

TRANSLATION IDEOLOGY OF CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS IN A MULTILINGUAL ANTHOLOGY OF ASEAN CHILDREN'S STORIES

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Abstract

Culture-specific items (CSIs) in ASEAN children's literature often contain cultural references that are difficult to transfer across languages without affecting their original meanings. Therefore, this study aims to identify the categories of CSIs, analyze the translation techniques used, and determine the translation ideology reflected in A Multilingual Anthology of ASEAN Children's Stories. This study employed a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative analyses. The data, consisting of culture-specific items identified in eleven ASEAN children's stories, were analyzed using Newmark's classification of culture-specific items, translation techniques proposed by Doni Jaya, Molina and Albir, and Newmark, as well as Venuti's theory of translation ideology. The findings show that Material Culture was the most dominant category of culture-specific items identified in the anthology. Thirteen translation techniques were found, with Literal Equivalent, Couplet, and Transference being the most frequently used. The frequent use of these techniques shows that the translator tended to maintain the cultural elements of the source text. As a result, foreignization emerged as the dominant translation ideology in the anthology.

Keywords: *culture-specific items, translation techniques, translation ideology, children's literature*

INTRODUCTION

The process of translating is more than simply transferring words from one language into another. Translation inevitably involves ideological positioning, cultural negotiation, and interpretative decisions. When transmitting meaning and cultural values, a particular ideological orientation always influences the translation process. A translator's decisions are influenced by various social, cultural, institutional, and ideological factors (S. Morrow, 2003). The ideology reflected in a translation does not necessarily originate solely from the translator's personal beliefs. It may be shaped by institutional policies, publishing standards, academic conventions, readership expectations, and dominant cultural norms within the target society. From this perspective, translation can be understood as a site where language, culture, and power intersect (Puurtinen, 1998). Contemporary translation studies emphasize that translation is not merely linguistic transfer but a socio-cultural practice embedded in ideological frameworks (Bassnett, 2014; Munday, 2016).

Conversely, when the translator prioritizes fluency and cultural adaptation, domestication becomes apparent (Venuti, 1995, 2018). Ideology is therefore not directly stated, but inferred from translation techniques and textual outcomes. The ideological dimension becomes more evident in texts containing culture-specific items (CSIs). According to Aixelá (1996), CSIs refer to elements deeply rooted in the source culture, such as traditional food, kinship systems, religious rituals, social customs, and culturally bound concepts. These elements often lack direct equivalents in the target language. As a result, the translator must decide whether to retain, adapt, explain, or omit them. Culture-specific items function as the most sensitive indicators of translation ideology because each strategy reflects a particular stance toward cultural representation and readership. This issue becomes more complex in children's literature. Relay translation refers to a process in which a source text is translated into an intermediary language before reaching the final target language, creating a multilayered chain of mediation (Chen, 2016). Rather than being an inferior form of translation, relay translation has played a historically significant role in multilingual literary circulation, particularly when direct linguistic competence was limited. The process may

introduce cumulative linguistic, cultural, and ideological shifts because each intermediary stage is influenced by the norms and perspectives of its linguistic community. Therefore, relay translation challenges the conventional source–target binary and highlights the importance of multilingual comparative analysis in tracing translation genealogy (Chen, 2016).

In children's literature, translation involves not only linguistic transfer but also cultural and ideological negotiation because texts function as important media of cultural transmission (Hunt, 2005; Nikolajeva, 2014). Translators must balance readability, pedagogical considerations, and cultural representation, while globalization has increased the circulation of culturally diverse children's literature across borders (Oittinen, 2000; Shavit, 2009). This issue is particularly relevant to ASEAN children's story anthologies, where stories from different local cultures may be translated through English before being rendered into Indonesian, producing multiple layers of cultural mediation (ASEAN Secretariat, 2017). Although Korneenkova (2025) examined ideological tendencies in Indonesian–English–Russian translation, her study focused on a single literary work, leaving opportunities to further investigate relay translation and ideological shifts in multilingual ASEAN children's literature.

