


Cultural Loss and Mediation in Translating *Para Priyayi* into German

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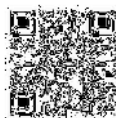
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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini mengkaji penerjemahan unsur budaya material dalam novel *Para Priyayi* karya Umar Kayam yang diterjemahkan ke dalam bahasa Jerman dengan judul *Ein Hauch von Macht* oleh Peter Sternagel. Penelitian ini berfokus pada fenomena *cultural loss* dan mediasi budaya dalam konteks penerjemahan sastra. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan menganalisis 146 data unsur budaya material yang diidentifikasi dalam korpus dan mengklasifikasikannya berdasarkan teknik penerjemahan yang dikemukakan oleh Molina dan Albir (2002). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 63 data mengalami *cultural loss*, yang diterjemahkan melalui teknik *borrowing*, *particularization*, *generalization*, *omission*, dan *reduction*. Sebanyak 41 data termasuk kategori mediasi budaya dengan menerapkan teknik *adaptation*, *description*, *amplification*, *modulation*, dan *substitution*. Sementara itu, 42 data lainnya bersifat netral dengan menggunakan teknik *literal translation*, *established equivalent*, dan *transposition*. *Cultural loss* terjadi ketika tidak ditemukan padanan langsung dalam budaya sasaran atau ketika teknik penerjemahan yang digunakan kurang sesuai, sedangkan mediasi membantu pembaca sasaran memahami makna budaya yang kompleks. Temuan ini menegaskan peran penerjemah sebagai mediator budaya serta pentingnya kepekaan budaya dan kesadaran konteks untuk mempertahankan kekayaan makna dalam penerjemahan sastra.

This study examines the translation of material culture elements in Umar Kayam's novel Para Priyayi into German in its translated version Ein Hauch von Macht by Peter Sternagel. The research focuses on the phenomena of cultural loss and cultural mediation in the context of literary translation. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the study analyzes 146 instances of material culture identified in the corpus and classifies them according to the translation techniques proposed by Molina and Albir (2002). The findings reveal that 63 instances exhibit cultural loss, translated through borrowing, particularization, generalization, omission, and reduction. A total of 41 instances fall into cultural mediation, applying adaptation, description, amplification, modulation, and substitution. Meanwhile, the remaining 42 instances are neutral, using literal translation, established equivalent, and transposition. Cultural loss occurs when no direct equivalent is found in the target culture or when the chosen translation technique is less appropriate, whereas mediation strategies assist target readers in understanding complex cultural meanings. These findings underscore the translator's role as a cultural mediator and highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity and contextual awareness in preserving the richness of meaning in literary translation.



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INTRODUCTION

There are two major challenges that translators face in interlingual translation. The first is the linguistic challenge, as translation inevitably involves at least two languages. Differences in language systems and structures require the translator to understand both the source and target languages thoroughly, so that target readers can access the same meaning and experience as those of the source text. Translation engages two distinct linguistic systems—source and target languages—across both grammatical (linguistic) and cultural (non-linguistic) domains. Therefore, translation is far from being a straightforward phenomenon (El-Dali, 2011).

The second challenge is cultural, since language and culture are inseparably linked. Language serves not only as a system of symbols to communicate meaning but also as a medium through which a community articulates its cultural identity. In this context, culture encompasses values, beliefs, norms, and social practices that influence human behavior and interaction (Sapir, 1921). This relationship underscores the fact that language is not merely a tool to express thought—it also shapes thought itself. Building on this idea, Whorf introduced the theory of linguistic relativity, suggesting that the structure of language influences how individuals perceive and conceptualize the world. As a result, translating a text is not merely a matter of replacing words from one language with another, but also involves transferring the cultural framework embedded in the original text.

