

## Lexical transformation in the translation of cultural terms: a case study of Ayu Utami's *Saman*

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the lexical transformations employed in the English translation of cultural terms in Ayu Utami's Indonesian novel Saman. Focusing on a domain – Indonesian-English literary translation – that remains underexplored, this research analyzes the strategies used to render culture-specific items (CSIs) accessible while preserving their cultural meaning. Employing Newmark's taxonomy of translation procedures within a qualitative comparative framework, the analysis identified 277 cultural terms. These were categorized as follows: social culture (24.91%); material culture (16.97%); ecology (15.16%); and gestures (9.39%), with the largest category comprising organization, customs, and religion (33.57%). From these, 119 instances of lexical transformation were analyzed. Generalization emerged as the predominant strategy (40.34%), suggesting a primary aim of enhancing reader clarity. This was followed by specification (23.53%), compensation (15.97%), and modulation (12.61%), while metaphorical transformation (4.20%) and differentiation (3.36%) were least frequent. The findings indicate that while lexical transformation is indispensable for cross-cultural meaning transfer, its application – particularly the reliance on generalization – can attenuate cultural specificity. The study underscores the translator's critical role in negotiating between cultural fidelity and target-culture comprehensibility. By elucidating these nuanced decision-making processes, this research contributes to translation studies by delineating culturally oriented strategies specific to Indonesian literature. It ultimately posits that literary translation functions as a complex act of intercultural mediation, significantly influencing the global reception of works like Saman.*

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### Introduction

Translation is a complex process that extends beyond the literal transfer of words between languages; it also demands careful consideration of the cultural and linguistic contexts in which those words are embedded. Lexical and grammatical transformations are integral to this process, involving modifications in linguistic structures to achieve equivalence between the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL) (Nida & Taber, 1982; Catford, 1965). The primary aim of such transformations is to ensure that the message of the Source Text (ST) is conveyed clearly and accurately in the Target Text (TT), while preserving the cultural nuances of the original. Translators, therefore, function as mediators who make strategic linguistic choices to bridge

gaps between cultures and facilitate comprehension for the target audience (Alghamdi, 2016, Nugroho & Shepia 2019). Differences in grammatical systems, semantic structures, and cultural norms often necessitate these shifts, compelling translators to balance fidelity to the source with accessibility in the target language (Mounin, 1998; Dabaghi & Bagheri, 2012).

Lexical transformation operates as a bridge between two linguistic and cultural systems. It encompasses strategies such as generalisation, specification, compensation, modulation, and metaphorical transformation, each serving distinct functions in the preservation of meaning (Widiastuty & Winarti, 2021; Haque & Sajarwa, 2024). Recent

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scholarship emphasises that, in literary translation, these strategies are not merely technical operations but interpretive acts shaped by the translator's cultural positioning and the target audience's expectations (Kurniawan et al., 2023). Such transformations are especially critical when translating culturally rich Indonesian literature into English, where the target readership may be unfamiliar with the underlying cultural references, idioms, and symbolic meanings. While these strategies are often necessary to enhance comprehensibility, they risk reducing specificity and potentially altering the intended meaning, thereby presenting an enduring challenge in translation practice (Sutaji & Nugroho, 2024).

Ayu Utami's *Saman* represents a landmark in Indonesian literature, renowned for its candid exploration of female sexuality, a theme considered taboo in Indonesia during the 1990s, and its critical portrayal of the socio-political realities under the New Order regime (Sa'adiyah, 2025). Beyond its literary significance, the novel has had a profound influence on public discourse regarding gender, politics, and religion, becoming a focal point in contemporary Indonesian cultural debates. Its English translation, undertaken by Pamela Allen of the University of Tasmania, sought to preserve the novel's cultural and emotional depth while rendering it accessible to an international readership. However, this process inevitably required the adoption of lexical transformation strategies that reshaped specific cultural expressions to suit the target audience's interpretive framework, sometimes at the expense of cultural precision (Le, 2024). A notable example is the rendering of *bambu betung*, a specific species of bamboo, into the broader term bamboo, illustrating an act of generalisation that facilitates comprehension but reduces cultural specificity.

