



Exploring Morphological and Cultural Adaptation in the Translation of the Legend of Pulau Senua

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the morphological and cultural adaptation strategies used in the English translation of the Indonesian folktale “The Legend of Pulau Senua.” The research aims to identify how affixation, derivation, and culture-specific elements (realia) are transferred across languages. Using a qualitative-descriptive method and translation theories from Nida, Newmark, Venuti, Baker, and Osimo, this paper analyzes selected text segments from both the source and target versions. Findings show that Indonesian morphological features are often simplified or replaced due to structural differences with English. Cultural elements are adapted using strategies such as substitution, explicitation, and idiomatic paraphrasing. Additionally, this study emphasizes how important it is to maintain symbolism and character development to maintain moral and narrative depth. The analysis confirms that effective translation of folktales requires more than linguistic accuracy it also demands cultural sensitivity and narrative awareness.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Adaptation;
Folktale Translation;
Morphological processes;
Realia;
Translation strategies.

ABSTRAK

Studi ini mengeksplorasi strategi adaptasi morfologis dan budaya yang digunakan dalam terjemahan bahasa Inggris dari cerita rakyat Indonesia “Legenda Pulau Senua.” Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana afiksasi, derivasi, dan elemen-elemen budaya (realia) diterjemahkan antar bahasa. Menggunakan metode kualitatif-deskriptif dan teori terjemahan dari Nida, Newmark, Venuti, Baker, dan Osimo, makalah ini menganalisis segmen-segmen teks terpilih dari versi sumber dan versi sasaran. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa fitur morfologis bahasa Indonesia sering disederhanakan atau digantikan karena perbedaan struktur dengan bahasa Inggris. Elemen-elemen budaya diadaptasi menggunakan strategi seperti substitusi, eksplisitasi, dan parafrase idiomatik. Selain itu, studi ini menekankan pentingnya mempertahankan simbolisme dan pengembangan karakter untuk menjaga kedalaman moral dan naratif. Analisis ini mengonfirmasi bahwa terjemahan cerita rakyat yang efektif membutuhkan kepekaan budaya dan kesadaran naratif.

KATAKUNCI

Adaptasi Budaya;
Terjemahan cerita rakyat;
Proses Morphologis;
Realia;
Strategi Terjemahan.

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1. Introduction

Innovation and development in the field of technology offer efficiency, connectedness, and advancement. But as language changes to represent common human experiences, it bears the burden of making sure that these modifications are consistent with social and cultural norms. In addition to promoting understanding, linguistic communication should respect good governance, or ESG, principles and have a positive impact on society and the environment. Translation equivalency is significantly impacted by this all-encompassing approach to language usage (Weber, 2019), especially when two cultures collide, producing a hybrid text in the target culture that includes aspects of the original text.

Trisnawati and Adika (2025) investigated translation morphology by looking at how the subtitles of the film *The Social Dilemma* were formed and how it affected the quality of the translation. They found that accuracy, acceptability, and readability were influenced by morphological elements such as affixation and shortening. However, this study has not looked at traditional texts, such as folklore, which have different language structures and cultural nuances. Therefore, to fill this gap, this study investigates the morphological process in the translation of the folklore "*Legenda Pulau Senua*".

One of Indonesian's most inspiring stories from tradition is *The Legend of Pulau Senua*, which originates from Natuna in the Riau Island. Its bilingual release creates a crucial chance for studies of comparability, although the reality is that it has not attracted a lot of academic attention. The transformation of culturally various language (realia) and technical issues like affixation and derivation from Indonesian into English are indeed the main subjects of this research. The traditional story is a relevant cultural tradition that demands stronger attention around the globe as a story which illustrates the fundamental qualities of Indonesia's seaside towns.

The linguistic adaptation of morphological and historical aspects of *The Legend of Pulau Senua* into English is explored in this research project. It applies the analogy theory of Eugene Nida (2001) to assess how the translator handles formal and dynamic equivalent validity to maintain the message precise and legible for the intended readers. In order to answer whether specific cultural characteristics survive in their original form or transformed to match up to the rules of the target culture, Collins (2016) uses Venuti's (1995) concepts of foreignization and domestication. Meanwhile, Newmark's (1988) framework, offering an analogy between communicative and semantic translation, can be being applied as a tool to examine the strategies explored for communicating cultural meaning.

