CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS AND TRANSLATION STRATEGIES IN TIM O'BRIEN'S *THE THINGS THEY CARRIED* AND ITS INDONESIAN TRANSLATION

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Abstract
As one of the most complicated concepts to translate, a number of translators and researchers have presented various strategies to transfer the meaning of culture-specific items (CSIs) from one language to another. Through eight translation strategies used by professional translators based on Baker, this paper aimed to find the most applicable strategy to find a way around culture-specific items. In addition, this paper also attempted to categorize CSIs found in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* according to Newmark's five taxonomies of foreign cultural words. The comparative model in translation studies and comparative research were applied as methods to obtain and analyze data from both the source text and target text. The results showed that out of five taxonomies, social culture has the highest percentage overall with 45%. Furthermore, translation by paraphrase using unrelated words also has the highest percentage among the eight translation strategies with 31%. Therefore, it can be concluded that translation by paraphrase using unrelated words is the most applicable strategy to translate CSIs found in *The Things They Carried.*

Keywords: culture-specific items, *The Things They Carried*, translation strategy

Introduction

Translation has enabled people to expand their social lives across language and culture. However, on top of that, translation is a complex procedure of rewriting and transferring meaning between two languages and inevitably two different cultures. Catford (1978, p.20) defines translation as the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL). In addition, Newmark (1988, p.5) describes translation as rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text. He further elaborated that the translation cannot simply reproduce, or be the original. Therefore, any product of translation would inescapably amalgamate two or more cultures by the end of its procedure, which in itself has become a different text compared to the source text (ST). Particularly, in the case of literary translation in the modern day where translators possess the capacity to decide which concept they would elaborate on or which concept they

would omit entirely from the target text (TT), which might instigate a power imbalance between the two cultures. Therefore, to solve translation issues that may appear in the translation process, it is suggested that translators must be able to consider and apply translation strategies accordingly. One of the objectives of this research is to find the most applicable strategy to translate culture-specific items (CSIs).

CSIs is a concept born from an intricate affiliation between language and culture throughout history. Chen et al. (2023) said that based on varying standards, different studies have defined CSIs in different ways. Kramsch (1998) divulges the relationship of language and culture. She concluded three aspects: language expresses cultural reality, language embodies cultural reality, and language symbolizes cultural reality. Furthermore, she elaborates on the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis which claims that the structure of the language one habitually uses influences one's manner of thinking and behavior. Thereafter, this behavior would compose a collective way of life peculiar to a community, which describes the definition of culture according to Newmark (1988). Newmark defines culture as the way of life and its manifestations are peculiar to a community that speaks a particular language as a means of expression. According to Baker (1992), "a word from the source language may express an idea that is completely unknown in the target culture" (p. 21). The idea at hand could be concrete or abstract, and it could have to do with specific foods, social more, or religious convictions. It is common to refer to these ideas as "culture-specific".

In addition, Aixelá (1996) also states the issue regarding the definition of CSIs, "the main difficulty with the definition lies, of course, in the fact that in a language everything is culturally produced, beginning with language itself." In this manner, language and culture exert influence on each other in a continuous cycle through time. As a result of the previously mentioned intricate and interwoven relationship, culture-specific items are very diverse and more often than not, specific to a particular culture. According to Aixelá (1996), CSIs are elements of the text connected to certain concepts in the foreign culture that might be unknown to the readers of the target text. Furthermore, Aixelá intends to improve the definition of CSIs to be more versatile. The definition of CSIs became

> "Those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text." (1996, p.58).

With a more flexible definition, any textual items that pose a translation problem due to a 'cultural gap' or nonexistent item in the target language would be considered as CSI.

Many translators and researchers deem CSIs as one of the most complex translation issues among many others. In her coursebook on translation titled *In Other Words,* Baker (2011) includes culture-specific concepts as one out of eleven common problems of non-equivalence at word level. Newmark (1998, p.94) also mentions that cultural words will be a translation problem due to the cultural 'gap'

or 'distance' between the source and target languages. When a certain concept in the source language is nonexistent in the target language, it unveils a 'cultural gap' that translators must be able to bridge by implementing a suitable translation strategy.