Previous research has examined lexical and grammatical transformations in diverse translation contexts, including Indonesian-English (Rahmadani & Sajarwa, 2018) Sutaji & Nugroho, 2024; Haque & Sajarwa, 2024), English-Russian (Rishatovnanasibullova et al., 2017), and French-Indonesian (Ningtyas & Sajarwa, 2017) language pairs. Studies on cultural terms have explored translation techniques (Widiastuty & Winarti, 2021),

strategies (Anisa & Sajarwa, 2022), explicitation (Dewanti & Sajarwa, 2023), translation quality (Nurnani et al., 2018), and cultural equivalence (Istiqomah et al., 2024); Asmilia et al., 2025). Research specifically on *Saman* has addressed its sexual politics (Oktivita, 2009), semiotic features (Hikmah, 2014), historical references, and polyphony (Andhika, 2016). Nevertheless, no study has systematically investigated the English translation of *Saman* through the lens of lexical transformation, nor examined the implications of such transformations for cultural equivalence. This gap justifies the present study.

Studies on *Saman* in translation have highlighted how Indonesian cultural terms undergo various lexical transformations to balance readability and semantic accuracy. Hilman (2015) examined the cultural lexicons in the English version of *Saman* (translated by Pamela Allen, 2005) and identified strategies such as loan words, cultural equivalents, functional equivalents, and addition, noting that these often resulted in semantic shifts. Similarly, Aziz (2017) investigated the treatment of culture-specific items in *Saman* and found that the translation tended to favor domestication over foreignization, employing strategies such as cultural equivalent, omission, globalization, and naturalization. Together, these studies emphasize that the translation of *Saman* into English relies heavily on lexical transformation strategies to mediate cultural meanings while striving to maintain the source text's nuances (Hilman, 2015) Utami, 2005; Aziz, 2017).

In light of these considerations, the present study aims to investigate the types and frequencies of lexical transformations in the English translation of *Saman* and to analyse their implications for maintaining cultural equivalence between the source and target texts. The research addresses two core questions: what types of lexical transformations are employed in the translation of *Saman* into English, and how do these transformations influence the preservation or modification of cultural meaning. By answering these questions, the study contributes to Indonesian-English translation scholarship by integrating linguistic analysis with cultural interpretation, offering insights that are relevant for

translators, scholars of Indonesian literature, and researchers in cultural studies

### Method

This study employs a qualitative-comparative research design with descriptive analysis, grounded in Newmark's (1988) model of cultural term classification and translation procedures. A qualitative-comparative approach, as defined by (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017), seeks to describe and interpret phenomena within their natural context, enabling a deep understanding of meaning as embedded in real-life settings. The comparative element facilitates systematic cross-linguistic analysis between the source language (Indonesian) and the target language (English), focusing on identifying similarities and differences in translation strategies. While qualitative methods dominate the analysis, a limited quantitative component is incorporated to calculate the frequency distribution of lexical transformation types, thereby supporting qualitative interpretations with numerical evidence.

The primary data comprises Ayu Utami's novel *Saman* (1998, Indonesian edition) and its English translation by Pamella Allen. Recognised as a landmark in Indonesian literature, *Saman* combines narrative innovation with culturally rich depictions of belief systems, customs, ecological references, material artefacts, and social institutions (Andhika, 2016). Its critical and commercial success for selling over 100,000 copies in the original Indonesian edition underscores its cultural significance. Pamela Allen, an academic specialising in Indonesian literature at the University of Tasmania, brings scholarly expertise and literary sensitivity to the translation, making it a purposeful act of cultural mediation for an international audience. The cultural density and thematic complexity of *Saman*, combined with the

### Results and Discussion

Culture is a way of life that is manifested differently in a society and expressed through a particular linguistic medium (Newmark, 1988). From the research conducted, 298 cultural terms in the novel *Saman* were identified, which are further

absence of prior research on its English translation from a lexical transformation perspective, make it an appropriate and timely case for this study.

Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, the Indonesian version of *Saman* was read thoroughly to identify cultural terms, classified according to Newmark's (1988) five categories of culture: ecology, material culture, social culture, organisations-customs-reigion, and gestures/habits. Second, corresponding segments in the English translation were examined to locate equivalent expressions, noting any lexical transformation strategies applied. Third, the identified terms were recorded in a coding sheet that included the original term, its translation, transformation type, and cultural category. This systematic documentation ensured traceability and consistency in subsequent analysis.

The analysis proceeded in three phases. In the classification phase, cultural terms were categorised into Newmark's (1988) cultural domains and linked to one or more lexical transformation strategies, drawing on Proshina's (2008) framework for cross-cultural translation. In the interpretation phase, representative examples were selected to illustrate each transformation type, with particular attention to cases involving semantic shifts, generalisation, or specification. Finally, in the evaluation phase, the cultural implications of these transformations were examined in light of translation equivalence theory, identifying potential shifts in meaning and cultural nuance. Frequency counts for each transformation type were compiled into tables and visualised in charts, providing a quantitative overview to complement the qualitative findings.

categorized into five types of cultural terms: 1) ecology; 2) material culture; 3) social culture; 4) organization, customs, & religion; and 5) gestures. The findings of the categorization of cultural terms are presented in the table below.

**Table 1. Cultural Term Categorization Findings**

No.	Category	Percentage	Frequency
1.	Organization, customs, & religion	33.57%	93
2.	Social culture	24.91%	69
3.	Material culture	16.97%	47
4.	Ecology	15.16%	42
5.	Gestures	9.39%	26
Total		100%	277

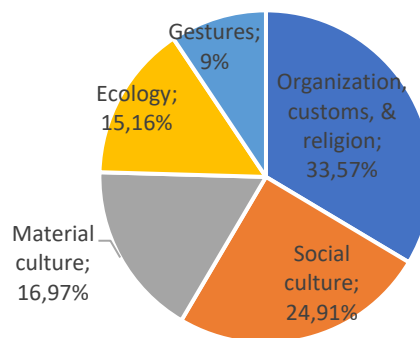


Figure 1. Culture Term Categorization Findings

**Table 2. Lexical Transformation Findings**

No	Category	Percentage	Frequency
1.	Generalization	40,34%	48
2.	Specification	23,53%	28
3.	Compensation	15,97%	19
4.	Modulation	12,61%	15
5.	Metaphorical Transformation	4,20%	5
6.	Differentiation	3,36%	4
Total		100%	119

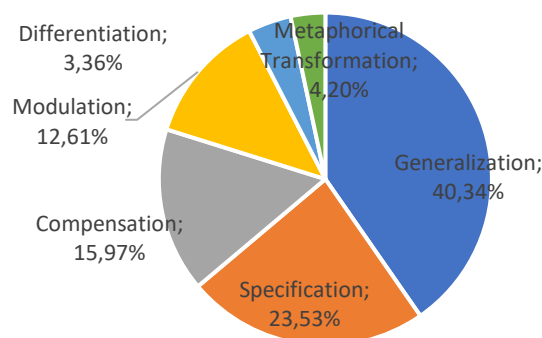


Figure 2. Lexical Transformation Findings

**Discussion**

The results are explained in two parts: the categorization of cultural terms found in the novel *Saman* based on Newmark’s (1988) theory, and the presentation of lexical

transformations that occur in the translation of the Indonesian novel *Saman* into English using Proshina’s (2008) theory.