The study remains situated within a limited linguistic configuration and does not explore multilingual ASEAN contexts. While Polina's study contributes significantly to understanding CSI treatment across languages, it primarily examines a single relay sequence (Indonesian → English → Russian). It does not investigate multilingual configurations where multiple ASEAN languages interact with Indonesian and English in varying translation directions. There remains limited research examining how translation ideology operates within multilingual children's literature involving multiple ASEAN languages, Indonesian, and English simultaneously. Moreover, previous studies on translation ideology predominantly focus on bilingual contexts (Hastürkoğlu, 2020). The analysis often centers on one source language and one target language, limiting the scope of ideological comparison.

Research on children's literature tends to prioritize domestication strategies for pedagogical purposes, yet rarely examines how ideological shifts occur across multilingual or relay translation stages (Korneenkova et al., 2025). Although studies such as Korneenkova's (2025) have examined culture-specific items within relay translation sequences, little attention has been paid to how translation ideology functions in multilingual ASEAN children's anthologies involving diverse source languages (Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Timor-Leste) that are mediated into Indonesian and English through both direct and relay processes. This gap is significant because ASEAN children's anthologies represent multiple cultural systems simultaneously (Fernandes, 2006).

However, in multilingual relay contexts, accuracy may be influenced by earlier translations, complicating equivalence assessment. Translation equivalence, as emphasized by Nida and Taber (1982), Newmark (1988), and Baker (1992), requires reproduction of meaning within contextual appropriateness. Yet equivalence becomes increasingly complex when the source text has already undergone mediation. In multilingual ASEAN anthologies, equivalence is negotiated not only between source and target languages but across multiple cultural interfaces (Fernandes, 2006).

Therefore, this study positions itself at the intersection of translation ideology, culture-specific items, multilingual translation, and relay translation within children's literature. Unlike previous research limited to bilingual or single-sequence relay translation, this study investigates how ideological tendencies emerge and transform when ASEAN cultural narratives are translated into Indonesian and English through both direct and mediated pathways. This research contributes theoretically by expanding translation ideology analysis into multilingual ASEAN contexts. In practice, it provides insight into how children's literature can preserve cultural diversity while remaining accessible and acceptable to young Indonesian readers. Ultimately, translation of culture-specific items in ASEAN children's anthologies is not merely a technical activity. It is a cultural, ideological, and educational act. Understanding translation ideology in multilingual and relay contexts is essential to ensure that cultural diversity is represented responsibly and accurately for future generations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Children's storybooks function not only as entertainment but also as educational and cultural media that introduce children to moral values, local traditions, and cultural knowledge. Stories originating from oral traditions and folklore preserve community values because they are transmitted across generations and reflect local wisdom (Kurniawan, 2018; Finnegan, 1992; Danandjaja, 2005). Children's literature encompasses various genres, including folklore, fairy tales, myths, legends, fantasy, science fiction, short stories, and picture books, making it difficult to define as a single literary genre (Nodelman, 2008). Its narratives generally employ accessible language,

relatively simple structures, engaging characters, and educational messages appropriate to children's cognitive and emotional development (Wirnitzer, 2007, as cited in Baseiria, 2016; Thompson, 2007, as cited in Saptaningsih, 2020).

The translation of children's storybooks involves more than transferring linguistic messages from the source language to the target language because translators must consider readability, cultural representation, educational purposes, and the characteristics of young readers (Newmark, 1988; Nikolajeva, 1998, as cited in Saptaningsih, 2020). Children's literature is also shaped by ideological, moral, ethical, religious, and pedagogical norms, which influence how cultural elements are represented in the target text (Puurinen, as cited in Hornby, Pöhhacker, & Kaindl, 1994). This issue becomes particularly significant when translating culture-specific items because translators may preserve source-cultural elements through foreignization or adapt them to target-cultural expectations through domestication (Venuti, 1995). Therefore, the translation of children's literature involves an ongoing negotiation between cultural preservation and accessibility, particularly because young readers may be less tolerant of unfamiliar cultural elements than adult readers (Puurinen, as cited in Hornby, Pöhhacker, & Kaindl, 1994).

