literal translation, followed by couplets, transference, functional equivalent, cultural equivalent, compensation, paraphrase, reduction, shifts or transpositions, recognized translation, through-translation, descriptive equivalent, modulation, componential analysis, and a more specific word. Notably, synonyms, translation labels, and less expressive words were the least utilized. The findings suggest that these diverse strategies effectively address cultural disparities between Thai and English, providing valuable insights for Thai translators and Thai teachers in the field of translation. Recommendations for further research are also provided.

Keywords: Culture-Specific Items (CSIs); novel translation; translation strategies

Introduction

In contemporary times, translation plays a crucial part in facilitating communication between individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Put differently, it serves as an efficient tool for people with varying languages and cultures to interact. Additionally, translation serves as a prevalent conduit for disseminating information, expertise, and thoughts, thus holding significance in numerous domains, including business, education, and entertainment.

Nonetheless, as the renowned translation theorist Baker pointed out in 2011, translators commonly grapple with the challenge of non-equivalence when transitioning from one language to another. Baker categorizes non-equivalence into five categories, encompassing issues at the word level, beyond the word level, grammatical level, textual level, and the level of pragmatics. These non-equivalence difficulties arise due to various factors, with one particularly significant issue being the translation of culture-specific concepts. As Larson asserted in 1984, translating these “cultural words” is often the most intricate challenge faced by translators.

Culture-specific concepts, also known as culture-specific items (henceforth: CSIs), pertain to terms used to describe objects, practices, institutions, traditions, or ideas unique to a specific community or group of people, as outlined by Newmark in 1988 (p. 283). This means that various communities may possess distinct cultural attributes, beliefs, social structures, artistic expressions, or geographical elements. In the context of translation, these concepts can pose challenges for translators since individuals from different cultures often hold different ideas that are expressed through their respective languages.

As per Nida's work in 1964, CSIs can be categorized into five primary groups: ecological, material, social, religious, and linguistic elements. To address the challenge of CSIs in translation, several experts (e.g., Baker, 2011; Newmark, 1988; Nida, 1964; Pym, 2018; Venuti, 1995) in the field have proposed various translation strategies. Among these, Newmark's 1988 translation strategies stand out as effective techniques that most translators can employ to deal with CSIs. The translation strategies include literal translation, transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, synonymy, through-translation, shifts or transpositions, modulation, recognized translation, translation label, compensation, componential analysis, reduction and expansion, paraphrase, couplets, and notes, additions, glosses.

Culture-specific elements are prevalent in various literary genres, with a notable presence in works like short stories and novels. In the Thai literary landscape, numerous novels vividly depict the intricacies of Thai culture. Noteworthy examples include Kukrit Pramot's *Four Reigns* (*Si Pan Din*), Utsana Phleungtham's *The Story of Jan Dara*, Khamman Khonkhai's *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*, and Ngarmpun Vejjajiva's *The Happiness of Kati*, which are well-recognized among the Thai audience. Additionally, the novel *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth* by Veeraporn Nitiprapha, which won the 2015 South East Asian Writers ("S.E.A. Write") Award, has enjoyed significant popularity in Thailand since its initial release in 2013, now reaching its twenty-first edition. The availability of an English translation, executed by Thai film critic Kong Rithdee, serves as a means to convey Thai culture to non-native English speakers worldwide.

Given that this novel is rich in both captivating language and mythical symbolism, and it offers insights into numerous facets of Thai culture, traditions, and Buddhist philosophy, particularly in the Thai context, it is valuable to examine how the translator addresses the challenges of non-equivalence arising from cultural disparities between Thai and English. Consequently, this study seeks to identify CSIs within the novel and analyze the translation techniques employed by the translator to navigate the non-equivalence between these two cultures. It is hoped that the findings of this study will offer valuable insights for Thai translators as they study and apply sample strategies to address cultural differences between Thai and English in their translations.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate culture-specific items (CSIs) within the novel *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth*.
2. To analyze the translation strategies implemented by the translator when dealing with these culturally specific items.

Scope of the Study

1. This research adopted a qualitative approach, focusing on content analysis. The primary texts under examination were the Thai novel *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth* by Veeraporn Nitiprapha, which won the 2015 South East Asian Writers ("S.E.A. Write") Award, and its English translation by Kong Rithdee in 2018.

2. The examination of CSIs in the novel centered on Nida's (1964) cultural categories, which include ecological culture, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and linguistic culture.

3. For the examination of the translation strategies employed to address non-equivalence between English and Thai, the study utilized Newmark's (1988) translation strategies as a theoretical framework. These strategies comprise a range of techniques, including literal translation, transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, synonymy, through-translation, shifts or transpositions, modulation, recognized translation, translation label, compensation, componential analysis, reduction and expansion, paraphrase, couplets, and notes, additions, glosses.

Review of Related Literature

Definitions of Translation

Various scholars have provided definitions of translation. According to Catford (1965), it involves replacing text in one language or source language with equivalent text in another language or target language. Similarly, Newmark (1981) described it as the attempt to replace a message in one language with the same message in another language. Nida and Taber (1982) defined translation as reproducing the source-language message in terms of meaning and style in the target language. Larson (1984) characterized it as transferring the meaning of the source language into the target language. In essence, translation's goal is to convey both the equivalent meaning and style of a message from the original language to the target language.

