



Adaptation of Cultural Nuances and Its Influence on Cultural Representation and Translation Quality in the Translation

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Abstract. Translating literary works is a complex process that goes beyond linguistic conversion, requiring careful attention to the cultural elements embedded in the source text. Ahmad Fuadi's novels, rich in Indonesian cultural and religious values, present unique challenges in translation. Despite the importance of cultural adaptation in literary translation, there has been limited research on how cultural nuances are adapted and how they impact cultural representation and translation quality. This study aims to fill the gap by analyzing the cultural adaptation strategies used in translating Fuadi's novels and evaluating their impact on cultural representation and translation quality. A descriptive-qualitative method was applied, using textual and comparative analysis. Data were collected by comparing the Indonesian source texts with their English translations, supplemented by interviews with the translator and analysis of reader responses to strengthen contextual understanding. The findings showed that the translator employed several cultural adaptation strategies, including transference (29%), generalization (29%), literal translation (16%), descriptive equivalence (12%), and as well as other strategies occurring at less than 7% each. The applied strategies were generally effective in maintaining the essential messages of the source text while improving comprehension for the intended audience. Nevertheless, certain shifts in cultural representation were observed as a result of modifications made to accommodate the cultural background of target readers. The overall translation quality, assessed through the dimensions of accuracy, acceptability, and readability, was largely considered satisfactory, though specific sections fell short in accurately reflecting the cultural nuances of the source text. This research adds to the discourse on literary translation by underscoring the significance of deliberate cultural adaptation in achieving a balance between preserving cultural integrity and ensuring accessibility for readers across different cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: Cultural Texts, Cultural Translation Representation, Translation, Translation Quality.

1 Introduction

Translation of literary works is one form of cross-cultural communication that involves not only linguistic aspects but also complex cultural dimensions [1], [2], [3]. In the translation process, cultural nuances are often adapted to ensure comprehension by readers from different cultural backgrounds. Such adaptations significantly influence the representation of culture in the translated text as well as the overall quality of the translation [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9]. Translators must therefore possess comprehensive knowledge of both the source and target cultures to uphold the originality of the text and prevent any misrepresentation of its intended meaning.

Ahmad Fuadi is one of Indonesia's prominent authors whose works are rich in distinctive cultural and religious values. His novels, which form a best-selling trilogy—including *Negeri 5 Menara*, *Ranah 3 Warna*, and *Rantau 1 Muara*—depict the life journey of a main character immersed in Islamic values, Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) education, and a life philosophy rooted in Indonesian cultural traditions [10] [11]. The cultural richness of these novels makes them compelling subjects for translation studies, especially in examining how culturally specific elements can be rendered into another language without losing their original meaning.

In the process of translation, various challenges arise when culturally specific elements in Ahmad Fuadi's works need to be adjusted to align with the cultural background of the target readers [12]. Novels may contain cultural elements such as terminology, ideas, traditions, and belief systems that often lack direct counterparts in other languages. For instance, the terms "santri" and "mondok" in the context of Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) carry complex meanings enriched with cultural values. If translators render them literally without sufficient context, target readers are unlikely to grasp their intended meanings accurately.

In responding to these challenges, translators may employ various approaches in rendering cultural elements, including domestication and foreignization. The domestication strategy works by adjusting cultural expressions to align with the norms of the target culture, thereby making the text more comprehensible to readers. In contrast, foreignization preserves the original cultural term while providing supplementary clarification, allowing target language readers to appreciate the distinctive characteristics of the source culture [13], [4], [15], [16], [17]. For example, the term *pondok pesantren* can be translated by preserving the original term (*pesantren*) while adding a descriptive explanation that defines it as a religious educational institution based on Islamic teachings in Indonesia.