Translation of culture-bound terms becomes a problem when the target language (TL) does not have the same cultural concept as the term from the source language (SL), so the exact equivalent meaning cannot be found (Kuncara, 2017). Therefore, words or expressions in SL will lose some of their meaning or message when translated to TL if there is no proper equivalent in the culture of the TL. To address these linguistic and cultural challenges, translators must be equipped with strong knowledge and skills. They need to be highly competent in both the source and target languages, as well as capable of interpreting and conveying meanings with precision (Bassnett, 2014; Brislin, 1976). Linguistic proficiency, practical experience, and cultural sensitivity are essential components of effective translation.

Newmark (1987) outlines five categories of cultural elements to aid in understanding cultural references in texts: ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations, and gestures or habits. Each category poses unique challenges in translation, especially when concepts do not have direct equivalents or carry different connotations in the target culture. Within these categories, *material culture*—such as food, clothing, dwellings, and transportation—plays a significant role in shaping social identity and is often deeply embedded in local traditions. Translating these elements requires not only linguistic equivalence but also cultural interpretation to maintain meaning.

In line with this, Aixela (1996) uses the term *culture-specific items* (CSIs) to refer to elements whose function and meaning are tied to a particular culture and are difficult to translate directly. Aixela proposes two macro-strategies for translating CSIs: *conservation* (preserving the source culture reference through techniques like borrowing, calque, or literal translation) and *substitution* (adapting or replacing the item to suit the target culture through techniques like adaptation, generalization, or description). This framework is highly relevant to the discussion of cultural loss and mediation, as it directly addresses the translator's choices when faced with terms lacking equivalents in the target language.

Several previous studies have examined the dynamics of cultural loss and mediation in literary translation, particularly concerning culture-specific items. For example, Hermawan and Suryawinata (2019) found that cultural loss frequently occurs when translating traditional food, clothing, and ceremonies due to the absence of direct equivalents in the target language. Farahsani et al. (2023) highlighted that the strategic application of techniques such as adaptation, description, and amplification can minimize cultural loss and enhance target reader comprehension. Similarly, Hadi et al. (2020) demonstrated that consistent application of translation techniques at lexical and structural levels improves translation quality, especially with culturally embedded terms. Research by Mala and Tanjung (2017) on the translation of cultural aspects in *Para Priyayi* into *Ein Hauch von Macht* revealed the frequent use of borrowing, literal translation, and description, while Puspitasari (2021) emphasized that modulation and borrowing are particularly effective for mediating cultural gaps between Indonesian and German literary texts.

While these studies offer valuable insights, most have focused primarily on identifying the types and frequency of translation techniques. Few have examined in depth the interplay between cultural loss and mediation, especially in the specific context of material culture. Furthermore, the influence of translation ideology—such as the choice between foreignisation and domestication—on the handling of culture-bound terms has received limited scholarly attention. As a result, the relationship between cultural loss, mediation strategies, and translator ideology in translating material culture remains underexplored.

This study offers a new contribution by focusing specifically on the translation of material cultural elements in *Para Priyayi* and its German version *Ein Hauch von Macht*, analyzing not only the occurrence of cultural loss but also the mediation strategies used to address it. By examining 146 instances of material culture, this research highlights how the translator's technique selection and ideological stance influence the preservation or transformation of cultural meaning. This combined focus on material culture, cultural loss, mediation, and translation ideology provides a more comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural literary translation from Indonesian into German, filling a gap left by previous studies.