The *ASEAN Children's Story Anthology* provides a relevant context for examining this negotiation because it presents stories from ASEAN cultures in native languages, Indonesian, and English. As a pedagogical and intercultural medium, the anthology introduces young readers to cultural diversity, social norms, customs, and moral values from Southeast Asia (Nikolajeva, 2014). Previous studies have examined culture-specific items and translation ideology in different literary and multimodal contexts, including *Cantik Itu Luka*, the Yogyakarta Calendar of Events, *Sarimin* webtoon, and *Battle of Surabaya*, demonstrating that translation techniques such as borrowing, transference, literal translation, adaptation, and description may reflect different ideological orientations (Korneenkova et al., 2025; Zahro et al., 2025; Hadi et al., 2023; Martendi et al., 2022). However, these studies generally focus on single-language or bilingual materials and do not specifically address the complexities of multilingual children's literature involving multiple cultural contexts.

This gap indicates the need for research that examines how culture-specific items are categorized, translated, and ideologically negotiated in a multilingual ASEAN children's story anthology. Drawing on Newmark's classification of culture-specific items and Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization, the present study investigates the relationship between CSI categories, translation techniques, and translation ideology in the selected stories. The study also considers the multilingual nature of the anthology and the specific demands of translating literature for young readers, thereby extending previous research beyond individual Indonesian literary works and other text types. Consequently, this research contributes a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural meanings are preserved, adapted, or transformed when ASEAN children's stories are mediated across languages and presented to target readers.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using a sequential explanatory design, which integrates quantitative and qualitative analyses. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), mixed methods provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem by integrating numerical and textual data. In this study, the quantitative phase was conducted first to determine the frequency and percentage of Culture-Specific Items (CSIs), translation techniques, and translation ideologies. The quantitative findings were subsequently followed by qualitative analysis to provide a deeper explanation and interpretation of the identified patterns (Creswell et al., 2003). The integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings was conducted at the interpretation stage to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how cultural elements were translated.

Data and Source Data

The data in this study consisted of words and phrases containing Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) identified in *A Multilingual Anthology of ASEAN Children's Stories*. The data sources comprised eleven children's stories representing ASEAN countries, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Timor-Leste, Brunei Darussalam, and Vietnam. The analysis focused on the source texts (L1), their Indonesian translations (L2), and their English translations (L3). A total of 150 CSIs were identified and analyzed based on their cultural categories, translation techniques, and translation ideologies.

Data Collection Technique

The data were collected through several systematic steps. First, the source texts, Indonesian translations, and English translations were read carefully to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the stories and their cultural elements. Second, Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) were identified and classified based on Newmark's (1988) classification. Third, all identified CSIs were selected using total sampling. Finally, the identified data were recorded systematically in a data sheet containing the source text, target texts, CSI category, translation technique, and translation ideology.

Research Instruments

The main instrument in this study was the researcher, who was responsible for identifying, classifying, and analyzing the Culture-Specific Items (CSIs), translation techniques, and translation ideologies. As the primary instrument, the researcher carried out the data identification and interpretation processes based on the theoretical frameworks applied in the study. A data sheet was used as a supporting instrument to organize and document the collected data systematically. The data sheet contained information on the source text, Indonesian and English translations, CSI categories, translation techniques, and translation ideologies.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the identified Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) were classified according to Newmark's (1988) cultural categories. Second, the translation techniques used to render the CSIs were identified based on Molina and Albir (2002), Newmark (1988), and Doni Jaya (2020). Third, the translation ideology underlying the translation of the CSIs was determined using Venuti's (1995) concepts of domestication and foreignization, supported by Doni Jaya's (2020) classification of translation tendencies. The quantitative findings were then presented in terms of frequency and percentage distributions. Finally, the qualitative analysis was conducted to interpret the findings and explain the relationship between the identified translation techniques and the ideological choices reflected in the translations.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study was established based on the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was maintained through systematic data analysis and consultation with the research supervisor to ensure that the identification and interpretation of the data were appropriate. Dependability was established by applying consistent analytical procedures and theoretical frameworks to all data. Confirmability was ensured by grounding the interpretations in the research data and relevant theoretical frameworks rather than in the researcher's personal opinions. Transferability was supported by providing clear descriptions of the research context, data sources, analytical procedures, and theoretical frameworks, enabling readers and future researchers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Classification of Culture-Specific Items