*Lexical Transformation of Cultural Terms in Saman*

Based on the theory proposed by Newmark, there are five main categories in translating vocabulary that contain cultural content, namely: ecology, material culture, social culture, organization, and gestures and customs. Through an analysis of the translation of cultural terms using Newmark’s approach, it

was identified that all five categories were present in *Saman*. These categories include social culture, material culture, ecology, gestures and customs, and organization. The following data presents the findings related to the translation of these cultural elements.

*Organization, Customs, and Religion*

This category includes organizations, customs, activities, procedures, and concepts that are political, administrative, religious, and artistic (Newmark, 1988). In *Saman*, 102 data findings encompass these concepts. The following examples illustrate cultural terms in this category. In data (1), *asar* refers to the mandatory prayer time for Muslims in the late afternoon, between the time of *zuhur* prayer and sunset (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan

Bahasa, 2024). In *Saman*, the time of *asar* is shown when Leila, the female protagonist, finishes her work as a journalist covering an event on a boat in the late afternoon. In data (2), *adzan* or *azan* refers to the call to perform the congregational prayer in a mosque or prayer room in Islam (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2024) The absence of the *adzan* refers to Leila being on the boat and not hearing the call.

## Datum 1

Tsu : "Perempuan itu mencukupkan pekerjaannya setiba *asar*."

TSa : "She finished her work by *four o'clock, a time usually marked by the call to afternoon prayer*."

## Datum 2

Tsu : "Meski tak ada *Adzan*."

TSa : "But the **summons** was absent here."

## Datum 3

Tsu : "Tetapi, seseorang yang berpengaruh, barangkali ayahnya dan teman-teman pejabat itu, menjamin Rosano sehingga dia bisa menjadi *tahanan luar*."

TSa : "But someone with influence - maybe his father and his cronies - acted as guarantor for Rosano and as a result he got a *suspended sentence*."

The lexical transformation found in datum (1) is compensation, a strategy involving the addition of explanatory elements in the target text to replace meaning lost in direct translation. *Asar* is a specific Islamic prayer time occurring in the late afternoon, a concept with no direct equivalent in the target language (TL). To bridge this gap, the translator chooses *four o'clock* and supplements it with the clause *a time usually marked by the call to afternoon prayer*. This approach allows the TL reader to understand both the temporal and cultural significance of the event, which would otherwise be lost. The strategy aligns with (Widiastuty & Winarti, 2021) recommendation that explanatory additions be used for culturally specific religious terms to ensure clarity and cultural retention.

On the other hand, the lexical transformation in datum (2) is generalization.

## Social Culture

In his explanation, Newmark (1988) stated that various forms of sports, arts, and activities carried out during leisure time can be classified into the category of **social culture**. In addition, professions or types of work also fall under this category. An example of data that contains elements of culture classified under **social culture** is presented as follows. One such example is the term *raden ayu*, which carries

Generalization is the replacement of a word with a narrower meaning with a word that has a broader meaning. *Adzan* or *azan* is another Islamic term, referring to the call or summons for Muslims to perform their prayers. When translated into the target language, it becomes "summons." This transformation occurs because there is no direct equivalent in the TL, and the translator uses the word "summons," which has a broader meaning of a call or invitation. This broader meaning allows the readers or speakers of the TL to grasp the meaning of *adzan* in the source language. Such use of generalisation supports Haque and Sajarwa's (2024) assertion that broader lexical choices can increase accessibility while inevitably simplifying the source culture's nuance.

The lexical transformation in datum (3) is **modulation**. Modulation is a shift in meaning or perspective made by the translator to adjust the meaning to fit the cultural context or legal system in the target language. In this case, the term *tahanan luar* in Indonesian refers to a person undergoing detention but not physically incarcerated in prison. In the target text, this term is translated as "a suspended sentence," which in the Western legal system means that a person is found guilty but the sentence is postponed, typically under certain conditions. The translator's choice reflects an effort to convey a functionally equivalent meaning, even though it is not a literal translation, because in the English-speaking legal system, there is no direct equivalent to *tahanan luar*. This modulation is necessary for the readers in the target language to understand the intended meaning and function of the cultural term. Newmark (1988) emphasizes that modulation is an essential procedure when literal equivalence cannot convey the same thought, enabling the translator to render the intended message more naturally in the target culture.