Translation Problems

According to Nord (1991) and Baker (2011), translation problems can be broadly classified into five main categories. Firstly, disparities in lexical items between two languages can present significant challenges, such as the absence of corresponding general or specific terms. Secondly, variations in syntactic structures between the languages can lead to translation difficulties, particularly when dealing with distinct language forms. Thirdly, issues concerning semantics frequently arise during translation due to differences in meanings and perspectives between the two languages. At a pragmatic level, discrepancies in context and language usage can pose challenges for many translators. Lastly, the unique cultures of various language-speaking groups

can profoundly impact translators when translating text. Among these factors, culture stands out as one of the most crucial aspects that translators must be attentive to when translating from one language to another. This is because culture is intertwined with people's lives, beliefs, customs, and more, and translating without an understanding of culture can lead to misunderstandings between individuals. Hence, in the field of translation, translators typically employ translation strategies to address and resolve translation challenges.

Newmark's (1988) Translation Strategies

- 1) *Literal translation*. It involves translating the source text as closely as possible to the original, preserving the structure, wording, and order of the source language.
- 2) *Transference*. It is the process of transferring a word or phrase directly from the source language to the target language text without translating it. It's essentially a form of loanword adoption or borrowing where the foreign term is used in the target language text as it is, without modification.
- 3) *Naturalisation*. It is a translation technique that aims to make the translated text feel more natural and familiar to the target language readers or audience.
- 4) *Cultural equivalent*. It involves replacing a cultural term or concept from the source language with a culturally equivalent term or concept in the target language to ensure that the translation is more meaningful and relatable to the target audience.
- 5) *Functional equivalent*. It necessitates the utilization of a culture-agnostic word, occasionally incorporating a new, precise term. As a result, it standardizes or broadens the meaning of the source language word and, at times, introduces a unique element.
- 6) *Descriptive equivalent*. It involves providing a detailed description or explanation in the target language rather than attempting to find a direct one-word or one-phrase equivalent for a term or concept in the source language.
- 7) *Synonymy*. It involves using a synonym or a near-equivalent word or phrase in the target language to convey the meaning of a term or expression in the source language.
- 8) *Through translation*. It involves translating a text by reproducing the same grammatical structures and linguistic forms as closely as possible in the target language while adjusting only the vocabulary and idiomatic expressions to fit the target language's cultural and linguistic norms.

9) *Shifts or transpositions.* They involve altering the grammatical structure, word order, or other linguistic features in the translation to convey the same meaning as the source text while making the translation more idiomatic or appropriate in the target language.

10) *Modulation.* It refers to a translation technique that involves a change in the point of view or perspective from which the information is presented while maintaining the same overall meaning.

11) *Recognized translation.* It is employed by using the officially accepted or generally acknowledged translation of institutional or specialized terms while also providing clarification or criticism if necessary.

12) *Translation label.* It is a temporary or provisional translation for a newly introduced institutional term or specialized terminology. This provisional translation is enclosed in inverted commas (quotation marks) in the translated text.

13) *Compensation.* It involves making up for a loss of information or nuances in the translation by emphasizing or overemphasizing certain elements in the target text.

14) *Componential analysis.* It is a translation technique that involves breaking down complex words or phrases in the source language into their constituent components, elements, or features.

15) *Reduction and expansion.* These techniques are used to address differences in the lengths of sentences or texts between the source language and the target language.

16) *Paraphrase.* It involves rephrasing or rewording the content of the source text to convey the same meaning in the target language.

17) *Couplets.* They are combinations of two, three, or four of the translation techniques.

18) *Notes, additions, glosses.* They are translation techniques used to provide additional information or explanations in the target text.

Culture-Specific Items (CSIs)

As noted by Newmark in 1988 (pp.283), culture-specific items are words employed to denote the objects, processes, institutions, customs, ideas, and so forth that are unique to a specific cultural group. According to Nida's framework outlined in 1964 (pp.91), culture can be categorized into five primary types, which are ecological culture, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and linguistic culture. Further elaboration on each of these types is as follows:

- 1) *Ecological culture*. It pertains to the ecological aspects of specific regions and lands, encompassing geographical conditions, natural surroundings, seasonal variations, and so on. Different regions may exhibit distinct ecological cultures.
- 2) *Material culture*. It refers to the tangible creations and products generated by a particular cultural group, including items like food, clothing, and architectural structures.
- 3) *Social culture*. It encompasses elements such as values, customs, beliefs, and lifestyles specific to a particular group of people.
- 4) *Religious culture*. It relates to cultural terms that express particular concepts associated with religions.
- 5) *Linguistic culture*. It denotes the unique characteristics or systems of phonetics, vocabulary, syntax, and other linguistic features that are exclusive to a particular cultural group.

