


## Translation Loss and Gain in the Translation of Nias Cultural Jewelry Terms into English

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 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v4i3.5450>

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: 10 Jan 2026

Revised: 23 Jan 2026

Accepted: 09 Feb 2026

#### Kata Kunci:

Kehilangan  
Penerjemahan,  
Keuntungan  
Penerjemahan, Perhiasan  
Budaya Nias,  
Penerjemahan Lintas  
Budaya

#### Keywords:

Translation Loss,  
Translation Gain, Nias  
Cultural Jewelry, Cross-  
Cultural Translation



### ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti fenomena loss dan gain dalam penerjemahan istilah perhiasan budaya Nias ke dalam bahasa Indonesia dan Inggris. Penelitian menggunakan desain kualitatif dengan sumber data berupa buku dan katalog dari Museum Pusaka Nias. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif dan komparatif untuk mengidentifikasi contoh loss dan gain pada kedua bahasa sasaran. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan terdapat sembilan kasus gain, yang umumnya berupa penambahan kata deskriptif seperti "golden," "silver," "ivory," atau "battle" untuk memperjelas makna bagi pembaca non-Nias. Sedangkan loss terjadi dalam lima kasus, terutama karena penghilangan informasi gender, unsur budaya, atau simbolik, seperti hilangnya kata "durian" pada terjemahan bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menegaskan tantangan dalam penerjemahan lintas bahasa dan budaya serta pentingnya menyeimbangkan keterbacaan dan kesetiaan budaya dalam menerjemahkan istilah warisan budaya.

*This study aimed to investigate translation loss and gain in the translation of Nias cultural jewelry terms into Indonesian and English. A qualitative research design was employed, using museum books and catalogues from Museum Pusaka Nias as data sources. Data were analyzed through descriptive and comparative qualitative methods to identify instances of loss and gain in both target languages. The results revealed nine instances of gain, mostly involving the addition of descriptive words such as "golden," "silver," "ivory," or "battle" to clarify meaning for non-Nias readers. Loss occurred in five cases, primarily due to omissions of gender, cultural specificity, or symbolic elements, such as the absence of the word "durian" in English translations. The study highlights the challenges of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural translation and emphasizes the importance of balancing accessibility and cultural fidelity in translating heritage terms*



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**How to Cite:** Afore Tahir Harefa, et al (2026). Translation Loss and Gain in the Translation of Nias Cultural Jewelry Terms into English, 4(3) 20097-20102. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v4i3.5450>

## INTRODUCTION

Translation is a complex cognitive and cultural activity, as it involves not only replacing words but also conveying meaning, context, and cultural nuance from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). This complexity becomes even more pronounced when cultural terms must be translated into more than one target language. Sonou and Babalola (2023) define translation as a mental process in which the meaning of a discourse is conveyed into another language. Freeman (2009) emphasizes that translation is essential for disseminating texts and knowledge, ensuring shared understanding across languages and cultures. Similarly, Melby et al. (2014) state that translation enables the creation of target content corresponding to source content, allowing individuals to access ideas, thoughts, and emotions from different societies or historical periods. Schulte (2012) also highlights that accurate and appropriate transfer of meaning is crucial for clear communication across languages, cultures, and time.

In practice, translation often faces challenges that cause inaccuracies or inconsistencies. Dinata (2023) notes that inconsistencies occur even in automated translation tools, where words translated accurately may still fail to convey full contextual understanding. Differences between SL and TL can also lead to gaps in meaning, coherence, and pragmatic function. Na'imah (2022) explains that the SL is the language in which ideas, expressions, and meanings first arise, while the TL is the language into which these ideas are rendered. Huong et al. (2025) add that SL and TL can function as L1 or L2 depending on translation direction. Omitting sentences or expressions can result in the loss of contextual information, reduced coherence, and altered pragmatic effects (Naveen & Trojovsky, 2024; Hadawiyah, 2025).

This phenomenon becomes even more complex in the translation of Nias cultural terms, particularly Nias traditional jewelry, which carries symbolic meanings, social functions, and cultural values. These terms are first translated into Indonesian, where translation loss often occurs because the cultural, symbolic, or social meanings are not fully conveyed. Subsequently, when the same terms are translated into English, translators tend to add explanations or descriptions to clarify the lost cultural meaning, creating translation gain. However, English translations are not always fully accurate; some words or meanings may still be omitted or altered, even though descriptive additions help clarify the terms. By situating this study in the Museum Pusaka Nias, where these cultural artifacts are preserved and displayed, the research engages directly with authentic examples, providing a realistic view of translation challenges and helping ensure that cultural meanings are accurately understood and communicated.