Javanese cultural significance and indicates the status of a noblewoman.

## Datum 4

Tsu : "Ibunya yang masih *raden ayu* adalah sosok yang selalu bisa dijelaskan dengan akal"

TSa : His mother, a *Javanese woman of noble origin*, was a figure who could

not always be described in rational terms.

Datum 5

Tsu : “Bapaknya tak punya **darah ningrat.**”

TSa : “His father had no **noble blood** in his veins.”

Datum 6

Tsu : “**Lik Dira** datang dari Jawa.”

TSa : “**Aunt Dirah** was from Java.”

In datum (4), the translator employs a lexical transformation in the form of compensation. The term *raden ayu* is not translated literally but is explained through the phrase *a Javanese woman of noble origin*. This is done because the term *raden ayu* does not have a direct equivalent in English that can capture all the cultural meanings, social status, and ethnic identity embedded in the term. The added information compensates for the loss resulting from the non-literal translation of *raden ayu*, thus enabling the target text reader to understand the character's social status contextually. This approach aligns with Aghaei and Khoshsaligheh's (2020) view that when translating culturally embedded titles, translators often need to provide explicit descriptions to maintain the socio-cultural context. While the translation is longer, it ensures the target reader understands the prestige and heritage implied by the original term.

*Material Culture*

The category of **material culture** encompasses elements such as food and beverages, clothing, transportation, housing, and buildings. An example of data containing terms that fall under the category of material culture is presented as follows.

Datum 7

Tsu : “Angin kencang datang dari laut dan **baling-baling**”

TSa : “The wind was gusting, from the sea and from **the helicopter blades.**”

Datum 8

Tsu : “Sebungkus **supermie** untuk lauk berlima.”

TSa : “One packet of **instant noodles** was the main course for all five of them.”

On the other hand, the lexical transformations occurring in datum (5) and data (6) are generalization lexical transformations. Generalization involves replacing a word with a narrower meaning with a word that has a broader meaning. *Darah ningrat* in data (5) is a Javanese cultural term that refers to a group of people who hold a high social position or status within Javanese society. When translated into the target language, it becomes *noble blood*. This transformation occurs because there is no precise equivalent in the target language, prompting the translator to use the term *noble blood*, which means "noble lineage."

*Lik Dirah* in datum (6) refers to a social relationship in Javanese culture, where the term *Lik* refers to *Bulik*, meaning the younger sibling of one's mother or father. When translated into the target language, it becomes *Aunt* because there is no direct equivalent for that social relationship term. The translator opts for the word *Aunt*, which has a broader meaning, referring to the female sibling of one's parents. This transformation is intended to help the target language reader grasp the meaning of *ningrat* in the source language. As noted by Haque and Sajarwa (2024), this kind of generalisation is often necessary in kinship term translation, especially when the cultural relevance of the distinction may not significantly impact the narrative for the TL audience

Datum 9

Tsu : “Sebuah rumah yang terbangun dari kayu dan beratap **rumbia**”

TSa : “a house built of wood with a **thatched palm roof**”

The lexical transformation found in datum (7) is a specification lexical transformation. Specification occurs when the translator uses a more specific term in the target language to clarify a more general meaning in the source text. In this data, the word *baling-baling* in the source language is translated as *the helicopter blades* in the target language. The word *baling-baling* in Indonesian is more general and can refer to the blades of an airplane, a ship, a fan, or other rotating devices. However, in

English, the translator chooses to specifically mention *helicopter blades* to clarify the type of blades being referred to, providing a more precise context for the target readers. Such specification aligns with Kurniawan et al. (2023) observation that narrowing generic terms in the TL can improve semantic accuracy, especially when context allows for unambiguous identification.