According to Chen et al. (2023), cultural words incorporate particular cultural traits, and cultural word translations seek to address the linguistic and cultural gaps brought about by differences in source and target languages. In line with Putri (2023), selecting diverse translation methods means that cultural components cannot be translated completely, and the methods selected for translation can change based on the context and target audience. Zuo, Abdullah, and Toh (2023) state the application of translation procedures shouldn't be predicated on speculative thinking or hasty assumptions of the expectations of the target audience. It requires to be determined by the unique circumstances surrounding certain cultural objects. Ergil (2020) in his statements states that translation plays an essential part in the circulation of world literature, in the creation and transformation of literary images, and in the maintenance of the dynamic nature of literary/cultural interactions. Due to this reason, translators are often referred to as mediators and bridges between two countries (Blažytė & Liubinienė 2016; Busana & Subiyanto 2020).

There has been a recent cultural turn in translation (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990; Bassnett, 2007), which requires that cultural distinctions between the communities the languages serve be taken into consideration in addition to the source and target languages (Venuti, 1994). Permatahati (2022) states that it is crucial for translators to consider not only the language but as well as the culture. Additionally, the translators need to have a deep understanding of both cultures from a wider angle. Mizin, Slavova, and Khmara, (2021) and Mizin et al., 2023) state that fields such as ethnolinguistics, linguculture, translation studies, and others provide solutions for problems pertaining to languages and cultures, interlingual barriers and deviations, etc. It is by means that the translator tends to utilize the techniques that are target-text-oriented such as localization, globalization, omission, transformation, and creation.

The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien (2009) is a collection of linked short stories and the Indonesian translation is titled *The Things They Carried: Kenangan Sang Prajurit* (2006) translated by Hendraytna. The major theme of the book mostly depicts the stories of post-war Vietnam war veterans with a few stories also portraying the life of soldiers in the middle of the war. *The Things They Carried* and its Indonesian translation have been chosen as objects of this research because of the historical significance that it contains. In one of his interviews, O'Brien stated that he had been drafted and served as a soldier in the Vietnam War, and it is precisely why he wrote war stories after he became a veteran. Although this book is mostly categorized as fiction or historical fiction, the fact that the author was a soldier in the Vietnam War implies that the contents of the book are not entirely fictional. In one of the short stories titled "Spin," O'Brien stated the term "truth-goose." A similar term to a verse in Marianne Moore's (1920) poem, "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." Both of these idioms refer to fictional stories that have genuine truth mixed in them. Due to his experience as a soldier in the Vietnam War, O'Brien incorporated various categories of culture-specific items including American, Vietnamese, and military

terms CSIs. Hence, *The Things They Carried* should be able to provide invaluable data for this research.

Five Taxonomies of Foreign Cultural Words

As mentioned earlier, Newmark defines culture as the way of life peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression. In addition, he acknowledges that cultural words would pose translation problems because of the cultural 'gap' between SL and TL. Particularly, the more a language is ingrained in cultural features, the more specific it becomes. On top of that, many cultural words and customs are described in typical language, which would distort the meaning if it is translated using literal translation. These are examples of issues that would emerge when translating CSIs or foreign cultural words as Newmark refers to it. Therefore, by adapting Nida, Newmark categorizes foreign cultural words into five categories:

1. Ecology
   Includes flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills, and any other natural phenomena.
2. Material culture
   Includes artifacts such as food, clothes, houses, towns, and transportation.
3. Social culture
   Includes work, leisure, and expressions that not only have denotation but also connotation in a particular culture.
4. Organization, customs, and ideas
   Includes politics, administrative, religious, historical, and artistic terms.
5. Gestures and habits
   Commonly cultural customs or habits are described using ordinary words that may or may not exist in other cultures.