Previous Studies Related to Translating CSIs

In the Thai context, various studies have delved into translation strategies for conveying Thai cultural concepts into English across diverse contexts. For instance, Krai-on (2013) studied a translator's approach to rendering the novel *Four Reigns*, identifying five methods including literal translation, free translation, transcription/transliteration, omission, and a combination of transcription/transliteration and literal translation. Additionally, Aotarayakul (2014) examined the translation of Thai movie subtitles, revealing a preference for linguistic cultural terms followed by social, material, religious, and ecological cultural terms. Seven strategies including generalization, specification, cultural substitution, explanation, transliteration, omission, and word-for-word translation were identified. In 2017, Ngamsri investigated cultural terms in *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*, revealing six types of cultural words including customs and values, ecology, material culture, linguistic culture, gestures and habits, and organizations. Nine strategies employed were transference, use of a more general word, use of more than one strategy, literal translation, paraphrase, omission, adding, labeling, and illustration. Lastly, Chaleegul (2017) explored translation in *The Story of Jan Dara*, observing the use of ecological, material, social, religious, and linguistic cultural terms, and strategies like transference, literal translation, classification, neutralization, accepted standard translation, cultural equivalent, paraphrasing, and deletion were utilized to bridge the gap between Thai and English cultures.

Apart from Thai-to-English translation, several studies have examined translation strategies employed in transferring CSIs across different languages. For example, Brasiene (2013) investigated the translation of CSIs in Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* from English to Lithuanian, revealing the use of preservation, addition, omission, globalization, localization, and transformation. Similarly, Fedora (2015) analyzed cultural words in the Indonesian novel *Laskar Pelangi* and its English translation, finding various CSIs including ecology, material culture, social culture, organization, customs, activities, procedures, and concepts. Translation strategies namely cultural equivalent, borrowing, notes, descriptive equivalent, functional equivalent, calque, and meaning shift were employed. Finally, in 2016, Amininanadji explored the translation of the Persian play *Aroosak-ha* into English, identifying the main CSIs namely organization, customs, ideas, social culture, and material culture. The translator employed techniques including descriptive equivalent, functional equivalent, literal translation, transference, couplet, and cultural equivalent to address cultural differences between Persian and English.

It is obvious that these studies collectively underscore the varied methods employed to tackle the translation of both Thai cultural concepts into English and CSIs across different languages. Each study addresses distinct challenges inherent in cross-cultural communication, showcasing a range of strategies utilized to convey cultural nuances accurately in literary texts.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative approach and used content analysis as the primary method for data collection. The main objectives are to investigate CSIs within the award-winning novel *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth* by Veeraporn Nitiprapha, which received the S.E.A. Write Award, and to analyze the translation strategies employed by the translator to render these CSIs from Thai into English.

Data Collection Procedures

The steps involved in data collection are outlined as follows:

- 1) Thoroughly read the original Thai version of the novel *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth*.

2) Compiled a comprehensive list of words that qualify as CSIs, drawing from Nida's (1964) cultural categories.

3) Categorized all identified CSIs into their respective groups, and arranged them in order of frequency, from the most frequently found categories to the least.

4) Delved into the meaning of each word by referring to credible Thai language resources, including a reputable Thai dictionary like the Royal Institute Edition and authoritative encyclopedias.

5) Located the English translations of each word in the translated version using reliable dictionaries and online sources, including Merriam-Webster (2023), Oxford University Press (2023), and The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History (2013).

Data Analysis

1) The study involved the analysis and classification of the translation strategies employed by the translator to convey the original meaning into the target language. These strategies were categorized based on Newmark's (1988) translation strategies.

2) To determine the prevalence of each translation strategy, the frequency of each strategy's occurrence was quantified as a percentage, using the following formula:

$$\frac{100 \times X}{Y}$$

Y

Where:

X = the number of instances of a specific translation strategy

Y = the total number of translation strategies in the analysis

3) The data was displayed in a tabular layout, providing information on both the frequency and percentage.

Research Results

Findings of research objective 1: To investigate culture-specific items (CSIs) within the novel *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth*

According to Nida's (1964) cultural categories, the novel contained a total of 338 CSIs. The most frequently found category was material culture, appearing 97 times, accounting for 28.70% of the occurrences. Following closely was ecological culture, noted 84 times, making up 24.85%. Social culture ranked third with 81 instances, representing 23.97%. Lastly, linguistic culture and

religious culture were equally prevalent, each appearing 38 times, accounting for 11.24% of the occurrences. The overall findings can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1 CSIs and Their Frequency and Percentage

Rank	Category (Frequency)	Sub-category (Frequency)	Percentage
1	Material culture (97)	Food (40) Specific places/ cities/ towns (36) Clothes (7) Household items (7) Houses/ buildings (6) Transportation (1)	28.70 %
2	Ecological culture (84)	Plants (62) Animals (16) Rivers (6)	24.85 %
3	Social culture (81)	Beliefs (40) Entertainment (23) Occupations (8) Important persons (3) Political events (2) Leisure activities (2) Festival (1) Currency (1) Time (1)	23.97 %
4	Linguistic culture (38)	Relationship (16) Reference pronouns (14) Language usage (5) Titles (3)	11.24 %
5	Religious culture (38)	Religious beliefs (15) Religious places (8) Religious activities (8) Religious persons (5) Religious objects (2)	11.24 %
Total 338			100%

1. Material Culture

Material culture emerges as a predominant category, constituting 28.70% of the dataset. This category encompasses diverse aspects including food, specific places or cities, clothing, household items, buildings, and transportation. It highlights the significance placed on tangible artifacts and physical elements within this cultural context. The following examples illustrate the findings.

