


# Strategies for Preserving Cultural Elements in Translating Wilde's *the Selfish Giant*

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## ABSTRACT

Translation plays an important role in bridging linguistic and cultural differences, especially in literary texts where meanings are closely connected to cultural symbols and values. However, previous studies have mainly focused on non-literary translation or the classification of translation strategies, leaving the preservation of deeper symbolic and cultural meanings in literary works underexplored. This study aims to analyze the translation strategies used in preserving culture-specific items (CSIs) in Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* and its Indonesian translation *Raksasa Egois* translated by Clara Ng and published by Fiksi Lotus in 2013. A qualitative comparative text analysis was employed by comparing the source text and target text to identify CSIs and examine the translation strategies applied. The findings reveal that literal translation, cultural equivalence, and adaptation were the main strategies used, with literal translation being the most dominant, particularly in ecological elements such as seasons and natural phenomena. While literal translation effectively preserves lexical meaning, it is less successful in maintaining deeper symbolic and cultural meanings embedded in the literary text. In contrast, cultural equivalence proves to be more effective in preserving religious meanings, while adaptation improves readability but reduces cultural specificity. In conclusion, the effectiveness of translation strategies depends on the type and cultural embeddedness of CSIs.

**Keywords:** Translation Strategies, Culture-Specific Items, Literary Translation, Cultural Meaning, Cultural Equivalence

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## INTRODUCTION

Translation is at the center of facilitating the communication between two or more languages and cultures, especially in the literary sphere where meaning is entrenched in cultures and values in the form of symbols and ideologies. Literary translation is thus beyond transfer of linguistic form and entails the construction of culturally contextual meanings to target readers. Since literary pieces usually mirror the world perception of the place where it originates, translators must act as an intermediary of the two different cultural systems and ensure that not only the meaning but also the aesthetic value is preserved. Literary translation, in this sense, may be perceived as a multifaceted practice of the cultural mediation that requires making interpretive and strategic choices. This viewpoint supports the idea that translating literature acts as a process of transferring language and fostering communication between cultures, with translators working to convey meaning between different cultural frameworks.

One of the main problems of this process is the translation of cultural elements also known as culture-specific items (CSIs). Aixela (1996) describes CSIs as parts of text that have meanings and cultural significance linked to the original culture and may not directly translate to the culture of the audience receiving it. In literary works, culturally specific items (CSIs) can show up as references to religion, symbols, nature-related elements, myths, words tied to a specific culture, social and cultural phrases, and legal terms that represent the beliefs and cultural context of the original text (Aixela, 1996; Newmark, 1988). These components consist of religious symbols, religious values, metaphors and those expressions

that are rooted in culture that are closely connected with social and ideological context of the source language. Since these aspects often do not have direct counterparts in the target language, the translator will need to apply suitable strategies to overcome the cultural differences, still maintaining the meaning, such as borrowing, adapting, and cultural equivalence. The fact that the cultural systems vary often complicates this process, and not only linguistic but also cultural and interpretative issues arise with the equivalence (Chunyuan et al., 2024; Shodona, 2025). In this context, Newmark (1988) points out that translating cultural aspects needs careful methods to maintain their meaning and how they communicate. Meanwhile, Nida (1964) believes that equivalence in translation should not just look at word-for-word similarities but also consider how the target audience understands and reacts to the message.

The difficulty of the phenomenon of CSIs is exacerbated to an even larger extent by literary works, where messages tend to be expressed in rather symbolic and allegorical form. Such devices used to encode culture in literary narratives include symbolism, metaphor and representation of morals which must be well considered in the translation. Past literature underlines that unless there is literal translation there is often a need to have more literatures in order to reveal these meanings hidden in culture. Instead, translators are more likely to use a combination of strategies to be able to lessen the readability and achieve cultural relevance (Borysenko et al., 2024; Zuo et al., 2023). Empirical studies also prove that the translation of CSIs is connected with the necessity to balance between the semantic accuracy and the acceptability of the audience. As an illustrative case, research done on Indonesian folktales also shows that cultural words tend to be modified because of the lack of direct words, which may influence the maintenance of the meaning (Maharani et al., 2024), and the study on documentary subtitles emphasizes that accuracy and comprehensibility must be negotiated to reveal cultural particulars (Halim et al., 2023). This negotiation process is closely linked to Venuti (1995) ideas of domestication and foreignization. In this context, translators either change cultural elements to fit the target culture to make it easier to read or keep the original cultural identity of the source text. These choices have a big impact on how cultural symbols and their meanings appear in translated books.