Particularly, idiom translation is a very difficult procedure that requires translators to be cognizant of the cultural differences between the source language (ST) and the target language (TT) (Osimo, 2022). According to Larson (1998), idioms are groups of

words that, when used together, have meanings distinct from those of the individual words. Idioms enable speakers to clearly convey their ideas and broaden the scope of their conversations (Thyab, 2016). On the one present, Smith (2022) indicates an impartial take on the issues featuring technical translation, even when it applies to texts with an important level of cultural plurality.

Literary texts have distinctive qualities and imaginative meanings that set them apart. These include fiction such as novels, short stories, folktales, drama, poetry, ballads, sagas, biographies and autobiographies, and children's literature. Research has shown that misinterpreting the author's message distorts the aesthetic value of literary texts (Baker, 2000; Boase-Beier, 2011; Chanda, 2012; Larson, 1998; Lihua, 2014; Monday, 2012; Newmark, 1988; Stubbs, 2001). Understanding and evaluating literary materials at different linguistic levels is necessary to produce translations of excellent quality.

2. Method

The lingual story *The Legend of Pulau Senua* from the Riau Islands, those Dian K. published by Indonesian and English on the last day of 2017, is the topic of the present investigation, featuring a descriptive qualitative approach with a heavy emphasis on document analysis. The four the main parts of the research process include preparation, collecting data, assess data, and reporting. Analyzing morphological steps that take place during translation, like affixation and derivation, is her primary source purpose. This inquiry further dives into the translator's way of cultural adaptation when attempting to reflect regional cultural aspects into the primary language. Specific sampling was applied to collect data, and then the source and target texts were thoroughly examined to find morphological and cultural characteristics. Later that, descriptive qualitative methods were used to analyze the data.

The *Legend of Senua Island* from the Riau Islands is rich in regional vocabulary and culturally relevant components, which is why I picked it as the topic of this study. This narrative illustrates the particular features of the local Malay dialect through a variety of lexical elements and morphological patterns that describe the distinct identity of the Natuna coastal community. An opportunity to directly compare the morphological characteristics and cultural adjustments used in the translation process is presented by the bilingual publication of these folk tales in English and Indonesian. I also incorporated secondary sources, including scholarly books and journal articles on cultural studies, translation theory, and Indonesian folk tales, to bolster the study and offer a more thorough contextual understanding. These kinds of references are very beneficial in expanding our knowledge of the customs underlying traditional Indonesian stories and placing discoveries into the broader context of translation.

3. Results and Discussion

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative approach using matching and case study approaches to examine how morphological structures and cultural expressions are preserved and modified in translation, such as Nida's (2001) framework on dynamic and formal equivalence, serve as the foundation for the analysis. The communicative and semantic translation models developed by Newmark (1995) thesis of foreignization and domestication. Additionally, the translation approach to adapted vocabulary, such as dialects and realia, is examined using the substitution and explanation translation models introduced by Osimo (2002) and based on Baker's (2018) ideas on idiomatic methods and uses.

3.1. Morphological Adaptation and Structural Translation

Due to basic linguistic differences, several Indonesian morphological processes, including affixation and derivation, are often simplified or left out when translated into English. The structural distinctions between the two languages are mostly to blame for this. Because Indonesian is an agglutinative language, it mainly depends on affixes to create new meanings, whereas English, which is more analytical, emphasizes word order and the use of auxiliary verbs. Because of this, translations frequently reduce or eliminate Indonesian affixes in order to conform to English grammar. Translation, according to Nida and Taber (1969), does not use literal word-for-word substitution, but uses a natural understanding of meaning according to the grammatical structure of the target language. To ensure that the original message remains consistent and easy to understand by the target language reader, it is important to change the structural and morphological elements in this context.

The literal rendering of the Indonesian verb "*mengenakan*" as "wore" reveals an upsurge from a morphologically intricate word resulting from combining the *meN-* and *-kan* designations to a simpler English past tense verb. Through equivalent lexical choice, the action's crucial meaning keeps being preserved whereas the morphological structure is eliminated. For instance, "*Mai Lamah taught the women how to create necklaces and bracelets*" translated into "*Mai Lamah mengajarkan para wanita cara membuat kalung dan gelang*" is an example of a sentence. "*Di ajarkan*" is the result of translating the verb "taught" in this sentence. The prefix *me-* is created and substituted with the verb "*yang pengajar*" in its prior version so that the phrases are equal. Newmark's concept of "transposition" is exemplified by this shift in grammatical structure (1988). The purpose of transposition is to preserve the original meaning of an expression while ensuring that grammatical alterations make it proper and natural

in the target language. This result is consistent with research by Trisnawati and Adika (2025) that demonstrates how morphological processes, like affixation in Indonesian, are frequently simplified in English during subtitle translation in order to maintain the target text's readability and smooth structure.