The primary aim of this study is to identify instances of cultural loss in the translation, analyze the cultural mediation strategies employed by the translator, and evaluate the techniques used to render material cultural elements so that target readers may gain a similar understanding and experience as those of the source text readers. Additionally, this study examines the translation ideology adopted by the translator in handling the material cultural aspects of *Para Priyayi*. This inquiry is significant to the fields of translation studies and intercultural communication, as it offers insights into how cultural meanings are negotiated, transformed, or even erased in the process of translation.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the translation of material culture elements from Indonesian (Source Text/ST) into German (Target Text/TT) in Umar Kayam's novel *Para Priyayi* and its German translation *Ein Hauch von Macht*. *Para Priyayi* was published by PT Pustaka Utama Grafiti in 2009, in its thirteenth printing (first published in 1992), with a total of 337 pages. *Ein Hauch von Macht*, translated by Peter Sternagel, was published by Horlemann Verlag in 1999, with a total of 336 pages. The data consist of linguistic units, in the form of words, phrases, or clauses that contain material culture elements, including food, clothing, household utensils, and means of transportation. The primary sources of data are the two novels, while the secondary sources comprise supporting literature such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous studies related to the translation of cultural aspects. The data were collected through careful reading of both texts, followed by the identification and documentation of all material culture elements based on the classifications proposed by Newmark (1987) and Koentjaraningrat (1974). The identified data were analyzed to determine the translation techniques employed, drawing on the typology of Molina and Albir (2002) with the addition of omission as a category not included in their original framework. The analysis further explored instances of *cultural loss* and the cultural mediation strategies applied by the translator, as well as the implications of these techniques for the comprehension of target text readers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis reveal that translating material cultural elements from the novel *Para Priyayi* into its German version *Ein Hauch von Macht* presents significant challenges, largely due to the absence of direct equivalents in the target language. Out of the 146 identified instances of material culture, 63 cases clearly exhibited cultural loss lexically, semantically, or symbolically. Meanwhile, 41 entries employed modulation as a strategy to bridge the cultural gap. An additional 42 entries were translated using other techniques such as borrowing, amplification, adaptation, established equivalent, and generalization. Although these entries do not fall under the categories of loss or modulation, they nonetheless reflect the translator's efforts to mediate cultural meaning by considering linguistic and cultural context. Some terms were even retained in their original form as a foreignization strategy, while others were adapted for easier comprehension by target readers. This demonstrates that strategies for translating material culture are not limited to just two primary approaches, but instead encompass a

variety of techniques adjusted to the term type, cultural specificity, and communicative intent of the target text.

Mediation techniques were shown to be prominently used by the translator, manifested through strategies such as description, amplification, adaptation, substitution, and modulation. These strategies allowed the translator to clarify or contextualize culturally unfamiliar terms for the target audience.

Table 1. Distribution of Mediation Strategies

No	Strategy	Quantity
1	Adaptation	1
2	Description	25
3	Amplification	13
4	Substitution	1
5	Modulation	1
Total		41

ST: Celana kolor komprang hitam dari kain kastup, celana terpercaya para petani, digantung berderet berdampingan dengan kutang-kutang perempuan berwarna jambon, putih, dan hitam

TT: *Da hängen in langen Reihen die weiten schwarchen Hosen aus Nessel, die die Bauern nach wie vor lieben, und daneben für die Bäurinnen die derben Büstenhalter in rosa, weiß, oder schwarz.*

(*"Hanging there in long rows are the wide, dark trousers made of nettle cloth, still favored by the farmers, and next to them, for the farm women, the sturdy brassieres in pink, white, or black."*)

In the data, the translator employed the adaptation technique, rendering the material aspect, specifically the everyday clothing worn by farmers into a culturally equivalent item in the target culture, thereby facilitating the target readers' understanding of the intended meaning. Adaptation is used when a direct equivalent in the target language does not exist, or when a literal translation would fail to convey the same cultural resonance. In this case, the *celana kolor komprang hitam dari kain kastup*, loose black shorts made from coarse cotton traditionally worn by Javanese farmers was translated into an item of clothing familiar to the German audience. While the literal image may differ slightly, the choice captures the functional and social role of the garment in the original context. This strategy ensures that the target readers can visualize and relate to the item without being hindered by unfamiliar terminology, thus maintaining both the communicative intent and the cultural relevance of the source text.