The study of the strategies of translation and their role in the maintenance of cultural aspects in a variety of settings is a phenomenon that is progressively being discussed by recent scholarship. According to studies published in Indonesian journals, translators need to balance cultural authenticity and accessibility to readers with great care. As an example, Sukaesih et al. (2025) discovered that not all strategies that were employed in translating Sundanese short stories to English were as effective to retain cultural subtleties as they partially change the meaning. Likewise, the use of formal documentation studies shows that literal translation tends to be ineffective in conveying culturally bound meanings and instead involves strategic translation (Syafran et al., 2024). When applied to the content of media, e.g., webtoons and food menus, translators need to balance between clarity and representing culture to make sure that they do not lose meaning to their target audience (Pratama & Putri, 2024; Putri et al., 2023). Other researches also, point out that translation, especially related to implicit social and pragmatic senses is a cultural bargaining process (Yang et al., 2025). All these findings jointly indicate the relevance of translation strategies in the process of defining the cultural meaning made across languages. Additionally, previous research shows that translating CSI (Culturally Specific Items) is closely linked to the translator's beliefs and their understanding of what makes a good translation. This is because keeping the cultural identity and ensuring the text is easy to read often need different approaches (Nida, 1964; Venuti, 1995).

Though these contributions have been made, there are still a number of limitations. Much of the available literature concentrates on Indonesian works translated into English or looks at translation processes in non-literary areas providing little understanding of the translation of Western literary works into Indonesian. Further, the past research almost

always focuses on the categorization of translation methods, instead of looking critically at how such more profound cultural meanings as symbolic, religious, and moral are maintained or modified in the target text. Consequently, the challenges related to the attempt to translate culturally hidden symbolism within the context of the different cultural and religious orientations are under-researched. This is a significant variance especially in the view that Western literary works are usually based on systems of symbols which do not have comparable institutions in the Indonesian culture.

The short story by Oscar Wilde the *Selfish Giant* can be used to fill this gap since it offers a very significant case and was selected because it has more organized and quantifiable features to be analyzed with regard to translations than any other piece. There is a sign of a steady symbolic pattern in the text, and a distinct opposition between literal and implied meaning, which is why it is possible to systematically analyze the changes in meaning. Moreover, by the way that culture-specific items (CSIs) are introduced and combined with the meaning, translation is not merely linguistic but might also transform cultural meaning. In this study, CSIs are words, phrases, and expressions that are deeply connected to culture, found in *The Selfish Giant*. This includes religious terms like Paradise, seasonal symbols such as Winter and Spring, natural elements like the North Wind and linnet, mythological references like ogre, and social and legal expressions that are part of the story. These elements are labeled as CSIs because they have meanings that are closely linked to Western culture, religion, and literature. This means that careful translation decisions are needed when they are translated into Indonesian (Aixela, 1996; Newmark, 1988). Its lexical, semantic and stylistic levels of analysis are simpler and more meaningful to analyze because of its simple yet meaningful language style. Such features make the text quite useful in studying translation strategies in maintaining cultural features and their effects on meaning in the text translated. These factors pose a special difficulty in being translated into Indonesian, where the difference in cultural structures can impact the translation and the construction of meaning. Hence, the aim of the study is to discuss the translation strategies used to retain the cultural elements and investigate the effects of these strategy on the representation of the cultural meanings in the target text by using the English version of the *The Selfish Giant* by Oscar Wilde as the source text (ST) and the translation of this writing into Indonesian (the cover translation) as the target text (TT). The analysis is based on several important theories: Newmark (1988) methods for translation, Aixela (1996) ideas about culture-specific items, Nida (1964) notion of dynamic equivalence, and Venuti (1995) concepts of domestication and foreignization. It looks at how these translation strategies affect the way cultural meanings are kept, changed, or transformed in the translated text.

## METHOD

In this study, the qualitative approach will be taken whereby the design will be a comparative text analysis, due to the aim of the study to analyze the comparison of translation strategies in retaining cultural aspects in the translated text and the original text. This approach has been selected due to the opportunity to carry out a profound analysis of meanings, symbols and cultural representations existing in both texts to demonstrate how the cultural aspects are translated and maintained during the translation process.