Beyond strategy selection, the way culture is represented in translation plays a significant role in determining how the source culture is understood within the target language context. This representation extends beyond mere accuracy, encompassing the broader question of how target language readers perceive and interpret the depicted culture [18]. If the translation is not carried out carefully, there is a risk of cultural distortion or oversimplification that may alter the original meaning of the text. Therefore, translators must exercise caution to ensure that the cultural representation in Ahmad Fuadi's novels remains authentic and does not lead to misunderstandings among target readers.

Furthermore, the quality of the translation is strongly influenced by how well the translator balances readability and cultural accuracy. Translations that are overly literal may appear rigid and difficult for foreign readers to comprehend, while overly adaptive translations may risk losing the essence of the original culture [19], [2], [21], [22], [23]. Consequently, translators are expected to competently manage linguistic and cultural dimensions at the same time, guaranteeing that the resulting translation remains not only understandable but also faithful to the cultural subtleties inherent in the source text.

Thus, translating Ahmad Fuadi's novels is not merely a process of language transfer but also an effort to bridge intercultural communication. The quality of a translation is determined not merely by the fluency of the target language text, but equally by the degree to which it retains the cultural representation present in the original work. Subsequent research examining the translation process of such novels will yield significant contributions toward identifying effective approaches for navigating cultural adaptation challenges in the field of literary translation.

The present study sought to investigate several research questions concerning the translation of Ahmad Fuadi's novels. The first question examined the degree to which cultural nuances underwent adaptation throughout the translation process. The second explored the types of translation strategies utilized to convey cultural elements into the target language. The third question addressed how such adaptations shaped the portrayal of Indonesian culture in the translated text. The fourth investigated the extent to which cultural adaptation had an impact on the overall translation quality. These questions were deemed fundamental as they related to both the precision of translation and the maintenance of source language culture within the target language text.

To answer these questions, the study employed a descriptive-qualitative approach, using textual and comparative analysis methods. The analysis was carried out by comparing the original Indonesian texts with their translated versions in English or other available target languages. The main focus was to identify the cultural adaptation strategies used and their impact on cultural representation and translation quality. In addition to textual analysis, this research also incorporated the perspectives of translators and readers. Interviews with translators or studies of reader responses offered further insight into how cultural adaptations were perceived by the target audience. The integration of both approaches enabled a more thorough understanding of the manner in which Indonesian cultural representation underwent transformation throughout the translation process, as well as how the overall translation quality could be assessed in an objective manner.

Numerous studies have been carried out on the translation of Indonesian literary works into foreign languages, with particular emphasis on translation strategies and cultural adaptation. Scholarly investigations have previously explored the translated works of prominent Indonesian authors, including Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Ayu Utami, and Andrea Hirata. The findings of these studies indicated that the extent of cultural adaptation in translation differs considerably based on the translational purpose and the characteristics of the intended audience [27], [28], [29]. However, research specifically addressing the translation of Ahmad Fuadi's novels remains very limited [24,25,26]. Additionally, there has been a lack of studies exploring the relationship

between translation quality and cultural adaptation [1], [20], [22], [30], [31], [32], [33]. Prior research has largely focused on the dichotomy between domestication and foreignization in literary translation [13], [14], [15], [16], [17]. Considering the scarcity of studies that specifically investigate the translation of Ahmad Fuadi's works—and the even fewer that examine how cultural adaptation shapes translation quality—this research aims to address this gap by systematically evaluating the correlation between cultural adaptation strategies and translation outcomes. Accordingly, this study offers a refined scholarly perspective by providing a comprehensive analysis of the interrelationship among cultural adaptation, cultural representation, and translation quality. Moreover, it contributes novel insights and a more profound understanding of the processes through which cultural adaptation is implemented and how it influences the representation of Indonesian culture as well as the overall quality of translated literary works.