As discussed in Chapter II, Newmark (1988, as cited in Kuleli, 2020) classifies culture-specific items into five categories: Ecology, Material Culture, Social Culture, Organizations and Customs, and Gestures and Habits. This classification was applied to identify and categorize the culture-specific items found in *A Multilingual Anthology of ASEAN Children's Stories*. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of each category of culture-specific items identified in the anthology.

Table 1. The Frequency and the Percentage of the Culture-Specific Items

Category of CSIs	Frequency	Percentage
Material Culture	61	40.67
Ecology	40	26.67
Social Culture	38	25.33
Organization and customs	11	7.33
Gestures and Habits	-	
Total	150	100

The findings in Table 1 show that Material Culture is the most dominant category, accounting for 61 data or 40.67% of the total 150 culture-specific items. This category mainly consists of cultural elements related to everyday life, such as local food, clothing, traditional objects, buildings, and other material aspects represented in the ASEAN children's stories. For example, references to a traditional food, a locally specific item of clothing, or a culturally distinctive object represent material culture because their meanings are closely associated with the daily life and cultural practices of a particular ASEAN community. The high frequency of this category indicates that the anthology introduces ASEAN cultural diversity largely through concrete cultural elements that can be encountered in characters' everyday experiences.

The Ecology category is the second most frequent category, with 40 data or 26.67%, followed by Social Culture, with 38 data or 25.33%. Ecological items include culturally relevant references to natural environments, plants, animals, geographical features, and other aspects of the natural surroundings described in the stories, whereas social culture includes elements related to occupations, social relationships, social activities, and culturally specific ways of life. For instance, a reference to a particular local plant, animal, or geographical environment can reflect the ecological characteristics of an ASEAN region, while a culturally specific social activity or occupation can represent how members of a community interact and organize their daily lives. The relatively high occurrence of these categories demonstrates that the anthology represents culture not only through physical objects but also through the natural and social environments in which the stories take place.

The category of Organizations and Customs occurs less frequently, with 11 data or 7.33%. The relatively low frequency suggests that the stories contain fewer references to formal institutions, political or administrative organizations, religious institutions, official titles, or culturally specific ceremonies and traditional practices. Nevertheless, the presence of this category demonstrates that institutional and customary aspects of ASEAN culture are also represented in the anthology, although they are not as prominent as material, ecological, and social elements. In contrast, no data were classified under Gestures and Habits, indicating that the stories did not contain gestures or habitual expressions that sufficiently matched Newmark's (1988) definition of this category.

Overall, the distribution demonstrates that the representation of ASEAN cultures in the anthology is primarily constructed through concrete and everyday cultural elements, particularly material objects, ecological features, and social practices. This pattern is relevant to children's literature because concrete cultural references can introduce cultural knowledge through elements that are embedded naturally in the characters' experiences and story settings. The findings therefore indicate that the anthology functions not only as a collection of children's narratives but also as a medium for introducing cultural diversity through accessible representations of everyday life in ASEAN communities.

Translation Techniques

In this study, the translation techniques used to analyze the culture-specific items were identified based primarily on Doni Jaya's (2020) classification, which includes transference, naturalization, literal equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, notes, expansion, and omission. In addition, generalization, particularization, and modulation proposed by Molina and Albir (2002) were identified in the data, while cultural equivalent and couplet proposed by Newmark (1988) were also included because some culture-specific items were translated using culturally equivalent expressions or a combination of techniques. These techniques were examined in two translation stages: from the source language (L1) into Indonesian as the intermediary language (L2), and from Indonesian (L2) into English as the final target language (L3). Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage of the translation techniques identified in both translation stages.