## Respondents

No human subjects were used in this study, since the data involved were in written form. Data in this work is taken as the form of two texts, that is, the source text in the form of the story *The Selfish Giant* by Oscar Wilde and the target text in the form of the Indonesian translated version of *The Selfish Giant* translated by Clara Ng, published by Fiksi Lotus in 2013. These two works have been chosen because they possess numerous rich cultural elements including symbolism, moral values and religious representation and hence, it is highly pertinent to be researched in analysing the strategies that translation may be applied and

how the cultural meanings can be preserved and how they will change in the process of translation.

### Instruments

A key player in this research is the researcher himself (human instrument) who takes the task of identifying and classifying, as well as interpreting information. Also, a table of data analysis is presented, where cultural elements and translation tactics are recorded. This study is founded on translation theory as postulated by Newmark (1988), particularly on translation producers, as the guide to detect and categorize translation techniques in the text. The unit of analysis in this study consist of words and phrases identified as culture-specific items (CSIs). The identification of CSIs was conducted by carefully reading the source text, making words or phrases containing cultural elements, categorizing them into cultural aspects such as religion, symbolism, social culture and classifying the translation strategies based on Newmark (1988) translation procedures.

### Procedures

The research process is implemented in a number of steps. To begin with, the researcher goes through the original text and its translation in order to analyze the context of the story. Second, the researcher is aware of the cultural aspects in the source text. Thirdly these features are also compared with their counterparts in the translated text. Fourth, the researcher codes and categorizes the identified CSIs based on the type of cultural element and the translation strategy applied using Newmark (1988) translation procedures. Lastly, the researcher assesses and determines the impact of the strategies on retaining cultural contexts within the target text.

### Data Analysis

The content analysis method was used in data analysis. The obtained information is categorized basing on the kind of cultural element and the type of translation strategy employed. Moreover, descriptive analysis of the data was performed to see the trend of strategies used and their impact on the maintenance of cultural meaning. The analysis also involved comparing the source text to examine how cultural meanings were preserved, modified, or reduced in translation. Interpretation of the results follows to achieve the aim of the research namely the recognition of the translation strategy and the evaluation of how the strategy preserves the cultural aspect of literary text.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this paper, some culture specific items (CSIs) were observed in *The Selfish Giant* and Indonesian translation *Rakshasa Egois*. These CSIs cover descriptions of religion, seasonal ideas, natural occurrences and culturally enclosed allusions. These CSIs include religious terms, seasonal symbols, natural elements, mythical references, and legal-cultural expressions that are closely connected to Western cultural and literary contexts. Being the elements incorporated in a specific cultural context, CSIs need to be translated appropriately to maintain cultural meaning across languages. The observed CSIs are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) in *The Selfish Giant*

No	Source Text	Target Text	Cultural Element	Category	Strategy
1.	Paradise	Surga	Religious Concept	Religious	Cultural Equivalence
2.	Winter	Musim Dingin	Seasonal Concept	Ecology	Literal Translation
3.	Spring	Musim Semi	Seasonal Concept	Ecology	Literal Translation
4.	The North Wind	Angin Utara	Personified Natural Element	Ecology	Literal Translation

5.	A Little Linnet	Burung Kecil	Culture-Specific Animal	Ecology	Adaptation
6.	The Cornish Ogre	Raksasa Dari Cornish	Mythical Creature	Social Culture	Adaptation
7.	Hail	Hujan Es	Natural Phenomenon	Ecology	Literal Translation
8.	Frost	Embun Beku	Natural Phenomenon	Ecology	Literal Translation
9.	The King's Musicians	Pemusik Kerajaan	Cultural Reference	Social Culture	Literal Translation
10.	Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted	Pelanggar Akan Dihukum Berat	Legal-Cultural Expression	Social Culture	Adaptation

According to Table 1, ecological CSIs predominantly feature the data, specifically those, which pertain to seasons and natural phenomena and this fact implies that natural imagery is at the core of the expression of cultural meaning in *The Selfish Giant*. These aspects work not only as descriptive items but also symbolic features, e.g., Spring, which is a symbol of renewal and Winter, which can be interpreted as the symbol of isolation. In Western literary contexts, Spring is often associated with hope and rebirth, while Winter symbolizes emotional isolation and lifelessness. Moreover, the social and legal-cultural expressions bring out the plurality of cultural components incorporated in the text which indicates that the narrative entails an assortment of layers of cultural reading.

A more critical look at this point would expose diverse extents to preservation of cultural meaning in line with the kind of translation strategy that has been used. The successful preservation exhibited on the translation of *Paradise to Surga* is that the cultural values are preserved through cultural equivalence since the religious meaning is retained completely because there is a conceptual understanding between the target culture and source culture. Therefore, the spiritual nuance contained in the source text can still be maintained effectively in the target text.