2 Method

The present study adopts a descriptive qualitative design, utilizing textual analysis as the primary method to investigate the rendering of cultural elements in Ahmad Fuadi's novels [24], [25], [34], [35]. The research procedure begins with data collection, which includes selecting Ahmad Fuadi's novels that have been translated into foreign languages, such as the English translation of Negeri 5 Menara titled *Land of Five Towers*. The data are used because they represent specific instances of cultural terms and expressions that appear in the source text and require strategic decision-making in the translation process. By analyzing these data, the study can accurately identify the types of cultural adaptation strategies applied by the translator, measure their frequency, and evaluate their impact on cultural representation and translation quality. The selected data also provide empirical evidence that supports the study's objectives, allowing the analysis to move beyond theoretical discussion toward a systematic and verifiable examination of translational choices. Subsequently, the researcher identifies sections of the text that contain cultural elements, including terms related to Islamic boarding school education (*pesantren*), Islamic values, and uniquely Indonesian life philosophies. The dataset comprises the Indonesian source text alongside its English target text, both of which are subsequently subjected to comparative analysis to observe the manner in which cultural elements are transferred throughout the translation process.

During the data analysis phase, the present study draws upon cultural translation theories, particularly Venuti's framework of domestication and foreignization, to categorize the translation strategies employed. The analysis examines the ways in which cultural elements are rendered in the target text, whether through adaptation, omission, or direct transfer. In addition, the study investigates the degree to which cultural representation in the translated text sustains the meaning and essence of the source material. To measure translation quality, the research incorporates translation quality assessment frameworks, notably those proposed by House, which take into

account dimensions of readability, accuracy, and the retention of cultural meaning [36], [37], [38], [39], [40], [41], [42], [43].

To enhance the validity of the findings, the study incorporates data triangulation. One of the steps taken is to conduct discussions with experts in translation and culture to gain additional perspectives on the strategies used. In addition, interviews or questionnaires will be distributed to the target readers, such as native speakers of the target language, to understand how they perceive cultural elements in the translated text. Thus, this study is not solely reliant on academic analysis but also considers the responses of readers who constitute the intended audience of the translation.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Strategy of Translation Text

In the data collection that has been carried out, a total of 75 cultural terms were identified and translated in the translated version of the novel, as shown in the table 1.

Table 1. Cultural terms in Ahmad Fuadi's novel

No	Cultural Category	Number of Data	Percentage
1	Ecology (flora/fauna)	2	2.7%
2	Material Culture (food, clothing, buildings, tools)	50	66.7%
3	Socio-cultural Aspects	5	6.7%
4	Organization, Traditions, Activities, and Concepts	16	21.3%
5	Gestures/Habits	2	2.7%
Total		75	100%

Drawing on Newmark's taxonomy of translation strategies, the 75 cultural terms found in the data, which carry cultural nuances in the target language, were classified based on the translation strategies utilized by the translator, as illustrated in Figure 1.