ST: Sayur lodeh

TT: *Sayur Lodeh, das traditionelle Gemüse in Kokosmilch*
(*"Sayur lodeh, the traditional vegetables in coconut milk."*)

The translation technique used in the data is description, which allows target readers to easily grasp the meaning intended by the author. In this case, the translator successfully bridges the cultural gap between the source and target cultures. Sayur lodeh is a traditional vegetable dish typically made from long beans, squash, eggplant, and young melinjo leaves, cooked in a coconut milk broth. Its spicy yet savory flavor is highly favored by the local community. Naturally, the cooking method and ingredients may not be familiar to readers from different cultural backgrounds. However, with the right choice of translation techniques, these differences in meaning can be effectively bridged.

ST: klobot

TT: Blatt Klobott

"corn husk or maize husk"

The amplification technique used by the translator helps target readers understand the meaning through the addition of the word *Blatt*, which means "leaf." This additional word functions as an immediate clue, allowing readers unfamiliar with the original term to visualize the object being referred to. In Javanese, *klobot* specifically refers to the husk or outer wrapping of corn. This is not merely an agricultural byproduct, it holds a distinct cultural role. Traditionally, *klobot* is used as natural wrapping for various Javanese foods such as *botok* or *bothok klobot*, which are steamed dishes made from grated coconut and spices. Beyond culinary use, dried *klobot* has historically been utilized to roll hand-made cigarettes (*rokok klobot*), a practice once common among rural communities. This multifunctional role of *klobot*, spanning both food culture and everyday life might be completely unfamiliar to readers from

other cultures. Therefore, by using amplification to add the word *Blatt*, the translator not only clarifies its physical form but also subtly opens a pathway for readers to infer its practical uses, even if the deeper symbolic or cultural nuances are not explicitly stated.

Meanwhile, loss in the translation of cultural aspects occurs through the use of techniques such as borrowing, particularisation, generalisation, omission and reduction. The omitting technique is not included in Molina and Albir’s taxonomy. Omission differs from reduction in that what is omitted is a significant element; its removal during the translation process results in the intended meaning of the source text not being conveyed. Consequently, target readers do not share the same experiential understanding as source text readers.

Table 2. Distribution of Cultural Loss Strategies

No	Strategy	Quantity
1	Borrowing	48
2	Particularisation	2
3	Generalisation	7
4	Omission	5
5	Reduction	1
Total		63

Borrowing is indeed an appropriate technique to preserve the original cultural flavor of the source text. However, excessive use of borrowing may hinder target readers from understanding the intended meaning conveyed by the author. For example:

ST: botok ikan teri

TT: Botok Ikan Teri

(*Javanese dish of steamed anchovies mixed with spiced grated coconut, wrapped in banana leaves*).

Botok ikan teri is a traditional Javanese steamed dish consisting of anchovies mixed with grated young coconut and aromatic spices, typically wrapped in banana leaves before cooking. Target readers may not necessarily be able to grasp the intended meaning due to the choice of translation technique used. When a term is simply borrowed without explanation, it risks becoming an unfamiliar and opaque reference for readers outside the source culture. Therefore, for culturally distant elements—especially those tied to specific local traditions, objects, or practices—it is advisable to apply a translation technique that not only preserves the cultural identity of the term but also provides sufficient contextual information. This approach enables the translator to bridge the cultural gap effectively, ensuring that the target audience can access both the literal meaning and the cultural significance embedded in the original expression.

ST: *soko guru*

TT: *die Säulen*

Particularisation in the translation of cultural elements often results in a significant narrowing of meaning. The *soko guru* is a crucial structural and symbolic element in traditional Javanese architecture, especially in *joglo* and *pendopo* buildings. The term comes from the Javanese words *soko* meaning “pillar” and *guru* meaning “main” or “principal”, thus *soko guru* refers to the main pillars that support the building. The *soko guru* consists of four large wooden pillars located at the center of the structure, functioning as the primary support for the roof, particularly the highest parts such as the *tumpang sari* and *brunjung*. These pillars are usually made of durable teak wood and each stands on a *umpak*, a trapezoidal stone base that prevents moisture from seeping into the wood and helps distribute structural load. Above the *soko guru*, there are other architectural components like *tumpang sari* and *sunduk* that form essential parts of the *joglo*’s roof framework.