The lexical transformation found in datum (8) is a generalization lexical transformation. Generalization occurs when the translator uses a more general or widely recognized term in the target language compared to the specific term in the source language. This choice is consistent with Haque and Sajarwa's (2024) findings that translators often substitute local institutional or cultural terms with global equivalents to maximise communicability. In this data, *supermie* in the source language (SL) is translated into *instant noodles* in the target language (TL). *Supermie* is actually a specific brand of instant noodles in Indonesia, which carries a strong cultural nuance for local readers. However, the translator chooses *instant noodles*, a broader and internationally recognized term that refers to the general category of the product, without limiting it to a single brand. By applying this transformation, the translator sacrifices the brand-specific reference but ensures that the target readers can easily understand the meaning without being confused by a culturally unfamiliar brand name. This transformation

### Ecology

Newmark states that elements such as flora, fauna, hills, wind, seasons, land areas, rice fields, and forests fall under the category of ecological culture. He emphasizes that geographic differences within a region lead to the diversity of flora, fauna, and seasons across different areas. Examples of data containing cultural terms that fall under the ecological category are presented as follows. Data examples (10), (11), and (12) represent the ecological category with a subcategory of flora. The Duku fruit is a popular tropical plant widely distributed in Indonesia, with the largest producing area being South Sumatra (BPTP Sumsel, 2011). The Duku fruit has a bitter seed, which makes the Duku seed less favored by the community. In data (4), the Duku seed

demonstrates an expansion of meaning from a culturally bound, brand-specific item (*supermie*) to a generic term (*instant noodles*). Such a choice facilitates accessibility and avoids cultural miscommunication, enabling the translation to be understood by a wider audience beyond the Indonesian context.

The lexical transformation found in datum (9) is a specification lexical transformation. Specification occurs when the translator uses a more specific term in the target language to replace a more general term in the source language. This approach aligns with Widiastuty & Winarti's (2021) assertion that adding detail in translation can be essential when the TL audience lacks prior knowledge of the cultural artefact described. In this data, the word *rumbia*, referring to a type of roof made from the leaves of the *rumbia* tree, is translated as *a thatched palm roof* in the target language. The word *rumbia* in Indonesian refers specifically to the type of leaf used for making traditional roofs. However, the translator chooses to use *palm* and *thatched* in English to provide a clearer picture of the type of material and construction technique used for the roof. By using *a thatched palm roof*, the translator adds detail about the materials used (palm tree) and the construction method (woven or thatched), thereby clarifying the context for target language readers. This transformation enriches the information in the target text by providing more specific details that can be understood by an international audience.

represents the bitterness caused by a feeling of bitterness reflected in the previous clause, "because that afternoon left behind bitterness."

Datum 10

Tsu : "Sebab siang itu menyisakan kegetiran, seperti biji **duku** yang tergigit lalu tertelan"

TSa : "Because the legacies of that day were a taste of bitterness, **the sting of bile** in the back of the throat."

Datum 11

Tsu : "Yang paling dekat rumpun-rumpun pisang dan **bambu betun**"

TSa : "The closest ones were clumps of banana palms and **bamboo**"

Datum 12

Tsu : “Bunyi tonggeret dan **orong-orong**”

TSa : “The din made by the cicadas and the **crickets**.”

The lexical transformation found in datum (10) is a metaphorical transformation. A metaphorical transformation occurs when the translation process in *TSa* identifies the similarity of ideas or concepts by using a group of words that do not have their literal meaning in *Tsu*. Proshina (2008) explains that *TSa* can be metaphorized to balance words or phrases marked with a particular stylistic sign or to express the emptiness of an expression in *Tsu*. The metaphorical transformation found in data (4) demonstrates the omission of metaphorical expressions, specifically proverbs, from *Tsu* to *TSa*. The Duku seed that was bitten and swallowed is a figurative expression in Indonesian, meaning a very bitter taste caused by the feeling of bitterness experienced by *Saman*. When translated into English, the translator replaced this metaphorical term with the clause *the sting of bile*, meaning a bitter taste that spreads like the sensation of bile. This resulted in a metaphorical transformation in the novel.

