
Translation Equivalence of Culture-Specific Items in Donna Widjanto's Rendition of The Field Guide

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Abstract: *This study investigates translation equivalence in the Indonesian version of The Spiderwick Chronicles (Book 1: The Field Guide) by Tony DiTerlizzi, focusing on 69 culture-specific items (CSIs). Applying Nida and Taber's framework of formal and dynamic equivalence, the research aims to determine the predominant strategy used in rendering culturally bound expressions. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the CSIs are categorized into five cultural domains: ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations and customs, and anthroponyms. The analysis reveals a strong preference for formal equivalence, with the highest occurrences in the categories of organizations (36.2%) and material culture (34.8%). Borrowing—both pure and naturalized—emerges as the dominant translation technique, particularly for items related to anthroponyms, religious concepts, and ecological terms. This reliance on source-language structures suggests a translator orientation that prioritizes fidelity over cultural adaptation. While this strategy preserves source-text integrity, the study recommends a more adaptive approach to improve clarity and cultural accessibility for target readers. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of balancing semantic accuracy and cultural resonance in the translation of culture-specific items.*

INTRODUCTION

Translation is far more than the simple act of converting words from one language into another; it is a multifaceted and intellectually demanding process that requires not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural sensitivity. A key challenge in translation arises when the text includes elements that are deeply embedded in the source language (SL) culture, known as culture-specific items (CSIs). These items—such as references to social customs, institutions, beliefs, ecology, and material culture—often have no direct equivalents in the target language (TL), making them particularly difficult to translate without losing essential meaning or cultural resonance.

As Hatim and Munday (2019) emphasize, translation is fundamentally the act of

transferring a written text from the SL to the TL in a way that captures both its linguistic meaning and cultural significance. When translating CSIs, this dual responsibility becomes especially critical. Inaccurate or insensitive translation of culturally bound elements can result in miscommunication, cultural distortion, or even complete loss of the original message. Thus, translators must employ careful strategies to ensure that the target audience receives not only the factual content but also the cultural essence of the original text.

At the heart of this challenge lies the concept of equivalence, which refers to the degree to which the translation preserves the original's meaning, form, and cultural impact. Eugene Nida and Charles Taber (1969) famously proposed two types of equivalence: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence emphasizes fidelity to the structure and wording of the SL, often at the cost of naturalness in the TL. Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, focuses on producing a similar effect or response in the TL audience, even if this requires rephrasing or cultural adaptation. Choosing between these approaches is not merely a matter of linguistic accuracy but also of cultural appropriateness and reader engagement.

This study investigates how equivalence is achieved in the Indonesian translation of *The Spiderwick Chronicles: The Field Guide* (Book 1) by Tony DiTerlizzi, as rendered by Donna Widjajanto. The novel, originally written for an English-speaking audience, is rich in culture-specific items that reflect Western cultural values, practices, and material artifacts. To assess how these items are translated, this research adopts a descriptive qualitative method and applies the translation techniques framework developed by Molina and Albir (2002), which includes strategies such as adaptation, borrowing, amplification, calque, compensation, and others.

Additionally, this study draws upon the comprehensive classification of CSIs proposed by Newmark (1988) and Espindola & Vasconcellos (2006), covering domains such as ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations and customs, gestures and habits, anthroponyms, and fictional characters. Through this framework, the research identifies and categorizes 69 culture-specific items found in the novel, analyzes the techniques used to translate them, and evaluates whether these techniques lean more toward formal or dynamic equivalence.

Previous studies—such as those conducted by Elnaili (2016), Baawaidhan (2016), Mujiyanto (2015), Ratnasari et al. (2016), and Daghoughi & Hashemian (2016)—have explored various strategies for translating CSIs, often focusing on domestication versus foreignization, or the application of specific translation techniques. This research builds upon their work by providing a focused analysis of equivalence strategies within a single translated literary work. It contributes to the broader field of translation studies by offering empirical data and critical insights into how CSIs are rendered in Indonesian, and by extension, how cultural meaning is negotiated across linguistic boundaries.