1.1 Food: ข้าวเหนียวเปียกสีม่วง (sweet purple sticky rice), ขنمสาลี (fluffy salee), กุ้งจอม (fermented shrimps), ขนมทองหยด (a Thai dessert called Golden Teardrops), ขนมชั้น (sticky kanom chan), แกงรัญจวน (Allure Curry), กุหลาบจำมุน (kulab jamun)

1.2 Specific places/ cities/ towns: สีลม (Silom Road), เมืองกาญจน์ (Kanchanaburi), ถนนข้าวสาร (Khao San Road), เกาะมอญ (Koh Mon), สวนจตุจักร (Chattuchak weekend market), ร้านขายข้าวแกง (a roadside restaurant)

1.3 Clothes: ผ้าถุง (sarong), ผ้าขาวม้า (chequered scarves)

1.4 Household items: ลูกปัดทวารวดี (ancient Dvaravati beads), มีดอีโต (a butcher knife), ถ้วยหลุมหنمครก (little pots), กะละมัง (trays)

1.5 Houses/ buildings: ศาลาท่าน้ำ (the riverside gazebo), กระตอบ (a shack), ศาลาทรงไทยประยุกต์ (a permanent shrine in the style of modern Thai architecture), เรือน (house-on-stilts)

1.6 Transportation: รถกระปะซูเปอร์มาร์เก็ตเคลื่อนที่ (a grocery pick-up truck-a mobile supermarket)

2. Ecological culture

Ecological culture stands out as another substantial facet, comprising 24.85% of the dataset. This category encompasses a wide array of natural elements, including plants, animals, and rivers. It underscores the cultural connection to the environment and the significance of nature within the society or region under study. The following instances can illustrate the findings.

2.1 Plants: ยีสุน (Yeesoon), ลำพู (lampu), พิกุล (pikul), ปีบ (pheep), กระดังงา (ylang-ylang), โมก (the mok flowers), พุจอมพล (pu-jormpol), จิกน้ำ (jik-nam), ฝ้ายคำ (faikhamb), ลำดวน (lamduan), ตะแบก (tabaek), อาโศกสปัน (asoke sapun)

2.2 Animals: ปลาตะเพียน (carp fish), ตัวลงกรานต์ (a bug), ปลาทู (mackerel), ปลาหมา (horse fish), หนูนา (field mice)

2.3 Rivers: មេន្តាំងគ្រួមទី (the Nakhon Chai Si River), មេន្តាំងទេរាបន្ទាយ (the Chao Phraya), តុម្នាំសាលាកិន (the Salween River), ទូក (the Mekong River), មេន្តាំងពិង (the Ping River)

3. Social culture

Social culture represents 23.97% of the dataset, showcasing a rich tapestry of beliefs, entertainment, occupations, influential persons, political events, leisure activities, festivals, currency, and the concept of time. This category emphasizes the social, historical, and temporal dimensions shaping the cultural aspects. These examples demonstrate the findings.

3.1 Beliefs: ចាប់តាករម (the tyranny of fate), ទេរាបិនុញ្ញាល (the spirit), គេរាប់ករម (bad karma), ខ្សោតិស (was possessed), ខុំខោយ (to ask for lucky lottery numbers), គុនទោង (a shaman), ទេរាបី (the area's guardian spirits), កេកបន (repaid), គាលពិឃឃីងតា (a wooden spirit house)

3.2 Entertainment: កាលខេនខុនចាច់ខុនផេន (Khun Chang Khun Phaen—the verse title), កិនី (Kinnaird), ពេលងេសេគារងេងគុរិទុទា (“Starlight of Faith”—the song title), និមាយរីធមេង (Shadow—the novel title), ផែនរាំ (a traditional dance), គិតលក (ancient hymns)

3.3 Occupations: នាខោរាំ (a traditional dancer), នាខោកលាងគុនវិធមុ (heroines in radio dramas), ឈាយតីតែខី (a lottery vendor), គុនលាយអនេងកាលងេបេល (an outdoor cinema projectionist), មេដោទីរីចុរីគុបុជា (a motorcycle taxi driver)

3.4 Important persons: គុននាយកិនកំបុណ្យអិងច៉ំខ័ណ្ឌ (Madame Eng and Madame Chan), រ៉ុខកាលពីឃក (the sixth reign), អតិថិជនា មូរាកុល (Mantana Morakul—a Thai singer)

3.5 Political events: កុំពុកតុលាកិរិយិក (the massacre of 6 October), ពុំមាគាពមិិ (the Black May)

3.6 Leisure activities: ពេងកប (speared frogs), តែកនក (trapped birds)

3.7 Festival: វិណ្ឌលូយក្រាន្តង (the *Loy Krathong* ceremony)

3.8 Currency: កុំពុកតុលាកិរិយិក (Six saluting—Thai currency)

3.9 Time: សង្កាត់ខោរ៉ូយ៉ាំសិបសាម (B.E.2553 (A.C.2010))

4. Linguistic culture

Linguistic culture contributes 11.24% to the dataset. Linguistic culture delves into relationships, reference pronouns, language usage, and titles, shedding light on the intricacies of language and communication within the culture. The examples provided serve to illustrate the findings.

4.1 Relationship: ឃោ (husband), គុណយាយ (Grandma-placed before the name), ឮីយ (wife), ប៉ា (Aunt-placed before the name), តុង (Uncle-placed before the name), យា (grandmother), ឧា (Uncle-placed before the name), បុរី (grandfather), នា (aunt), ពិនុវត (Sister Nual), តានឹង (Grandpa Nong), យាយ (grandma)

4.2 Reference pronouns: អាលុខន (she), អុន្ត (I), អាន (he), គោះ (they), ក្នុង (me), ពវាមីង (your...), នៅ (her), ឱះ (you), ខា (my...), មីង (you), ពិនុវត (ធម្មុណុធម្មុរិយកត្រាខោះ) (my...)