On the other hand, datum (11) and datum (12) represent lexical transformations through generalization found in the translation of the *Saman* novel. Generalization is a lexical transformation that occurs when the translator changes a word or phrase from the source language (SL) that is more specific to a more general term in the target language (TL) (Proshina, 2008). This approach aligns with

#### *Gestures and Custom*

In the context of cultural translation, the categories of gestures and customs encompass cultural expressions in the form of attitudes, social titles, and everyday customs that do not always have a direct equivalent in other languages. One example is the term *raden ayu*, which carries Javanese cultural significance and indicates the status of a noblewoman.

Datum 13

Tsu : “Lelaki yang suci itu **menampar** sehingga perempuan itu tergelincir.”

TSa : “The pious man **raised his hand and struck the woman** to the ground.”

Rishatovnanasibullova et al. (2017) who emphasize that lexical transformations such as generalization help translators ensure interpretability across cultural boundaries. In addition to the purpose of expanding meaning, generalization can also occur when a word or phrase with a specific meaning in the SL is irrelevant or considered unimportant in the TL. As a result, the word or phrase may not be translated by the TL speaker (Proshina, 2008).

In data (11), the term *bambu betung* is translated as *bamboo*. *Bambu betung* is a type of bamboo found in Indonesia, characterized by a dense clump, thick stems, and commonly used in construction (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2024). In *TSa*, the translation of *bambu betung* is *bamboo*. While *bambu betung* is a specific type of bamboo in Indonesia, this information may not be significant for the target audience, so the translator generalized the term to *bamboo*. A similar situation occurs in data (12), where the term *orong-orong*, which specifically refers to *mole crickets*, is transformed into the more general word *crickets* in the translation. This choice is consistent with Haque and Sajarwa's (2024) findings that translators often substitute culturally specific terms with global categories to maximise communicability. However, as they caution, this generalization reduces the ecological and cultural specificity of the original, since the distinct sound of *orong-orong* is not fully conveyed by the broader term *crickets*. The transformation simplifies the understanding for the *TSa* reader, but at the expense of losing some elements of local natural heritage.

Datum 14

Tsu : “Ia juga rela mencuci kaki Lukas sebagai tanda **sembah bakti istri** pada suami.”

TSa : “She even agreed to wash Lukas’ feet as a sign **wife’s devotion** to her husband.”

Datum 15

Tsu : “Eyang **mengerenceng minyak** dari kelapa dan ibu meminumnya dan kelak bayi lahir dengan lancar.”

TSa : "Grandmother **made a special brew from coconut oil**, which Mother drank to ensure a smooth birth."

The lexical transformation found in datum (15) is a **modulation transformation**. Modulation, as defined by Proshina (2008), occurs when the translator changes the angle of description or the way the information is framed in the target language. This strategy is often applied to make the meaning more natural and accessible for the target audience. In this case, the source text uses the single verb "menampar" ("to slap"), while the target text renders it as "raised his hand and struck". The addition of "raised his hand" is not present in the source, but it reframes the action by highlighting the preparatory gesture before the strike. According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), such modulation is effective in conveying a functionally equivalent meaning, since it provides the target readers with a clearer visualization of the act. This transformation thus shifts the expression from a straightforward description of the action (*slap*) into a more dynamic portrayal that emphasizes both the gesture and the consequence. The modulation enhances the dramatic effect and ensures that the intensity of the action is fully perceived by English readers.