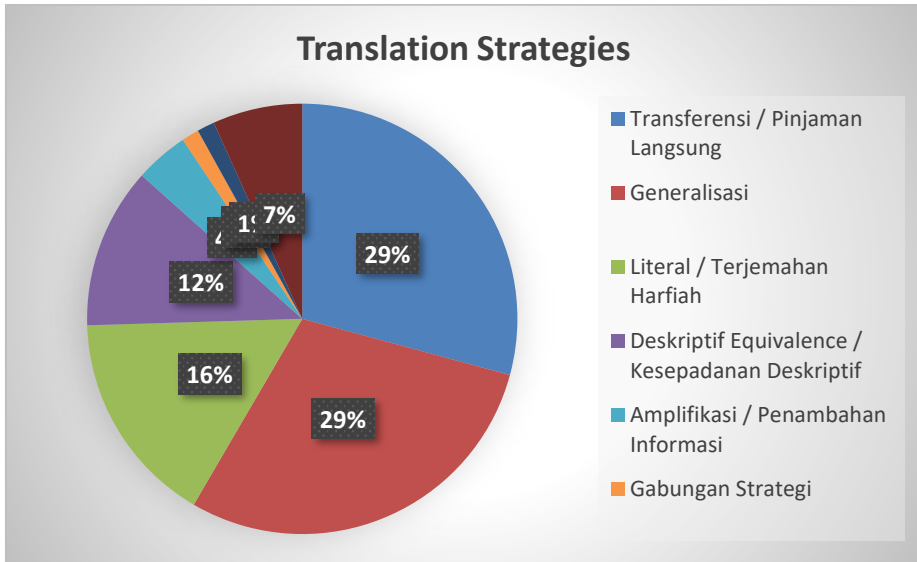


Fig. 1. Translation strategies in Ahmad Fuadi's novel

Based on the figure 1, the translator employed various strategies to render culture-bound terms that reflect local cultural values. The most frequently used strategies were *transference* (22 cases) and *generalization* (22 cases). The *transference* strategy was applied by retaining the original cultural terms, such as *ustadz*, *kiai*, and *tarawih*, which have no direct equivalents in the target language (TL) but are essential to preserve the cultural nuance of the source text. In addition to these, *literal translation* and *literal + transference* strategies were also frequently employed. In the *literal + transference* strategy, a cultural term is translated literally while maintaining its original form, for example, *gamis* rendered as *long robe (gamis)*. This approach effectively bridges the reader's understanding of culturally specific expressions. Furthermore, the *generalization* strategy was applied in cases such as *santri senior* translated as *senior student*, where the cultural meaning of *santri* is simplified to enhance comprehensibility for global readers. *Amplification* and *modulation* strategies were used in limited cases, particularly when the translator intended to elaborate or shift the perspective of meaning to maintain coherence within the target language context.

Case 1

SL: "Ustadz Salman adalah guru paling disegani di pondok ini."

TL: "Ustadz Salman is the most respected teacher in this boarding school."

The term *ustadz* is not translated into English but is retained in its original form. This strategy is applied because there is no direct English equivalent that fully conveys the religious and social connotations embedded in the word *ustadz*. The use of *transference* effectively preserves the Islamic cultural nuance specific to the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) context, although it may potentially create ambiguity for readers unfamiliar with the term. Therefore, in some contexts, this strategy is occasionally combined with *descriptive equivalence* to provide additional clarification.

The analysis of the two translation cases from *Negeri 5 Menara* and its English version *The Land of Five Towers* reveals significant dynamics in the process of cultural nuance adaptation, its influence on cultural representation, and the overall quality of translation. In Case 1, the term *ustadz* was not translated into an English equivalent but retained in its original form through the strategy of *transference*. This strategy was chosen because there is no equivalent term in English that can fully represent the religious, social, and cultural meanings embedded in the word. Within the Indonesian *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) context, *ustadz* carries a strong connotation as an Islamic teacher with high moral authority—an idea that cannot be entirely conveyed by terms such as *teacher* or *Islamic cleric* in the target language. Therefore, *transference* was employed to preserve the authenticity of the source culture, even though this strategy has limitations in terms of comprehensibility for target readers unfamiliar with the term. In some instances, *transference* may be combined with *amplification* or *descriptive equivalence* to avoid semantic ambiguity.

Meanwhile, in Case 2, the translator faced the challenge of transferring a local cultural gesture that is both physical and context-specific—*mencium tangan ustadz* (kissing the teacher's hand) as a sign of respect. This expression was translated as *bowed and kissed the teacher's hand*, employing the strategy of *descriptive equivalence*. The aim of this strategy is to convey the functional meaning of the gesture to the target readers without preserving its original linguistic form. Although the specific cultural term from the source language is omitted, this descriptive approach allows readers from different cultural backgrounds to understand the act as a form of politeness and reverence toward an authoritative figure. In other words, the strategy simplifies the surface form of the cultural expression but retains its social value, thereby enabling the cultural meaning to be effectively communicated to an international audience. These two cases illustrate how the translator strives to maintain a balance between *foreignization* and *domestication*, two poles that often-become central considerations in cultural translation theory by Venuti [50]. The *transference* strategy tends to bring readers closer to the source culture (*foreignization*), whereas *descriptive equivalence* brings the text closer to the comprehension of the target audience (*domestication*).