4.3 Language usage: ឱិម (Well), ស៉ែវ (Bitches), សាហសី (sawasdee-Thai greeting), ខុបគុណមាតក (Thank you)

4.4 Titles: គ្រូទស (Teacher Tos), វីវិម (Tim-a young man's name), ពិកហិង (a girl-a title commonly used before a Thai female name, especially for those aged under 15)

5. Religious Culture

Religious culture contributes 11.24% to the dataset. It encompasses religious beliefs, religious places, religious activities, significant religious figures, and religious objects, illustrating the spiritual and ritualistic aspects deeply embedded within the cultural framework. The findings are illustrated by the following examples.

5.1 Religious beliefs: បិបុរិបិបិកិ (be reborn), ទរស្តី (attained enlightenment), បេរត (ravenous ghouls), មាតិហន្តាកំបាតិតុលុ បិប (afterlife), វិរិយនវាយតាយកិ (the cycle of life-samsara), ឈូនិតិ (forgive)

5.2 Religious places: វិហារវត្ថុសុខណ៍ (Suthat temple), ពុំពរគគិមហាបូឌី (the Great Bodhi Tree), ឱះឱះឱះឱះ (the eaves), បិបសិត (the prayer hall), វត្ថុប៉ា (a forest monastery)

5.3 Religious activities: ឯកមនុទរ (to call a monk), សាត (to perform funeral rites), លើយ ឯកគារ (to scatter ashes), ឯកិតិការ (dead people's ashes), ការវត្ថុ (temple fairs), ឯកបាតរ (to give alms to the monks), បវច (to ordain as a monk), ឯក (leave the monkhood)

5.4 Religious persons: ព្រះបុធទុងគិត (Lord Buddha), នៅរ (novice monks), ឯកគតាគាត (the Lord Buddha), ពវច (monk), ខ្សោនិនិង (Krua in Khong from the late 19th century)

5.5 Religious objects: បានិសិយាសន (the reclining Buddha), ឯកាសាទាប៉ែតិ (the robe of monkhood)

Findings of research objective 2: To analyze the translation strategies implemented by the translator when dealing with these culturally specific items

From an analysis, it was found that there are 18 translation strategies used by a translator in translating CSIs in the novel from Thai into English. The most commonly employed strategy is literal translation ($f=74$), followed by couplets ($f=60$), transference ($f=52$), functional equivalent ($f=44$), cultural equivalent ($f=21$), compensation ($f=19$), paraphrase ($f=19$), reduction ($f=14$), shifts or transpositions ($f=9$), recognized translation ($f=6$), through-translation ($f=5$), descriptive equivalent ($f=4$), modulation ($f=4$), componential analysis ($f=2$), and a more specific word ($f=2$). Conversely, the least utilized translation methods include synonyms ($f=1$), translation labels ($f=1$), and less expressive words ($f=1$). Examples are provided to illustrate the application of each strategy. However, only the first seven, which are the most commonly employed, are featured in this section.

1. Literal translation ($f=74$)

Direct literal translation ($f=69$)

The translator primarily utilized direct literal translation, with the highest frequency in ecological culture ($f=27$), followed by material culture ($f=15$), social culture ($f=13$), religious culture ($f=13$), and linguistic culture ($f=1$), respectively. The findings are exemplified in the following instances.

Ecological culture: ឃុំខ័ណ្ឌ = butterfly-pea, អង្គកម្មង់ = flame, ករោទុន = santol, ករោចិងា = ylang-ylang

Material culture: កុំទុំខោម = fermented shrimps, អនុនូនូម = silkworms, កោង = curry

Social culture: គោរពិរិយាយណ = the spirit, គោរពិករម = bad karma, កាលឈន = verses

Religious culture: ឪពុជុំឪពុកិត = be reborn, ពិនិត្យសុខ = attained enlightenment, ឯទាសិ = forgive

Linguistic culture: គ្នាពីស = Teacher Tos

Literal translation using capitalization to suggest a proper name ($f=3$)

The translator employed a technique known as literal translation, utilizing capitalization to indicate a proper name, particularly evident in instances related to material culture ($f=2$) and ecological culture ($f=1$), as revealed in the following findings.

Material culture: កោងរីរុយទោន (ខ្លួនឈាម) = Allure Curry, ពេងដំឡូង (ខ្លួនឈាម) = Planetarium

Ecological culture: ព្រារណា (ខ្លួនឈាម) = Desire

Literal translation using italicized capitalization to suggest a proper name (f=2)

The translator employed literal translation, incorporating italicized capitalization to signify a proper name within the context of social culture (f=2), as evident in the following findings.

Social culture: ແກ (ຊື່ອນິຍາຍ) = *Shadow*, ເພລິງ (ຊື່ເພລິງ) = *Flame*

2. Couplets (f=60)

The translator employed couplets as a strategy to handle a particular cultural difference between the two languages, with the highest frequency in material culture ($f=28$), followed by social culture ($f=16$), ecological culture ($f=10$), religious culture ($f=5$), and linguistic culture ($f=1$). The translator often used a combination of transference and notes. The following instances serve to illustrate these findings.