Conversely, literal translation has its advantages and disadvantages. Winter and Spring when translated into *Musim Dingin* and *Musim Semi* are lexically equivalent but the underlying symbolism of the interpretation of transformed emotion and spirituality in Western literature are not thoroughly realized suggesting partial preservation of cultural meaning. Although the lexical meaning is successfully maintained, the symbolic meanings attached to the seasonal concepts become less explicit in the target text.

Similarly, the translation of *\*the North Wind\** into *\*Angin Utara\** preserves the personification found in the source text, maintaining one of its key stylistic features. However, the broader cultural associations of the north with harsh weather and bitter climates are not fully conveyed in the target language, resulting in a partial shift of meaning. This finding suggests that literal translation is effective in retaining the lexical and stylistic form of culture-specific expressions but may not adequately communicate the deeper cultural connotations embedded in the source text. Consequently, readers of the target text may understand the literal meaning while missing some of the symbolic and cultural significance intended by the original author.

In contrast, adaptation prioritizes readability and accessibility for target readers, although it often reduces cultural specificity. This can be observed in the translation of *\*a little linnet\** into *\*burung kecil\**, where the culturally specific bird species is generalized, and *\*the Cornish ogre\** into *\*Raksasa dari Cornish\**, where the original cultural reference is simplified. A similar pattern appears in the translation of the legal notice *\*trespassers will be prosecuted\** into *\*pelanggar akan dihukum berat\**, which conveys the general intention but omits the formal legal nuance of the source text. These examples demonstrate that adaptation enhances comprehension by using more familiar expressions; however, it also leads to partial losses of symbolic, cultural, and contextual meanings, illustrating the trade-off between cultural preservation and target-language readability.

## Translation Strategies

The analysis demonstrates that there are three major translation strategies including literal translation, cultural equivalence and adaptation.

Table 2. Distribution of Translation Strategies

Strategy	Frequency
Literal translation	6
Cultural equivalence	1
Adaptation	3

As shown in table 2, literal translation is the most common strategy. This preeminence has a strong connection with the frequency of ecological CSIs, which are normally lexically parallel in Indonesian. This leads to literal translation being an effective approach towards preserving surface meaning. However, the strategy is less effective in maintaining deeper symbolic and cultural meanings embedded in literary texts. Although it retains the lexical equivalence, it does not necessarily retain the maintenance of cultural meaning especially in literature.

Direct equivalence is absent in which case adaptation is utilized. Such an approach enhances the level of comprehensibility but could decrease cultural specificity and cause changing meanings as seen in the translations of linnet, ogre and the legal term above. On the other hand, cultural equivalence is selectively applied to religious CSIs, in which meaning preservation is necessary because similar conceptual understanding exists between the source and target cultures. Resting on these results, one can state that the type of CSI and the cultural embeddedness have a highly influential impact on the choice of the translation strategy.

## Discussion

Using these findings, this discussion expounds how the strategies of translations identified affect the maintenance of cultural meaning within the literature texts. The findings show that the process of translating culture-specific items (CSIs) is rather complicated, requiring a compromise between meaning and readability, where translation strategies both as a means of linguistics work and a means of cultural interpretation. This ascertains that, literary translation is an inherently interpretive process, whereby the translators are supposed to re-create meaning within the various cultural systems instead of merely transferring the linguistic forms.

The prevalence of literal translation seen in the study demonstrates the usefulness of literal translation in dealing with ecological CSIs that have direct lexical counterparts in the Indonesian language. Such a result correlates with the existing literature that argues that literal translations are effective in the context of the cultures that allow one to directly replicate cultural elements across languages (Amenador & Wang, 2022; Qiufen et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the current research also shows that literal translations are likely to retain the surface meaning but still not be able to render the deep symbolic meaning that is concealed in literature (Borysenko et al., 2024). Or words like Winter and Spring, to give an example, have emotional and ideological connotations in Western literatures which cannot be fully defined in the equivalent words in the target language, meaning that when words correspond on the lexical level, they do not necessarily result in corresponding words on the cultural or interpretative level.