Beyond its structural role, the *soko guru* carries deep symbolic meaning in Javanese culture. The four pillars represent balance, stability, and harmony with the four cardinal directions, and reflect life values rooted in cosmic and social equilibrium. The installation of the *soko guru* is often accompanied by ritual ceremonies such as *slametan* or *tumpengan*, as it is believed to be the spiritual center of the house where protective forces reside.

In Javanese philosophical thought, *soko guru* also serves as a metaphor for key figures in life, such as parents, leaders, or other fundamental pillars of social and cultural order. Thus, the *soko guru* is

not merely an architectural element, but also a symbol of local wisdom and the philosophical worldview of the Javanese people.

If *soko guru* is translated merely as *die Säulen* (pillars), the target text readers may only grasp the literal meaning without any insight into its cultural or symbolic significance. Omitting such cultural references in translation can lead to a serious loss of meaning, as essential connotations and local wisdom embedded in the term are not conveyed, leaving the target audience with a fragmented or incomplete understanding of the source culture.

ST: Kiriman oleh-oleh kami mereka jawab dengan oleh-oleh balasan yang berupa mangga santok Magetan satu keranjang dan juadah serta dodol nangka.

TT: *Unsere Aufmerksamkeiten beantworteten sie ihrerseits mit einem Korb Manggas aus Magetan und einem Päckchen Dodol aus Nangka-Früchten, mit kandierten Nankas.*

(They responded to our gifts in turn with a basket of mangoes from Magetan and a package of *dodol* made from jackfruit, along with candied jackfruit.)

The words *santok* and *juadah* are omitted and not translated in the TT, resulting in a loss of meaning that prevents TT readers from having the same reception experience as ST readers. Although both omission and reduction involve the removal of certain elements, they differ in their impact on meaning. In reduction, the omitted element is relatively insignificant and does not affect the overall meaning within the context, allowing TT readers to have an experience comparable to that of ST readers. In contrast, omission removes a culturally significant element, thereby diminishing the richness of meaning and undermining the nuanced understanding conveyed in the source text. Omission often occurs when the translator perceives the term as too obscure for the target audience, when there is no close equivalent in the target language, or when space and stylistic constraints influence the translation decision. However, such omissions can lead to a considerable cultural gap, especially in the translation of material culture.

ST: pisang goreng panas

TT: *geröstete Bananen*
(fried banana)

Fried bananas are a snack that is typically served hot. In the data above, the word *panas* ("hot") is omitted in the TT; however, this omission does not significantly diminish the intended meaning conveyed by the ST author because the concept of fried bananas generally implies that they are served warm or hot, even without explicitly stating it. In many cultures, fried foods are understood to be consumed shortly after cooking, so the target readers can still infer the same sensory experience, crispy texture and warmth associated with the dish. This case illustrates that not all omissions necessarily lead to cultural loss; when the omitted element is already culturally or contextually implied in the TT readers' frame of reference, the communicative impact remains intact. Thus, the reduction of explicit information here does not hinder comprehension or alter the overall cultural and culinary image the author intended to convey.

There are 42 data entries categorized as neutral or ambivalent. The translation techniques used for these instances include *literal*, *established equivalent*, and *transposition*. These techniques sufficiently assist TT readers in understanding the intended meaning, yet they remain neutral—neither leaning toward mediation nor indicating cultural loss.

Table 3. Distribution of Neutral Strategies

No	Strategy	Quantity
1	Literal	27
2	Established Equivalent	12
3	Transposition	3
Total		42

ST: ...atau kadang-kadang juga menumbuk beras dan memisahkan bekatul dari beras.

TT: *...gelegentlich auch Reis zu stampfen und den Mahlstub von den Körnen zu trennen.*
("occasionally also to pound rice and separate the chaff from the grains.")