Lurisari (2019) argues that limitations in TL expression can lead translators to reduce or add meaning. Putry and Aprillina (2022) explain that loss of meaning occurs when the translator is unable to convey expressiveness fully, often due to linguistic and extra-linguistic differences between SL and TL. Kembaren (2018) emphasizes that cultural terms may undergo significant loss or gain in connotation during translation. Meanwhile, gain, according to Putry and Aprillina (2022), involves creating new communication or terminology to clarify source terms, and Tiwiyanti & Retnomurti (2016) note that gain can enrich or clarify the source text while enabling languages to adapt during cross-linguistic interaction.

To manage loss and gain, Newmark (1988) proposes twelve translation procedures, including transference, cultural equivalent, neutralisation, literal translation, labeling, naturalisation, componential analysis, deletion, couplet, accepted standard translation, and paraphrase/gloss/notes/classifier. These procedures provide practical strategies for handling meaning differences, especially for culture-specific terms such as Nias jewelry.

Research specifically examining the translation of Nias cultural jewelry terms into both Indonesian and English remains limited, particularly in real-world contexts such as the Museum Pusaka Nias. The phenomenon of loss in Indonesian, as well as gain and occasional loss in English, highlights a unique dynamic in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural translation. Conducting this study in the museum context allows researchers to engage directly with authentic artifacts, ensuring that the analysis reflects real-world translation challenges and contributes to the accurate preservation and dissemination of Nias cultural knowledge. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for ensuring that translators can balance accuracy, expressiveness, and cultural fidelity.

This study analyzes Nias jewelry terms translated into Indonesian and English. By examining patterns of loss and gain in both target languages within the context of the Nias Heritage Museum, this study aims to provide practical insights into how translators can preserve cultural meanings while ensuring clear understanding for cross-language readers. Thus, this study contributes not only to translation studies but also to the documentation and protection of Nias cultural heritage, offering guidance for translators and cultural educators.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to analyze translation loss and gain in the translation of Nias cultural jewelry terms. Qualitative research is appropriate for studies that focus on meaning, interpretation, and context rather than mere numerical measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, qualitative methods rely on text and image data, apply specific steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse research designs, allowing researchers to interpret cultural phenomena comprehensively

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach enables the study to analyze written descriptions and visual representations of Nias jewelry in a systematic and contextual manner.

The research was conducted at the Museum Pusaka Nias, which serves as a primary institution for preserving Nias cultural heritage, including traditional jewelry and its documentation. The museum was chosen as the research locus because it provides official books and catalogues that record Nias jewelry terms along with explanations and translations. Examining data within an authentic institutional setting aligns with Yin's (2018) view that qualitative case-based research should investigate phenomena in real-world contexts.

The research target is the Nias cultural jewelry terms, while the research subjects consist of written texts in the form of museum books and catalogues containing descriptions and translations of these terms into Indonesian and English. The analysis focuses primarily on textual data, while images and illustrations serve as supporting data to strengthen cultural interpretation, consistent with qualitative research practices that integrate textual and visual sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research procedure follows several systematic steps. First, Nias jewelry terms were identified from selected museum texts. Second, translations of these terms into Indonesian and English were documented. Third, the translations were analyzed to identify instances of loss and gain, particularly when cultural meaning, symbolic value, or social function was reduced, altered, or clarified.

Fourth, translation strategies were classified based on Newmark's translation procedures (1988), including transference, cultural equivalent, neutralisation, literal translation, labeling, and paraphrase. Finally, the findings were interpreted within the framework of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural translation. To maintain contextual accuracy, textual data were cross-checked with catalogue notes and visual documentation, supporting validity in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). Data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis combined with comparative analysis between the source language and target languages. Patterns of translation loss and gain were identified by comparing how Nias cultural terms were rendered into Indonesian and English.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents the findings of this study on the translation of Nias cultural jewelry terms into Indonesian and English. It highlights patterns of translation loss and gain, explaining how certain cultural, symbolic, or social elements are altered, omitted, or added in the target languages. This discussion also explores the implications of these translation phenomena in the context of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication, providing insights into the challenges faced by translators in preserving cultural meaning while ensuring clarity for readers.