In the sentence "*Mai Lamah semakin pongah,*" in the context of "*Mai Lamah is becoming more arrogant,*" it is acceptable to take the statement literally. But the phrase "increasingly arrogant" can signify more than that. This validates Baker's (2018) conclusion that pragmatic and affective criteria should be taken seriously in addition to semantic accuracy when translating literary or narrative content. "*Awalnya, Baitusen menemukan sebuah kolam dengan ribuan mentimun laut di dalamnya*" (English translation: "*it all started with Baitusen who found a sea pool with thousands of sea cucumbers in it*"). Although semantically correct, this translation faces structural problems because the word "started with" is usually followed by a noun clause, gerund, or nominal clause, not a finite clause as *Baitusen* found. Structural translation usually involves changes in sentence structure that maintain grammatical correctness in the target language without changing the original meaning, according to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995). English would be more suited to the paraphrase "It all started when *Baitusen* found a sea pool".

3.2 Cultural Adaptation and Realia

Culturally specific terms, or realia, are challenging to translate since they are not directly related to the target culture. Osimo (2022) recommends use techniques like explicitation, substitution, and transliteration to get around this issue because they are effective. Switching out words ignoring their cultural meanings is a common problem faced while translating reality. The inaccurate translation of "*Tetangga adalah keluarga terdekat*" into "They were the nearest relative" in English offers an illustration of this. Since it usually refers to marriage or blood ties, the word "relatives" in Indonesia has a metaphorical meaning that indicates the relationship that one has with neighbors. The translation "Neighbors are like family" is more in line with cultural since it better reflects the values of community and family that are common in Indonesian society. Based on Venuti (1995), it is impossible to convey reality directly. Instead, to successfully express cultural meanings in the target language, culturally laden regard needs to be clarified or coupled with contextual clarification.

The expression "*hantaran nasi syukuran,*" which translates to "a rice banquet," provides another illustration. This translation is less exact even though replacement is used. The word 'banquet' in English describes a big feast, but in Indonesian culture, it relates more to a symbolic offering made during Thanksgiving celebrations. Because it more accurately captures the cultural significance, a translation like "traditional rice

offering" is therefore thought to be more accurate. The phrase "*tabib dari Tiongkok*" is commonly translated as "Chinese physician," yet this rendering fails to convey the traditional and cultural nuances embedded in the original term. The word "physician" tends to suggest a modern, formally trained medical professional, whereas "*tabib*" refers more accurately to a traditional healer associated with herbal remedies and ancient practices. Perhaps "traditional healer" or "herbalist" are more appropriate translations as they are more in keeping with the history and culture of traditional Chinese medicine. This example illustrates the importance of cultural sensitivity and the application of appropriate translation strategies when dealing with realia, ensuring that the intended meaning is accurately conveyed to target-language readers.

3.3 Translation of Idioms and Proverbs

Translating proverbs and idiomatic expressions commonly found in folktales can be particularly challenging, as many of them lack direct equivalents in the target language. According to Baker (2018), translators should use techniques like expressive replacement or idiomatic paraphrasing, which enable culturally relevant and context-sensitive interpretations of figurative language, in order to maintain the original meaning.

For instance, the idiom "*Malang tak dapat ditolak*" is translated as "Sometimes, bad things just happen." While this version conveys a general idea of adversity, it lacks the idiomatic and cultural depth of the original expression. The original meaning of the phrase "Misfortune is inevitable" or "You cannot escape fate" is translated better, emphasizing the fact that fate is unavoidable. This choice follows the recommendation made by Baker (2018) to use idiomatic paraphrases when direct equivalents are not accessible, while maintaining the metaphorical force and fatalistic tone of the source idiom. Idioms and metaphors are two types of figurative expressions imbued with cultural meaning. According to (Nugraha, 2024) idioms and metaphors are used to describe abstract concepts in a more specific and familiar way within a particular culture. Therefore, to maintain semantic and pragmatic meaning, idioms and metaphors found in folklore must be translated with their cultural context in mind.