Through the use of the literal translation technique, TT readers can easily understand the meaning because the words or phrases from the ST are rendered directly into the TL without significant modification, while still producing grammatically correct and semantically clear expressions in the target language. This technique is often applied when the linguistic structures and cultural concepts in both languages are closely aligned, ensuring that the translation remains faithful to the original form and meaning without creating confusion.

ST: *nyamikan pagi*

TT: *Morgenimbiss*

(morning snack)

Morgenimbiss means morning meal or morning snack, making it equivalent to *nyamikan pagi* and easily understandable for TT readers. In Indonesia, it is common for people to enjoy light snacks in the morning, often between breakfast and lunchtime. These snacks, known as *jajan pagi* or *camilan pagi*, can range from sweet treats to savory bites and are usually sold by street vendors, in traditional markets, or prepared at home. Popular choices include *pisang goreng* (fried bananas), *klepon* (glutinous rice balls filled with palm sugar), *lemper* (sticky rice with chicken or beef filling), and *lontong isi* or *arem-arem* (rice cakes with savory fillings). Morning snacks are often accompanied by hot beverages such as tea or coffee, and they are enjoyed not only for their taste but also as part of a social ritual—sharing food with family members, neighbors, or colleagues. This practice reflects the Indonesian value of togetherness and hospitality, where eating is as much about connection as it is about nourishment.

The established equivalent technique involves replacing a term or expression from the ST with a recognized, widely accepted equivalent that already exists in the TL. This approach is especially useful for terms that have a stable, conventional translation in the target culture—often because they are shared concepts or have become familiar through repeated exposure. By using an established equivalent, the translator ensures that the target audience can immediately grasp the intended meaning without requiring additional explanation, as the expression has already been culturally adjusted and accepted in the TL.

ST: Kemudian sederet penjual makanan, jajan, dan minuman.

TT: *Und dann natürlich die Verkaufsstände mit Essen, Naschwerk, und Getränken.*

(And then, of course, the stalls offering food, sweet treats, and drinks.)

The phrase *penjual makanan* is translated as *die Verkaufsstände*, which means “sales stalls”, a term commonly used in the German language. This demonstrates the application of the transposition technique, namely changing the grammatical form from a verb-based noun phrase (*penjual makanan*) to a compound noun (*Verkaufsstände*) in accordance with the norms of the target language. This change does not alter the original meaning but makes the sentence structure more natural and aligned with the grammatical conventions of German. The use of transposition in this data preserves the meaning of the ST while adapting it to the target language norms, resulting in a translation that feels natural and does not cause any loss of meaning.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that translating material cultural elements from the novel *Para Priyayi* into its German version *Ein Hauch von Macht* involves complex linguistic and cultural challenges, especially in handling culture-bound terms. Out of 146 material culture entries analyzed, 63 entries exhibited cultural loss, 41 entries employed mediation strategies, and 42 entries were categorized as neutral. Cultural loss mainly occurred when no direct equivalents existed in the target culture or when the translator applied techniques such as borrowing, generalization, or omission without sufficient contextual explanation. Examples such as *tarub* and *soko guru* illustrate how symbolic and social meanings embedded in cultural elements may be diminished if not adequately mediated.

Conversely, several terms, such as *blangkon*, *sayur lodeh*, and *klobot*, were effectively mediated through strategies including description, amplification, adaptation, substitution, and modulation, enabling target readers to access both the literal meaning and part of the cultural nuance intended in the source text. Modulation was particularly effective in adjusting semantic perspectives, while amplification and description provided necessary cultural context.

Overall, the findings highlight that the translation of material culture requires more than literal language transfer; it demands cultural sensitivity, strategic technique selection, and awareness of the

translator's ideological stance. The translator functions as a cultural mediator, bridging not only linguistic gaps but also preserving and conveying the symbolic, historical, and social dimensions of the source culture to the target audience.

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