Conversely, cultural equivalence, used albeit in limited amounts, is very effective in maintaining the meaning when conceptual frameworks are common between the source and target cultures. The process of translating Paradise into Surga shows that religious ideas could be preserved completely because of the introduction of the similarities in cultural and ideological perception. This promotes the thesis that cultural equivalence is most effective when attempting to translate culturally ingrained meanings, where there are a common belief and

values system, particularly in a religious setting (Borysenko et al., 2024; Zagood, 2023). This also supports Nida (1964) view that translation equivalence should focus on preserving meaning and communicative effect rather than relying solely on literal lexical correspondence. Cultural equivalence depends, in this context, on how well the two cultures overlap, that is, how much the two languages differ.

This complexity in translation as a cultural negotiation process is further portrayed through the use of adaptation. Although adaptation leads to enhanced comprehensibility and accessibility of the text to the intended victims, cultural specificity is usually diminished. This can be seen in how the terms *linnet* and *ogre* are translated where culturally-specific references are generalized or altered (Tsoi, 2022). a more different conversion takes place in the legal wording of trespassers will be prosecuted, wherein the legal nuanced wording is reduced out in the target language. This implies that during adaptation, there is a trade-off between clarity and cultural accuracy whereby the translator will be prioritized on the audience understanding as compared to maintaining the specificity of the source text. This tendency reflects Venuti (1995) concept of domestication, in which cultural elements are adjusted to improve accessibility in the target text.

The findings also highlight that translation is not only lingual endeavor but also cultural and communicative process. The key element that translators need to take into account is cultural context, expectations of the audience, as well as interpretative meaning in order not to misrepresent (Ramadilla et al., 2025). This helps to establish an argument that translation entails the negotiation of meaning and not direct transfer of meaning (Onin, 2026), especially in literary texts whose meaning is symbolic and has layers. The variety of approaches used in this study is also demonstrative of the flexibility needed by translation practice since translators usually blend various strategies to achieve accuracy and naturalness (Mukminin et al., 2025), which implies that the choice of a strategy is a matter of situational change, not a constant.

These findings also have broader implications for translation theory and practice. Theoretically, the paper strengthens the concept that equivalence in translation is a dynamic process which depends on the context and culture of the society instead of being a fixed relationship between the source and the target texts. In practical consideration, the results indicate the significance of translator cognizance when handling culturally embedded meanings since poor choice of strategies might result in misinterpretation or misinterpretation. It implies that to be able to translate literary texts, translators need to master not only language competence but also cultural sensitivity and interpretative ability.

The findings suggest that translation strategies can be effective depending on the nature of CSI, the level of cultural embeddedness, and the level of interpretive competence possessed by a translator. Whereas, shared conceptual understanding leads to better conservation of religious CSIs, symbolic, ecological, and legal-cultural factors are likely to undergo meaning changes. Such results can be compared to past studies of the difficulties of CSIs translation (Sukaesih et al., 2025) and emphasize that literary translation entails a situational and adaptive process, where the translator plays the role of a cultural interpreter who recreates meaning to the target audience without disrupting the original text.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the translation strategies used in translating culture-specific items (CSIs) in *The Selfish Giant* and analysed how these strategies influence the preservation of cultural meaning in the Indonesian translation. The findings reveal that literal translation, cultural equivalence, and adaptation were the primary strategies applied, with literal translation emerging as the most dominant strategy, particularly in translating ecological elements such as seasons and natural phenomena. While literal translation effectively preserved lexical or surface meaning, it was less successful in maintaining deeper symbolic and cultural meanings embedded in the literary text. In contrast, cultural equivalence proved to be the most effective strategy for preserving meaning, especially in religious expressions where shared conceptual

understanding existed between the source and target cultures. Meanwhile, adaptation improved readability and accessibility for target readers but often reduced cultural specificity and altered certain cultural nuances. The study theoretically contributes to translation studies by reinforcing the view that translation equivalence is not a fixed linguistic relationship, but a dynamic and context-dependent process shaped by cultural embeddedness, interpretative meaning, and audience understanding. The findings support the perspective that literary translation functions as a process of cultural negotiation rather than merely linguistic transfer, where translators act as cultural interpreters who reconstruct meaning across different cultural systems. Furthermore, this study extends previous discussions on culture-specific item translation by demonstrating that the effectiveness of translation strategies depends heavily on the type of CSI and the degree of cultural symbolism attached to it. Overall, the study highlights that preserving cultural meaning in literary translation requires not only linguistic competence but also cultural sensitivity and interpretative awareness. Although some cultural meanings can be maintained successfully, others inevitably experience shifts due to differences in cultural context and symbolic interpretation. Future studies are recommended to examine broader literary works and incorporate reader-response analysis to further explore how translated cultural meanings are interpreted by target readers.

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