Translation Strategies

It has been established that Baker includes culture-specific concepts as one of eleven common problems of non-equivalence at word level. In addition, she presented eight translation strategies to overcome said eleven problems, including culture specific concepts. Baker refers to these strategies as strategies used by professional translators. First, translation by a more general word (superordinate) employs a hierarchical structure in the semantic fields that are not specific to a certain language, especially in the area of propositional meaning. Second, translation by a more neutral/less expressive word is often applied to an action or a verb that frequently has a considerably positive or negative connotation in the ST. Considering the translation may not have the same connotation in the TL, the result would be more neutral or less expressive than the ST. Third, translation by cultural substitution which replaces a CSI with a completely different item in the TL that is more familiar to the TT reader. However, it has to give a similar impact or evoke a similar emotion or context to the TT reader. Fourth, translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation which is usually written in *italics* or 'inverted commas' followed by an explanation inside a bracket if there is any. Fifth, translation by paraphrase using related words as the name suggests, paraphrase certain CSIs to become a different form. However, said CSIs might not be completely non-existent in the TL, hence a related word can still be used. On the contrary, sixth, translation by paraphrase using unrelated words is suitable for

CSIs that are non-existent or unknown in the TL. This strategy usually paraphrases by describing or altering a superordinate of the CSI. Seventh, translation by omission might sound extreme, but if the CSI or expression is not particularly necessary to the development of the text, and if translating it would result in a lengthy explanation, the CSI can be omitted from the TT. Lastly, translation by illustration can be an option if the CSI lacks an equivalent in the TT which refers to a physical object that can be illustrated (Baker, 1992).

Method

Williams and Chesterman (2002) present three theoretical models of translation, namely the comparative model, process model, and causal model. A model that is being referred to is similar to the likeness of a miniature scale model of, for instance, a house that represents the full size of the house. They define a model as a construction that represents aspects of reality to some degree. In the example of a house, it is quite straightforward that the miniature scale model does not represent the size of the real house as the name "miniature scale" suggests. However, theoretical models represent more abstract objects in a more abstract way. These models are considered conceptual tools to arrange an initial framework within which we can start our train of thought. Therefore, the aims are to construct images and to better visualize, understand, and analyze the object of research.

This particular research was based on the comparative model which looks as follows: source text (ST) ≈ target text (TT). Instead of the equal sign (=), the sign 'approximately equal' (≈) brings back the argument that Catford has, which he stated that "the translation cannot simply reproduce, or be the original" (Catford, 1978, p.20). The translators' duty is to choose elements of the target language that align most closely with the elements in the source language. In addition, the comparative model was product-oriented considering this paper was researching a translation product that has been published. The comparative model was mainly exercised to obtain CSIs in the ST and find the approximately equal translation in the TT. Therefore, any CSIs and their translation in the form of either words or phrases were considered the data of this research.

Following the comparative model, comparative research was also applied to analyze CSIs found in the ST and TT. The aim of this method was to evaluate the differences, similarities, and associations between objects of research. The evaluation often refers to the application of a general theory or process through different contexts or categories (Mills, 2008). The evaluation that was applied to the data included categorizing CSIs into five taxonomies of foreign cultural words based on Newmark. In addition, the translation strategy was analyzed using eight translation strategies used by professional translators according to Baker (2011). Comparative research assisted the research process in terms of analyzing the meaning of CSIs including the denotation and connotation that cultures are attached to certain CSIs.

Findings and Discussion
Five Taxonomies of Foreign Cultural Words

After CSIs and their equivalence were found in the ST and TT, they were classified into five taxonomies of foreign cultural words based on Newmark. According to the findings, all five taxonomies were able to be identified in the objects of research. The table below contains the number of data and their overall percentages that have been sorted from the highest to the lowest number.

Table 1. Five Taxonomies of Foreign Cultural Words

Taxonomies	Data	Percentage
Social culture	343	45%
Material culture	182	24%
Organization, customs, and ideas	105	14%
Gesture and habits	72	10%
Ecology	53	7%
Total data	: 755	

Out of five taxonomies, social culture had the highest percentage of 45%, nearly half of the overall percentage. The reason was various cultural expressions that can be seen in the book from either American or a few Vietnamese expressions. These expressions contain connotations from their respective cultures, which in the next section would most likely be paraphrased to elaborate the CSI or replaced by a more familiar item in the TL. Followed by material culture with 24% and organization with 14% due to the settings of war and military in the book. The last two were gestures and habits with 10%, followed by ecology with 7%. To elaborate on the reason ecology had the least number of data was because of the translation of proper names. According to Newmark (1988, p.214-216), we must respect a country's desire to decide the name of its geographical features, hence it is encouraged for translators to keep the proper names of not only geographical terms but also names of objects with trademarks and people's name. Therefore, every geographical feature name that was kept as the original in the TT to respect the cultural value of its name was not included in this research.