The lexical transformation identified in datum (14) is a differentiation transformation. Differentiation occurs when a lexical item in the source language, which carries a broad or culturally embedded meaning, is rendered in the target language by highlighting only one aspect of its semantic range. As Proshina (2008) explains, differentiation is employed when a direct equivalent would be too vague or when the translator selects the most salient feature of the term to fit the communicative context of the translation. In this case, the source expression

#### *Implications for Translation Equivalence of Cultural Terms*

The lexical transformations identified in *Saman* have direct implications for achieving translation equivalence, particularly in the case of culturally specific items. In many instances, strategies such as generalisation and modulation lead to a shift from formal equivalence toward dynamic or functional equivalence, as proposed by Nida and Taber

"tanda sembah bakti istri pada suami" is translated as "a sign wife's devotion to her husband." The phrase "sembah bakti" in Indonesian conveys cultural connotations of reverence, ritual respect, and loyalty within the marital relationship. In contrast, the English rendering "devotion" narrows the meaning to emotional loyalty and commitment while omitting the ritualistic and cultural undertones. This shows how differentiation functions as a lexical transformation, ensuring semantic clarity and readability in the target text while inevitably reducing the cultural richness of the source expression.

The lexical transformation found in datum (13) is a modulation transformation. Modulation occurs when the translator changes the perspective or way of conveying meaning in the target language to make it easier for the target reader to understand. This reframing aligns with Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) view that modulation is essential for conveying functionally equivalent meaning when direct translation would result in obscurity. In this case, the phrase "Eyang mengerenceng minyak dari kelapa dan ibu meminumnya" is translated as "Grandmother made a special brew from coconut oil, which Mother drank." The word "mengerenceng", which specifically refers to the process of extracting or processing coconut oil in Javanese/Indonesian, is not translated literally. Instead, the translator modifies it to "made a special brew", which conveys the end result and purpose of the process, rather than the technical process itself. This shows a shift in the way information is presented, from a process to a result. This transformation helps English readers understand the context without needing to know the cultural practices or local terms in detail.

(1982). This shift occurs when the translator prioritises conveying the intended meaning and cultural function of the source term over maintaining its original linguistic form. While such strategies enhance the comprehensibility of the target text for readers unfamiliar with the source culture, they may simultaneously result in partial loss of cultural nuance (Catford, 1965).

Conversely, strategies like compensation and specification allow the translator to reintroduce lost meaning through

elaboration, thereby restoring a closer degree of semantic and pragmatic equivalence (Proshina, 2008). These findings are consistent with recent research by Istiqomah et al. (2024) which highlights that equivalence in cultural term translation is not a fixed point but a dynamic negotiation between accuracy, cultural fidelity, and target audience accessibility.

### Conclusion

This study has examined the lexical transformations applied in the English translation of cultural terms in Ayu Utami's *Saman*, drawing on Newmark's (1988) categorisation of cultural terms and Proshina's (2008) framework for translation strategies. The analysis identified five categories: ecology, material culture, social culture, organisation, and gestures and customs, all of which were present in the novel. Across these categories, the translator employed strategies such as generalization, specification, modulation, metaphorical transformation, and compensation. Each of these strategies shaped the way meaning was conveyed, influencing how cultural information was retained, modified, or omitted in the target text.

The findings highlight that translation equivalence in culturally bound terms is not

Consequently, the implications of this study suggest that maintaining equivalence in translating cultural terms requires a flexible application of strategies, guided by the translator's cultural competence, awareness of the target audience, and the communicative purpose of the translation.

static but negotiated, requiring translators to balance semantic accuracy, cultural fidelity, and audience accessibility. Strategies like generalisation and modulation are often prioritised for target reader comprehension, sometimes at the expense of cultural specificity, while specification and compensation allow for the retention or restoration of meaning through elaboration and contextualisation. These results contribute to the ongoing discourse on equivalence in translation studies by demonstrating that the translator's choices reflect both linguistic constraints and cultural considerations. Future research could extend this analysis to other literary works or explore comparative studies across multiple translators to further understand how cultural and linguistic backgrounds shape translation strategies and outcomes.

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