Tabel 1. Translation Loss & Gain in Nias Cultural Jewelry Terms

No.	Nias (SL)	Bahasa Indonesia (TL1)	English (TL2)	Loss/Gain	Notes on Issue
1.	Bu mbewee ana'a	Kumis	Golden moustache	Gain	Addition of the word "golden" in the English TL
2.	Böbö högö ni'otandru	Hiasan dahi	Golden headband	Gain	Addition of the word "golden" in the English TL
3.	Böbö högö Simamao	Hiasan	Golden headband ornament	Gain	Addition of "golden" and "headband", more complete than SL
4.	Balu-balu wusö	Penutup pusar	Golden navel cover	Gain	Addition of the word "golden" in the English TL
5.	Sawe	Ikat pinggang keluarga bangsawan	Silver belt for royal family	Gain	Addition of the word "silver" in the English TL
6.	Razo mbu	Konde / sanggul	Hairnet with golden trimmings	Gain	Addition of the word "golden" in the English TL

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7.	Sukhu ana'a	Sisir	Golden haircomb	Gain	Addition of the word "golden" in the English TL
8.	Töla Zaga	Gelang untuk laki-laki	Ivory bracelet	Gain	Addition of the word "ivory" in the English TL
9.	Zolo-zolo	Manik-manik	Glass stone	Loss	Meaning is inconsistent, and the form does not match the definition of beads
10.	Zolo-zolo	Kalung dari batu permata	Precious stone necklace	Loss	One SL term → two translations, meaning inconsistency
11.	Töla zaga	Gelang untuk laki-laki	Ivory bracelet	Loss	Gender information lost in the English TL
12.	Töla zaga	Gelang untuk perempuan	Bracelets	Loss	Gender information lost in the English TL
13.	Ni'obowo duria	Anting berbentuk bunga durian	Flowershaped earring	Loss	Cultural element "durian" is missing; typo in "earring"
14.	Öröba uli mbuaya	Pakaian	Battle vest	Gain	Added meaning of the word "battle" in the English TL

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The data analysis shows clear patterns of translation loss and gain in the translation of Nias cultural jewelry terms. Out of 14 terms analyzed, there were 9 cases of gain and 5 cases of loss, with distinct dynamics in the Indonesian and English target languages (TLs).

1. Gain in English TL

- a. Most gain cases occurred in the English TL, for example:
- b. Bu mbewee ana'a → Golden moustache
- c. Balu-balu wusö → Golden navel cover
- d. Sawe → Silver belt for royal family

In these cases, English TL adds material or descriptive information ("golden," "silver," "ivory") that does not exist in the Indonesian TL or the source language (SL). This shows that English translators emphasize clarity for readers unfamiliar with Nias culture, resulting in meaning addition that aligns with context. The Indonesian TL remains more literal and close to the SL, so no addition occurs.

2. Loss in English TL

Some terms show loss of critical information, particularly regarding gender and cultural elements:

- a. Töla zaga → Ivory bracelet: gender information "for men" is missing.
- b. Töla zaga → Bracelets: gender information "for women" is missing.
- c. Ni'obowo duria → Flowershaped earring: the cultural element "durian" is lost, and there is a spelling error ("earring" should be "earring").

These cases indicate that English TL does not always preserve all SL information, even though some descriptive additions are made in other terms. The Indonesian TL preserves gender and cultural forms, making it more accurate to the SL, although sometimes less explanatory for non-Nias readers.

3. Inconsistent Meaning and Multiple Translations

The term Zolo-zolo has different translations in the Indonesian TL ("manik-manik" and "kalung dari batu permata") and the English TL ("Glass stone" and "Precious stone necklace"). This shows ambiguity in the SL, where one cultural term can have multiple meanings. The English TL attempts to adapt meaning but remains inconsistent with the original context. The Indonesian TL is more

literal but produces two different versions, highlighting the challenge of translating polysemous cultural terms.

4. Over-interpretation

Only one case shows over-interpretation (Öröba uli mbuaya → Battle vest), where the word “battle” is not in the SL or Indonesian TL. This indicates that English translators sometimes interpret freely to fit reader expectations but risk altering the original meaning.

### CONCLUSION

This study analyzed translation loss and gain in the translation of Nias cultural jewelry terms into Indonesian and English. The findings reveal that gain occurs more frequently than loss, with 9 instances of added information, clarification, or elaboration in the English TL, often through the addition of descriptive words such as golden, silver, ivory, or battle. These additions serve to make the cultural objects more understandable to non-Nias audiences but can also alter or expand the original meaning.

On the other hand, loss occurred in 5 cases, mainly involving omission of gender, cultural specificity, or original symbolic meaning. Examples include the loss of gender information in translations of Töla Zaga, and the removal of the cultural reference “durian” in Ni’obowo duria. Loss in translation demonstrates the challenge of fully preserving cultural and social context across languages.

Overall, the study shows that cross-linguistic and cross-cultural translation of Nias jewelry terms requires a careful balance between making terms accessible to target audiences (gain) and maintaining cultural fidelity (avoiding loss). The results highlight the importance of translator awareness of cultural, symbolic, and social nuances to minimize unintended loss while ensuring clarity. These findings can inform translators, museum documentation practices, and educational materials that aim to represent Nias heritage accurately in multiple languages.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher would like to express his gratitude to those who have contributed to the implementation of the research and the preparation of this article.

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