An examination of the 75 cultural terms in *Negeri 5 Menara* and its English counterpart, *The Land of Five Towers*, demonstrates that the translator made use of diverse strategies to effectively render culture-specific elements. According to Newmark's taxonomy, *transference* and *generalization* emerged as the most predominant strategies, each recorded in 22 instances. *Transference* was applied to terms with no direct English equivalents, such as *ustadz*, *kiai*, and *tarawih*, preserving the Islamic cultural nuances inherent in the source text. In addition, *literal translation* and *literal + transference* strategies were utilized to bridge comprehension for readers unfamiliar with the source culture, while *generalization* simplified complex cultural concepts, for example, translating *santri senior* as "senior student." These strategic choices illustrate the translator's effort to maintain the authenticity of Indonesian cultural elements while enhancing readability for an international audience.

Case analyses further demonstrate the balance between *foreignization* and *domestication*. The term *ustadz* retained in its original form exemplifies *foreignization*,

bringing readers closer to the source culture and preserving its social and religious connotations. Conversely, descriptive equivalence, as seen in the translation of *mencium tangan ustadz* as “bowed and kissed the teacher’s hand,” illustrates domestication, adapting culturally specific gestures into comprehensible actions for target readers. These cases highlight the translator’s deliberate negotiation between maintaining cultural authenticity and ensuring clarity, which is essential in translating texts rich in culture-bound terms.

3.2 The Influence of Cultural Adaptation on Cultural Representation and Translation Quality

In the context of the present study, cultural adaptation serves as a deliberate mechanism for conveying the cultural elements of the source text in an effective manner. The representation of culture in translation is not exclusively shaped by vocabulary selection, but is equally dependent on the translator's awareness of the social context and cultural functions associated with the terms being translated. Consequently, the choice of translation strategies affects not only the precision of meaning but also constructs the reader's understanding of the source culture as mediated through the target text.

As evidenced in Case 1, the term *ustadz* was preserved in its original form rather than being rendered into English. The strategy applied by the translator falls under transference, as outlined in Peter Newmark's framework of translation strategies. Transference is defined as the direct incorporation of a cultural term from the source language into the target language without any alteration. This approach is commonly adopted for culture-specific expressions that have no precise equivalent in the target language. By preserving the term *ustadz*, the translator successfully conveys the Islamic cultural nuance of Indonesian society more authentically. The word does not merely mean *religious teacher*; it also carries connotations of respect, social status, and religious authority within the Indonesian Muslim community. If the term were translated as *religious teacher* or *cleric* in the TL, the connotative meaning and local nuance would be lost, and the social role of the *ustadz* within *pesantren* communities or Indonesian Muslim society would be underrepresented. Therefore, the use of *transference* in this case can be regarded as a form of implicit cultural adaptation, in which cultural nuances are preserved through the retention of the original term.

In addition, the direct use of *ustadz* in the translation indicates the translator’s effort to maintain the authenticity of source-culture representation. The target readers are thus introduced to the cultural reality of Indonesian Islam without excessive generalization or domestication into the target culture. However, for international readers unfamiliar with this cultural term, *ustadz* may be obscure. Hence, in certain cases, the translator might consider including a footnote or glossary if the term is used recurrently throughout the text.

According to the translation quality assessment framework proposed by Nababan et al. [51], the quality of this translation can be described as follows:

- Accuracy: High – because the term *ustadz* retains the specific meaning of the SL.

- Acceptability: Moderate – the sentence remains natural despite containing a foreign word.
- Readability: Fair – depending on the target reader’s familiarity with Islamic culture; readers familiar with Muslim contexts may understand the term, while general readers might not.