Material culture: ขนมสาลี = fluffy *salee** / Note: * Salee is a steamed pudding made of cassava and tapioca flour; topped with shredded coconut.

Social culture: ປອບ = the ravenous *pob** ghost / Note: * The ever-hungry *pob* is a kind of Thai ghost or demon that possesses humans and devours their entrails.

Ecological culture: ມະດັນ = madan / Note: ..., madan is a Thai fruit used in savoury dishes,

Religious culture: ชรรัตน์โง่ = Krua In Khong** from the late 19th century / Note: ** Krua In Khong was a Buddhist monk who introduced Western painting techniques to Thai temple murals in the 19th century.

Linguistic culture: ສ ວ ສ ດී = *Sawasdee** /Note: **Sawasdee* is the common phrase of greeting in the Thai language.

3. Transference (f=52)

3.1 Transference using italicized lowercase (f=23)

The translator utilized transference through italicized lowercase in instances related to ecological culture ($f=20$), social culture ($f=2$), and religious culture ($f=1$). The following examples can exemplify these findings.

Ecological culture: ລໍາພູ = *lampa*, ພິກຸລ = *pikul*, ປືບ = *pheep*, ພູຈອມພລ = *pu-jormpol*, ຈິກນໍາ = *jik-nam*

Social culture: กินรี = *kinnarii*, ครุฑ = *garuda*

Religious culture: ພູມານາດ = *naga*

3.2 Transference using capitalization (f=22)

The translator utilized transference through capitalized words, with material culture (f=17), social culture (f=4), and ecological culture (f=1), as demonstrated in the following examples.

Material culture: นครชัยศรี = Nakhon Chai Si, อุทัยธานี = Ayutthaya, เกาะมอญ = Koh Mon

Social culture: สดาวย = Jatayu, โรสลาเรน = Rose Laren, มัณฑนา มีรากร = Mantana Morakul

Ecological culture: ยีสุน = Yeesoon

3.3 Transference using italicized lowercase with a word to suggest the name (f=4)

The translator employed transference through italicized lowercase, using a word to suggest the name, specifically about ecological culture (f=4). The following instances can exemplify these findings.

Ecological culture: โมก = the *mok* flowers, ปีบ = the *pheep* tree, พุจอมพล = *pu-jompol* flowers

3.4 Transference using capitalization with words to suggest the name (f=2)

The translator utilized transference through capitalization, employing words that suggest a name, particularly in the context of material culture (f=1) and social culture (f=1), as evidenced in the following findings.

Material culture: สวนจตุจักร = the Chattuchak weekend market

Social culture: ลิงหกนัญชร = the great lion Singhakunchorn

3.5 Transference using a formal name (f=1)

The translator employed transference by using a formal name exclusively within the context of material culture (f=1), as illustrated in the following finding.

Material culture: เมืองกาญจน์ = Kanchanaburi

4. Functional equivalent (f=44)

The translator employed the functional equivalent of social culture (f=12), ecological culture (f=11), material culture (f=9), linguistic culture (f=9), and religious culture (f=3). The following instances can illustrate these findings.

Social culture: วิญญาณ = the ghost, คนทรง = a shaman, แก็บหน = repaid

Ecological culture: กล้วยน้ำว้า = banana, ระกำ = zalacca, ต้นตาล = the sugar palm tree

Material culture: ផោតុង = sarong, វានខាយខាងកែង = a roadside restaurant

Linguistic culture: ថា = Aunt, នា = aunt, លុង = Uncle, ឧា = Uncle, យា = grandmother

Religious culture: ពិភពល័យកំលើ = fire, សុណុណ្ឌា = the void, ចិងចាយបីរោកា = the eaves

5. Cultural equivalent (f=21)

The translator employed cultural equivalent with material culture (f=7), ecological culture (f=7), social culture (f=3), religious culture (f=3), and linguistic culture (f=1). The following instances can demonstrate the findings.

Material culture: អេអមក = casseroles, កេងគេងគេង = earthstar mushrooms in gravy, ផាគារមា = chequered scarves, ករចតុប = a shack

Ecological culture: ខ្សែកុដ = purple orchids, ករចតុប (ឯក) = okra, ប្រាកុទ = mackerel

Social culture: ចុះឈើស៊ីនឈើយាង = drew straws, មួគទេវិគិចគិចរុបចា = a motorcycle taxi driver

Religious culture: ព្រៃត = ravenous ghouls, មាតិហន៍កាបមាតិតុង ឬប៊ូ = afterlife

Linguistic culture: ស៉ុតវ៉ុត = Bitches

6. Compensation (f=19)

The translator employed compensation with linguistic culture (f=18) and social culture (f=1), as demonstrated in the following instances.

Linguistic culture: ឃោវ = husband, ឃុំ = I, គោះ = they, ធម៌នុវត្ត = your, ឲ្យ = me, ឪ = you

Social culture: ធម៌រុក្ស = to ask for lucky lottery numbers

7. Paraphrase (f=19)

The translator employed the paraphrase technique with material culture (f=7), social culture (f=6), and religious culture (f=6). The following instances can illustrate these findings.