Table 2. The Frequency and Percentage of Translation Techniques

No	Translation Technique	L1 => L2		L2 => L3	
				L1 => L3	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	Literal	95	63.33	89	66.92
	Equivalent				
2	Couplet	13	8.67	13	9.77
3	Transference	11	7.33	19	14.29
4	Naturalization	8	5.33	0	0.00
5	Cultural	6	4.00	0	0.00
	Equivalent				

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6	Generalization	6	4.00	0	0.00
7	Descriptive Equivalent	5	3.33	2	1.50
8	Functional Equivalent	2	1.33	1	0.75
9	Notes	1	0.67	1	0.75
10	Omission	1	0.67	0	0.00
11	Expansion	1	0.67	0	0.00
12	Particularization	1	0.67	3	2.26
13	Modulation	0	0.00	5	3.76
	Total	150	100	133	100

In this study, Language 1 (L1) refers to the original source language of the ASEAN children's stories, Language 2 (L2) refers to the Indonesian translation as the intermediary language, and Language 3 (L3) refers to the English translation as the final target language. The analysis was therefore conducted in two stages, namely L1→L2 and L2→L3. A total of 150 translation units containing culture-specific items were identified in the L1→L2 stage, while 133 corresponding translation units were identified in the L2→L3 stage. The difference in the number of units indicates that some culture-specific items identified in the original texts were not retained as separate translation units in the subsequent English translation.

Table 2 shows that Literal Equivalent is the most frequently used technique in the L1→L2 stage, occurring in 95 data or 63.33% of the total data. This technique indicates that the Indonesian translators generally rendered the culture-specific items by maintaining their basic lexical meaning and structure as closely as possible. For example, when a culturally specific food, object, or place name has a relatively direct lexical correspondence in Indonesian, the translator may retain its basic meaning rather than replacing it with a culturally familiar Indonesian expression. The frequent use of Literal Equivalent therefore suggests that the Indonesian translations tend to preserve the semantic content of the source cultural references while making them understandable in the intermediary language.

The use of Couplet and Transference in the L1→L2 stage, with 13 data (8.67%) and 11 data (7.33%), respectively, further demonstrates that cultural elements were not always translated through a single technique. Transference, for example, allows a culture-specific term to be retained in the Indonesian translation, particularly when replacing it with an Indonesian equivalent could reduce its cultural specificity. Couplet, on the other hand, combines two translation techniques to address a cultural item more comprehensively; for example, a culturally specific term may be retained through transference while additional information is provided through another technique. These choices suggest that the translators sometimes prioritized the preservation of cultural identity while simultaneously considering the comprehensibility of the Indonesian target readers.

Other techniques in the L1→L2 stage occur at considerably lower frequencies. Naturalization appears in 8 data (5.33%), while Cultural Equivalent and Generalization each occur in 6 data (4.00%). Descriptive Equivalent occurs in 5 data (3.33%), whereas Functional Equivalent, Notes, Omission, Expansion, and Particularization occur only once or twice. For example, a culture-specific item may be translated through Descriptive Equivalent when there is no direct Indonesian term and the translator needs to explain the item through its function or characteristics. Similarly, Cultural Equivalent may be used when a source-culture item can be replaced by an Indonesian cultural expression with a similar communicative function, demonstrating that the translator sometimes adapts the cultural reference to facilitate comprehension.

The L2→L3 stage shows a similar but not identical pattern. Literal Equivalent remains the dominant technique, occurring in 89 data or 66.92%, followed by Transference with 19 data (14.29%) and Couplet with 13 data (9.77%). The continued dominance of Literal Equivalent suggests that the English translation generally maintains the lexical and semantic content established in the Indonesian intermediary text. However, the increase in Transference from 11 data (7.33%) in L1→L2 to 19 data (14.29%) in L2→L3 is particularly noteworthy because it indicates a stronger tendency to retain certain Indonesian or ASEAN cultural terms in the English translation rather than replacing them with culturally familiar English expressions.