Overall, the translation of this sentence can be considered of good quality, as it successfully preserves the cultural integrity and local identity of the source text, albeit with a slight compromise in readability for target readers who are unfamiliar with Islamic culture.

Furthermore, interviews and questionnaires were distributed to 10 respondents who represent the target readers in order to gain insights into the readability of the English-translated novel and the acceptability of its meaning, particularly in relation to the adaptation of cultural nuances in the translation. Based on the collected data, the majority of respondents reported that the translated text demonstrated a meaning readability and acceptability level of 90–97%, indicating that the storyline, linguistic flow, and cultural messages were highly comprehensible. Respondents noted that the cultural adaptation strategies applied by the translator effectively clarified Indonesian cultural contexts without diminishing the essential meaning of the source text.

Nevertheless, several respondents stated that certain cultural terms still required additional explanation or more explicit contextualization to achieve full acceptability. This suggests that not all cultural elements can be transferred directly without the risk of losing specific nuances, especially for readers who are not familiar with Indonesian culture.

Overall, the findings from the interviews and questionnaires indicate that the cultural adaptation strategies used by the translator contribute positively to the high readability and meaning acceptability of the translated novel. These results also highlight the importance of selecting appropriate adaptation strategies to maintain translation quality and ensure that cultural messages are effectively conveyed to cross-cultural audiences.

Cultural adaptation plays a central role in effectively representing source-culture elements and maintaining translation quality. The retention of terms like *ustadz* exemplifies implicit cultural adaptation, allowing readers to experience the Indonesian Islamic context authentically. According to Nababan et al.’s quality assessment framework, such strategies provide high accuracy, while acceptability and readability may vary depending on the readers’ familiarity with the culture [51]. Interviews and questionnaires with 10 target readers revealed that 90–97% of respondents found the translated text highly readable and its meaning acceptable, confirming the effectiveness of the adaptation strategies. Nevertheless, some respondents indicated that certain terms required additional explanation or contextualization, suggesting that complete comprehension of culture-bound elements may still pose challenges for international readers.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that strategic cultural adaptation significantly influences both the representation of the source culture and the overall quality of translation. By carefully selecting and applying strategies such as transference, generalization, and descriptive equivalence, the translator successfully preserves

cultural integrity while ensuring accessibility to cross-cultural audiences. This underscores the importance of translator sensitivity to social and cultural contexts, as well as the necessity of balancing foreignization and domestication to produce translations that are both faithful and comprehensible.

4 Conclusion

The analysis of 75 cultural terms in Ahmad Fuadi's novel *Negeri 5 Menara* and its English translation *The Land of Five Towers* indicates that cultural translation requires careful strategies to balance semantic accuracy and readability for the target audience. Most of the terms belong to the *material culture* category, and according to Newmark's classification, the most frequently applied strategies were transference and generalization. Transference preserves original terms, such as *ustadz* and *kiai*, to maintain cultural authenticity, while generalization simplifies certain concepts to facilitate comprehension for global readers. Case analyses show that transference emphasizes *foreignization* by bringing readers closer to the source culture, whereas descriptive equivalence for expressions like *mencium tangan ustadz* illustrates *domestication*, making the cultural gestures understandable. Overall, the translator successfully balances the preservation of cultural identity with textual readability.

The influence of cultural adaptation on cultural representation and translation quality is evident in how the selected strategies maintain both the connotative meaning and social functions of cultural terms. According to Nababan et al.'s translation quality assessment framework, the transference strategy ensures high accuracy, although acceptability and readability may decrease for international readers unfamiliar with Indonesian culture [52]. Data from interviews and questionnaires with 10 respondents show that the readability and acceptability of the translated text ranged from 90–97%, indicating that the cultural adaptation strategies effectively clarify social and cultural contexts without compromising the source text's meaning. In conclusion, the translator successfully preserves the representation of Indonesian culture while ensuring that cultural messages are comprehensible to cross-cultural readers, resulting in a translation that is communicative, accurate, and culturally rich.

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