Material culture: ត្រូវការបានសាន់ = fermented sausages, ឃោនម = Yunnan-style sour pork, ត្រូវការបានសាន់ = northern sausages, ករចង = a floating basket, គីឡូន = house-on-stilts

Social culture: តែវិទី = the area's guardian spirits, បើកទាន = to unlock the hindrances, គាលពីឃុំ = a wooden spirit house, ចុះឈើមាមសាមពោ = consulting the oracular powers of the sun, the moon and Mars

Religious culture: សវត = to perform funeral rites, ត្រូវបាតទ = to give alms to the monks, បរាជ = to ordain as a monk, សិក = leave the monkhood

Discussion

1. CSIs found in the novel *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth*

Based on Nida's (1964) cultural categories, the novel incorporated a total of 338 cultural terms. Among these, material culture was the most prevalent category, accounting for 28.70%, followed by ecological culture at 24.85% and social culture at 23.97%. Linguistic culture and religious culture exhibited equal prevalence at 11.24%. Material culture's prominence in this novel is likely attributed to the main characters, Chalika and Chareeya, who share a passion for cooking food and desserts aspect prominently presented in the narrative with 40 occurrences. Furthermore, the novel vividly depicts various locales in Thailand, including the renowned Khao San Road, the bustling capital city of Bangkok, the historical province of Ayutthaya, and the famous weekend market, the Chatuchak weekend market. The results also indicated that ecological culture ranked second in the utilization of cultural terms within the novel. This can be attributed to the novel's setting in Nakhon Chai Si, a city characterized by fields and rivers.

Consistent with prior research, the present findings are consistent with a previous study conducted by Fedora (2015). Fedora analyzed the cultural words found in the Indonesian novel *Laskar Pelangi*, written by Andrea Hirata, and its translation, *The Rainbow Troops* by Angie Kilbane. The analysis revealed that ecological culture and material culture were the most prevalent cultural terms in the novel. Additionally, the findings of this study align with the conclusions drawn in Chaleegul's (2017) study, where similar cultural terms were observed. In Chaleegul's (2017) research, the focus was on translation strategies used for cultural words from Thai to English in *The Story of Jan Dara*. By applying Nida's (1964) culture-specific terms, the researcher found that ecological culture terms and material culture terms were predominantly present in the novel.

2. Translation strategies employed by the translator

From an analysis, it was found that the translator predominantly employed direct literal translation when translating ecological culture. Furthermore, additional types of literal translation were identified, specifically, literal translation using capitalization to indicate a proper name and literal translation using italicized capitalization to suggest a proper name. These particular cases were unique findings observed solely in the current study. One potential rationale for this choice is the translator's aim to closely preserve the original meaning of the source text. In doing so, the translator seeks to ensure that the audience comprehends the content in the same manner as the

original readers. Moreover, the use of capitalization or italics for proper names serves to uphold a formal and distinct representation of names in the target language, mirroring their appearance in the source text. These findings align with a prior study conducted by Krai-on (2013), who examined the translation strategies employed by Tulachandra, a translator working on the novel *Si Pan Din* or *Four Reigns*, translating Thai cultural words into English. The analysis revealed that the translator predominantly utilized literal translation in the process.

In addition to literal translation, the adoption of couplets or the utilization of multiple translation strategies to address challenges arising from cultural differences between the two languages was predominantly employed as a secondary approach. The translator commonly employed a combination of transference and explanatory notes when handling Thai words, including names of food, desserts, trees, flowers, specific places, and cultural beliefs. One possible reason for this approach is to help preserve the authenticity of the term, ensuring it maintains its original form and cultural significance. Explanatory notes are used to provide additional context or information about cultural terms that may be unfamiliar to the target audience, thereby enhancing the reader's comprehension and allowing them to grasp the nuances and cultural context associated with the term. The results align with a prior study conducted by Ngamsri (2017), which investigated the types of cultural words and translation strategies applied in translating cultural terms from Thai into English in the novel *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*. The study revealed that one of the frequently employed strategies was the use of multiple strategies simultaneously to facilitate a clearer understanding for the target readers.

Finally, transference emerged as the third key strategy employed by the translator in this study. Notably, various techniques were identified during the analysis of transference, including 1) transference using italicized lowercase, 2) transference using italicized lowercase with a word suggesting the name, 3) transference using capitalization, 4) transference using capitalization with words suggesting the name, and 5) transference using a formal name. The translator usually used transference with terms related to ecological culture and material culture. One possible reason is that italicizing and using lowercase letters can help distinguish foreign terms from the surrounding text. This visual distinction signals to readers that the word or phrase is not part of the regular text in the target language, drawing attention to its foreign origin. The findings from this current study are similar to previous studies conducted by Fedora (2015), Amininanadji (2016), and Wongeree

(2021) who found that one of the frequently used strategies a translator employed to deal with cultural differences between the two languages was *transference* or the use of loan words.

Conclusion

Applying Nida's (1964) cultural categories to the analysis of the novel *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth* revealed a total of 338 CSIs. The predominant category was material culture, with 97 occurrences, constituting 28.70% of the total instances. Ecological culture closely followed, being identified 84 times and accounting for 24.85%. Social culture ranked in the third position with 81 instances, representing 23.97%. Additionally, linguistic culture and religious culture were equally distributed, each appearing 38 times and contributing 11.24% to the overall occurrences. This examination underscored the diverse cultural dimensions embedded in the novel, with material culture, ecological culture, social culture, linguistic culture, and religious culture all playing significant roles in shaping the narrative landscape.