For example, when an Indonesian translation retains a local term for a traditional food, cultural object, or social practice, the English translator may transfer the same term into the English text instead of replacing it with a generalized English expression. This choice allows English-speaking readers to encounter the original cultural term and therefore maintains a visible connection to the source culture. In this case, Transference can be interpreted as a

foreignizing tendency, particularly when the retained term carries cultural information that would otherwise be reduced through substitution. However, the presence of Transference alone is not sufficient to conclude that the entire translation adopts a foreignization ideology because ideological orientation must be interpreted in relation to the function and combination of techniques used across the data.

The use of Couplet in 13 data (9.77%) also indicates that some cultural references required more than one strategy in the L2→L3 stage. A translator may, for instance, retain a culturally specific term through Transference while providing an explanatory element through another technique. Such a combination demonstrates that the translation process involves negotiation between cultural preservation and reader accessibility. Therefore, the ideological tendency of a particular translation should be interpreted from the actual treatment of the cultural item rather than inferred solely from the name or frequency of a translation technique.

Several techniques used in the L1→L2 stage do not occur in the L2→L3 stage, including Naturalization, Cultural Equivalent, Generalization, Omission, and Expansion. The absence of these techniques suggests that the English translation did not frequently replace, generalize, or remove the cultural information established in the Indonesian intermediary text. Instead, the English translator appears to rely more heavily on Literal Equivalent, Transference, and Couplet. At the same time, Modulation appears only in the L2→L3 stage, with 5 data (3.76%), indicating that some Indonesian cultural expressions were reformulated from a different perspective when rendered into English.

Overall, Literal Equivalent is the dominant translation technique in both L1→L2 and L2→L3. However, its dominance should not be interpreted automatically as evidence of foreignization or domestication. The ideological orientation of the translation needs to be determined by examining how each technique treats the cultural identity of the source item: retention of an unfamiliar cultural term through Transference may indicate foreignization, whereas replacement with a familiar target-culture expression through Cultural Equivalent or Functional Equivalent may indicate domestication. Therefore, the findings suggest that the translation of culture-specific items in *A Multilingual Anthology of ASEAN Children's Stories* involves a negotiation between preserving cultural specificity and ensuring accessibility for Indonesian and English-speaking children, with the final ideological tendency depending on the cumulative treatment of the cultural items across the translation process.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Material Culture was the most dominant category of Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) in *A Multilingual Anthology of ASEAN Children's Stories*, particularly through references to traditional foods such as *nasi lemak*, *kuih karipap*, and *banh chung*. Ecology and Social Culture were also frequently represented through references to natural environments, plants, animals, and social life, while the stories' illustrations provided additional visual context for understanding cultural references. In terms of translation techniques, Literal Equivalent was the most frequently used in both L1→L2 and L2→L3 translation stages, indicating that many cultural elements were translated while maintaining their basic meaning and form. Foreignization was identified as the dominant translation ideology, particularly through the retention of cultural terms such as *Batik*, *Pawikan*, and *Tarik Upih*, demonstrating the translators' effort to preserve the cultural identity of the ASEAN source texts.

Based on these findings, future researchers are encouraged to examine children's translations from additional perspectives, particularly readability, accuracy, and acceptability, to determine whether the preservation of cultural elements remains accessible to child readers. Further studies may also investigate how illustrations interact with translated cultural items because the multimodal nature of children's storybooks can influence readers' understanding of unfamiliar cultural references. For translators, the findings suggest the importance of maintaining a balance between preserving cultural identity and ensuring that translations are clear and appropriate for children. Future translation practices should therefore consider both linguistic accuracy and cultural representation so that translated children's literature can effectively communicate ASEAN cultural diversity without compromising readers' comprehension.

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