Translation Strategies

Commencing from being classified into five taxonomies, the pair of CSIs and their translations were analyzed by applying comparative research to determine which translation strategies were exercised in the translation process. Based on the findings in Table 2 below, only seven out of eight translation strategies were exercised. The exception is the translation by illustration which can be used to illustrate physical objects. However, there were no hints of any illustration in the TT, hence translation by illustration is stated as 0%.

Table 2. Eight Translation Strategies

Strategies	Data	Percentage
Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words	234	31%

Translation by paraphrase using related words	195	26%
Translation by a more general word (superordinate)	130	17%
Translation by cultural substitution	66	9%
Translation by using a loan word or loan word plus explanation	62	8%
Translation by omission	37	5%
Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word	31	4%
Translation by illustration	0	0%
Total data	: 755	

The highest percentage out of the seven strategies that were able to be identified in the TT was the translation by paraphrase using unrelated words at 31%, followed by its counterpart, translation by paraphrase using related words at 26%. Subsequently, translation by a more general word (superordinate) with 17%, the last of the double-digit percentage in the list. The rest of the strategies were fairly close to each other, translation by using a loan word or loan word plus explanation with 8%, translation by omission with 5%, and with a mere one percent difference, translation by a more neutral/less expressive word with 4%.

Table 3. Example of translation by paraphrase using unrelated words

ST	TT	Taxonomy	Strategy
Dog tags	*Kalung tanda pengenal militer*	Material culture	Paraphrase using unrelated words

To this day, there are many rumors surrounding how dog tags are called as such. Dog tags are small metal disks on a chain that army members wear to identify themselves in battle (Lange, 2020). The Army Historical Foundation suggested that the term was coined by Willian Randolph Hearst in 1936. Other rumors include how the tags looked similar to the tag on a dog's collar and that the draftees of World War II claimed that they were treated like dogs. However, the most certain aspect is its function as an identifying tag. This description is being transferred in the Indonesian language, albeit the translator added more items, providing more context to the readers to avoid ambiguity. *Kalung tanda pengenal militer* essentially means "military identifying tags" without any relation to the word "dog." But, as Indonesian does not have a specific word equivalence for "tag," it is replaced by the closest word *kalung* or "necklace." Hence, the translation for this CSI is considered a translation by paraphrase using unrelated words.

Table 4. Example of translation by paraphrase using related words

ST	TT	Taxonomy	Strategy
Royal Canadian Mounted Police	*Polisi Berkuda Kanada*	Organizations, customs, & ideas	Paraphrase using related words

According to the official website (The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2021), The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has been serving Canada for

almost 150 years since 1873. Furthermore, The Canadian Encyclopedia (2016) mentions that as Canada's national police force, the RCMP provides various services from municipal policing to national intelligence gathering. However, the word "Royal" was added in 1904, and before that, the force was only known as North-West Mounted Police. Similar to the TT, it does not include "Royal" and only the "Canadian Mounted Police" with a few adjustments according to the Indonesian phrase structure. Therefore, the translation is considered a product of paraphrase using related words.

Table 5. Example of translation by using more general words

ST	TT	Taxonomy	Strategy
Ben Franklin store	*Toko serba ada*	Social culture	More general words

Baker (2011) states that abstract or concrete could have to do with a religious conviction, a specific type of food, or even a social more. Due to this reason, translators are often referred to as mediators and bridges between two countries (Blažytė & Liubinienė, 2016; Busana & Subiyanto, 2020). Ben Franklin store is an independent retail franchise in the United States. This establishment is well-known to be a one-stop shop for home décor, giftware, and crafts (Ben Franklin Online, 2023). However, the target readers are most likely not familiar with this particular franchise as it does not exist in Indonesia. The translation itself is also interesting, *toko serba ada* is much more general than the range of items that Ben Franklin provides. In addition, *toko serba ada* is also easier to accept in TL for its more familiar term affected by the local culture inherent in their social system. The meaning of *toko serba ada* is closer to a "department store" where they sell everyday necessities. It is conceptually more general and acceptable to the target reader.