In addition, the translation process between Thai and English involved the utilization of 18 distinct strategies to deal with cultural differences. The most frequently employed strategy was literal translation, with 74 instances, emphasizing a direct transfer of language elements. Following closely were couplets (60) and *transference* (52), each playing a substantial role in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. Functional equivalent (44) and cultural equivalent (21) strategies contributed to maintaining meaning and cultural nuances. Compensation (19), paraphrase (19), and reduction (14) were employed to address specific challenges in the translation process. Other strategies, such as shifts or transpositions (9), recognized translation (6), through-translation (5), descriptive equivalent (4), modulation (4), and componential analysis (2), revealed the translator's flexibility in adapting to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. A more specific word (2) was employed for precision in certain instances. Conversely, less frequently utilized strategies included synonyms (1), translation labels (1), and less expressive words (1). These strategies may be selectively applied based on the specific demands of the text. It is suggested that these translation strategies can be particularly beneficial for Thai translators, especially novices, as they navigate the challenges of translating CSIs between the two languages. Moreover, these findings are valuable for instructors teaching translation, as they can serve as illustrative examples for students learning how to handle cultural terms during the translation process between Thai and English.

Suggestions

Suggestions for future research studies

- 1) It is suggested that a researcher may analyze other novels, such as *Memories of the Black Rose Cat* and *Talaysab Namta*, composed by Veeraporn Nitiprapha in 2018 and 2020, respectively. A focus on CSIs used in these novels may help determine whether the results align with or differ from the findings of the current study.
- 2) The novel *The Blind Earthworm in the Labyrinth* extensively employs figurative language, making it a valuable subject for study. Exploring the types of figurative language utilized and examining the translation strategies employed to address the disparities between Thai and English adds further significance to the analysis.

New Knowledge

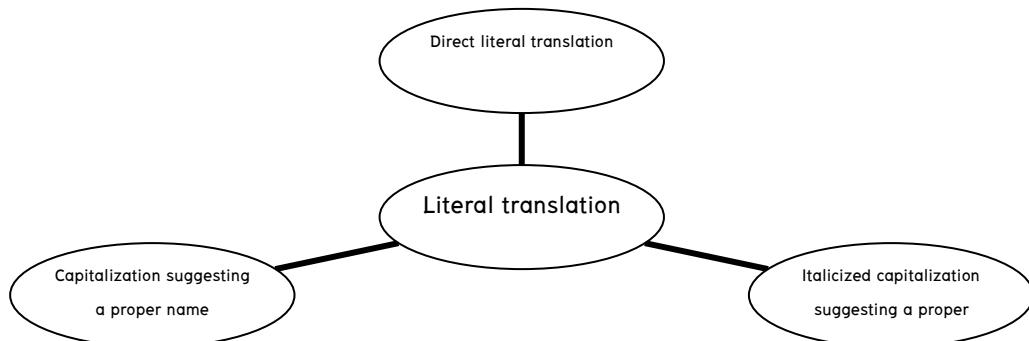


Figure 1 Types of Literal Translation

According to the model above, it is evident that there are three types of literal translation that a translator can employ when translating CSIs. These include direct literal translation, literal translation using capitalization to suggest a proper name, and literal translation using italicized capitalization to suggest a proper name. These methods prove beneficial for novice translators, especially when translating proper names while ensuring that the intended meaning is retained, allowing target readers to comprehend the message effectively.

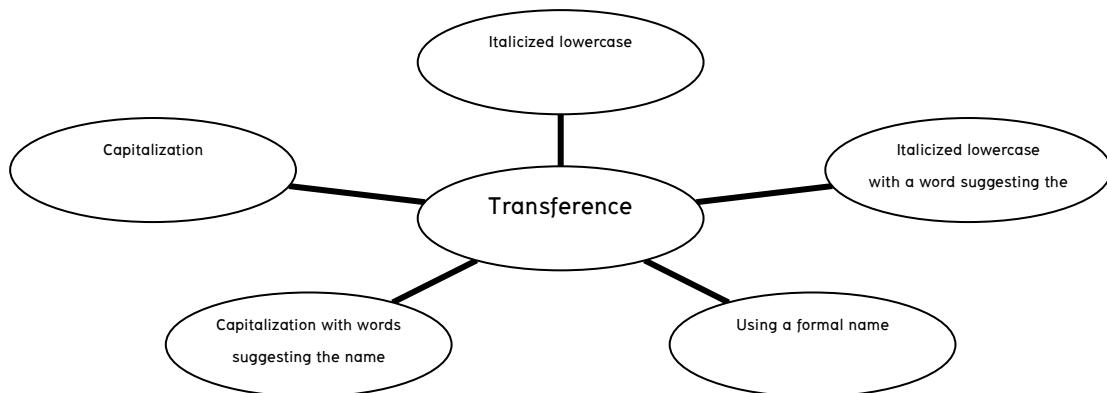


Figure 2 Types of Transference

In the model outlined above, five types of transference are identified: 1) transference involving italicized lowercase, 2) transference employing italicized lowercase with a word suggesting the name, 3) transference utilizing capitalization, 4) transference incorporating capitalization with words suggesting the name, and 5) transference utilizing a formal name. Novice translators can employ these strategies effectively when translating cultural terms associated with proper names in the realms of food, desserts, plants, specific places, cities, and characters.

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