Similarly, translating "*Malas bergaul*" as "to feel reluctant" is inadequate since it does not convey the original expression's suggested social dimension and lacks the colloquial tone. Here are more appropriate translations, such as "reluctant to socialize" or "avoiding social interaction", which better convey the intended meaning, indicating an inability to interact with others, which is an important component of the intended meaning, reflecting an aversion to engaging with others a key aspect of the phrase in its original cultural and communicative context. The translation "The neighbor went home sadly" for "*Tetangga itu pulang dengan sedih*"

may be grammatically correct, but it lacks emotional depth. A more evocative alternative, such as "going home with a heavy heart," would better convey the level of sadness present in the original lyrics, thus harmonizing with the emotional tone of the lyrics. The use of expressive substitution and idiomatic paraphrasing is essential for maintaining the underlying meaning and emotional depth of idiomatic statements throughout the translation process, as Baker (2018) highlights.

3.4 Character Development and Symbolism in Translation

In translating folktales, characters and symbolism are very important because they convey deep moral and cultural values beyond the overall meaning of the text. As Newmark (1988) asserts, an effective translation must balance semantic and communicative purposes capturing not only the literal message but also the emotional tone, symbolic elements, and intended effect on the reader. In order for target readers to fully grasp a character's emotional trajectory, internal conflict and character development must be translated with precision and sensitivity. For example, while the sentence "*Mai Lamah semakin pongah*" is literally translated as "Mai Lamah became more arrogant," this version falls short in capturing the intensity of her transformation. A more expressive rendering, such as "Mai Lamah allowed arrogance to consume her," would better reflect the psychological depth and similarly, while the sentence "Gold chest? What for? *Baitusen* wondered" is a grammatically acceptable translation of "*Peti emas? Untuk apa?*" The verb "wondered," "*baitusen heran*," lacks the emotional impact of the original. A more expressive alternative, such as "Baitusen asked in disbelief," would better reflect the tone of astonishment. According to Baker's (2018) and Newmark's (1988) ideas as well as more recent studies (Hanafi, 2025; Suriadi et al., 2022), translating literary works—especially folktales—requires more than lexical precision. In order to preserve the characters' emotional dynamics, cultural depth, and idiomatic strength, translators must employ strategies like expressive substitution, idiomatic paraphrasing, and cultural adaptation. To guarantee that the story content is retained and is organically embraced by the intended audience, cultural and emotional sensitivity is essential.

In addition, folktales often contain culturally rich symbols that require careful interpretation in translation. Baker (2018) asserts that cultural allusions and subliminal connotations that contribute to the overall narrative message must be taken into consideration by translators. In this story, sea cucumbers represent both. Sea cucumbers in this narrative signify both livelihood and fluctuating wealth, the neighbor figure represents communal harmony, and the gold chest represents monetary desire and greed, leading to conflict. If cultural values are misinterpreted or ignored, the moral and philosophical nuances of the story can be lost in translation. As a result, a translator

needs to consider the text's cultural and symbolic undertones in addition to its language components.

4. Conclusion

The study of the bilingual text of *The Legend of Pulau Senua* shows, translating folktales requires not only the transfer of meaning between languages but also morphological and cultural changes. Many Indonesian morphological affixes have no direct relationship to English, making translation structurally difficult. To overcome this problem and ensure that information is understood and communicated effectively in the target language, translators often use techniques such as transposition and structural changes. Cultural elements such as traditional culinary language, social roles, and ideas such as neighborliness and community values are examples of realia that must be taken into account when translating. Strategies such as explicitation, substitution, and idiomatic paraphrasing are essential for preserving their meaning. Likewise, character development and symbolic elements are vital, as they reflect the story's moral teachings and emotional layers. Therefore, a translator's task goes beyond mere linguistic transfer; it requires sensitivity to cultural nuance and emotional tone to faithfully render the narrative's full impact. This study supports previous findings about the importance of cultural sensitivity in folktale translation. This study supports previous research on the importance of cultural sensitivity in folklore translation. In addition, it provides useful guidance for translators in choosing the best strategies to preserve regional meaning in literary works intended for readers around the world. Additional studies should examine folklore from different regions or assess how well human and machine translation handle cultural content. It is recommended that future studies look at folktales from different regions or assess how well machine and human translations manage cultural content.

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