Table 6. Example of translation by cultural substitution

ST	TT	Taxonomy	Strategy
Shredded wheat	*Telur dadar*	Material culture	Cultural substitution

Farkhan, Naimah, and Suriadi, (2020) in his findings state when translating terms linked to food, translators should take into consideration the cultural connotations associated with these terms, their purpose and meaning in the original language, and the translatability to which the phrases may be translated into the target language. The cultural or linguistic connotations of the original word in the source language are not taken into account by this method. The context behind "shredded wheat" is that in the story titled "The Man I Killed," Tim the soldier had killed a man with a grenade. He was shocked, stunned, and kept looking at the corpse. Meanwhile, one of his comrades, Azar, who's a brash young man was talking about how Tim shredded that man like shredded wheat. Wheat is not a common staple food in Indonesia and many target readers might not be familiar with any products related to wheat. Hence, "shredded wheat" was translated into a more familiar food to the target readers, *telur dadar* or "scrambled egg." Keeping in mind how "shredded" was used to describe a disarranged corpse, "scrambled" also expresses similar messiness. In fact, Azar

also used "scrambled" along the lines of "you scrambled his sorry self," before he said "shredded wheat." Therefore, "scrambled egg" is a suitable cultural substitution for "shredded wheat."

Table 7. Examples of translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation

ST	TT	Taxonomy	Strategy
Birch	Birch	Ecology	Loan words
Trip flare	Trip flare (*suar yang menyala bila pemicunya tersangkut*)	Material culture	Loan words plus explanation

Loan words are often signified by inverted commas or the *italic font*. This method ensures that the intended readers avoid getting lost in translation and can comprehend the specifics given in the text, such as how Birch, a species of tree is written in the TT. However, at other times, loan words are also followed by an explanation to provide more context for the target readers. For instance, the TT explained in parenthesis that a trip flare is a flare that will be activated if the trigger gets stuck. To put into more context, trip flares are commonly used in a defensive operation so that if someone unsuspectingly triggered it, it would burn and give a signal to nearby soldiers.

Table 8. Example of translation by omission

ST	TT	Taxonomy	Strategy
Riding shotgun	-	Gesture and habits	Omission

For some taboos and strange language collocations that cannot be accepted in another country's culture, omission can be used to symbolize the language habits of the readers of the target language. Norman Bowker, a Vietnam war veteran, was riding his father's Chevy around a lake. He imagined talking about the Song Tra Bong River to Sally Kramer, his high school crush while driving past her house. He also imagined talking to his father who was riding shotgun, telling a story about how he almost won the Silver Star, a medal for valor. According to the context of the story and the Oxford Dictionary, "riding shotgun" means to travel in a vehicle, especially as a passenger. However, this phrase is completely omitted in the TT. Instead, the TT described how Norman Bowker imagined his father was there and talking to him.

Table 9. Examples of translation using a more neutral/less expressive words

ST	TT	Taxonomy	Strategy
Gape	*Kekaguman*	Gesture and habits	Neutral/less expressive words

This strategy transforms the cultural expressions in the source language into more accessible and culturally equivalent expressions in the target language. Most dictionaries define "gape" as an act of staring at someone or something with your

mouth open because you are shocked or surprised. Therefore, it is related to the emotion of amazement or surprise similar to the TT *kekaguman*. However, it also signifies a specific action of being very surprised that you opened your mouth, which is non-existent in the translation. Hence, the translation is less expressive than the ST.

Conclusion

There are a few conclusions that were achieved in this research. First, the most commonly found taxonomy in the research objects is social culture with 45% and more than three hundred data. On the contrary, ecology has the least amount of data with a little more than fifty and 7%. Second, the most applicable translation strategy for CSIs found in this research is translation by paraphrase using unrelated words with 31% and more than two hundred data followed by translation by paraphrase using related words with 26%. Lastly, only seven out of eight translation strategies were found in the objects of research. Translation by illustration has not been found in the TT in any shape or form.

From the conclusions above, it can be indicated that in general, paraphrasing is the most suitable strategy to translate CSIs. Regardless of whether the translator uses related or unrelated words, paraphrasing would provide more context to the target readers and avoid ambiguity. However, one shortcoming of this strategy is the difference in the length of the ST and TT. In the case of this research, the TT has 105 more pages compared to the ST.

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