Ultimately, this study aims to deepen our understanding of the practical challenges and theoretical considerations involved in translating culture-specific items. By evaluating the effectiveness of different translation strategies in achieving equivalence, it seeks to offer recommendations for translators and researchers striving to preserve both the linguistic fidelity and cultural richness of source texts in their translated versions.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research approach to investigate the equivalence strategies used in translating culture-specific items (CSIs) from English into Indonesian. The analysis is centered on the Indonesian translation of *The Field Guide* (Book 1 of *The Spiderwick Chronicles*) by Tony DiTerlizzi, rendered by Donna Widjajanto. The qualitative nature of this research allows for an in-depth examination of linguistic and cultural elements without relying on

numerical data as the primary measure, instead focusing on interpretation, classification, and explanation of translation equivalence.

The primary theoretical framework applied in this study is **Nida and Taber's (1969) theory of equivalence**, which distinguishes between *formal equivalence* and *dynamic equivalence*. Formal equivalence emphasizes adherence to the linguistic form and content of the source text, while dynamic equivalence aims to reproduce the intended effect of the source text in the target language, even if structural adjustments are necessary. Each culture-specific item found in the translation is evaluated according to these two categories to determine the predominant equivalence strategy employed by the translator.

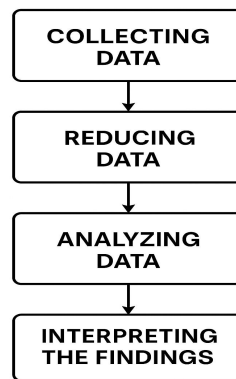


Diagram 1. Data Analysis

This study examines a systematic research process through a vertical flowchart comprising four sequential stages, alongside an analysis of translation equivalence in culture-specific items: the research framework begins with "Collecting Data," where relevant information is gathered, followed by "Reducing Data," which involves refining the collected data to isolate key elements, then proceeds to "Analyzing Data," where patterns and insights are identified, and concludes with "Interpreting the Findings," wherein the analyzed data is evaluated to derive meaningful conclusions, with downward arrows indicating the linear progression and interdependency of each stage. Concurrently, the study identifies and analyzes 69 culture-specific items extracted from translated Indonesian texts, comparing them with their original English versions to classify their translation equivalence as either formal or dynamic and to determine the predominant equivalence type applied overall, providing a structured approach to both data handling and translation analysis.

To categorize the CSIs systematically, this study refers to the classification schemes developed by Newmark (1988) and Espindola & Vasconcellos (2006), as elaborated in the works of Setiawan & Sutopo (2018) and Setiawan (2021). The culture-specific items are grouped into the following categories:

1. Ecology
2. Material Culture
3. Social Culture
4. Organizations, Customs, Activities, Procedures, and Concepts of Belief
5. Gesture and Habit
6. Anthroponyms (Personal Names)
7. Fictional Characters

Each item is tagged with a code corresponding to one of these seven categories,

facilitating clearer classification and analysis. This codification helps streamline the identification process and allows for more accurate cross-comparison between items.

To further support the analysis, the study also incorporates the framework of **translation techniques proposed by Molina and Albir (2002)**. Techniques such as adaptation, borrowing (pure and naturalized), amplification, calque, compensation, and deletion are applied to each CSI to reveal the translator's strategy in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps.

The integration of these classification models and theoretical frameworks facilitates a comprehensive analysis of how equivalence is achieved in the translation of culture-specific items. It enables a deeper understanding of both the linguistic and cultural dimensions embedded in the translated text. To streamline the classification process and ensure consistency in categorizing each culture-specific item, a codification system is applied. The codes assigned to each category allow for more efficient data organization and analysis. The codification system is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Culture-Specific Items Classification

Code	Culture-Specific Items Classification
1	Ecology
2	Material culture
3	Social Culture
4	Organization, Customs, activities, Procedures, Concepts
5	Gesture and habits
6	Anthroponyms
7	Fictional Character

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

After conducting the analysis, a total of 69 culture-specific items (CSIs) were identified in The Field Guide, the first book of The Spiderwick Chronicles series. Each item was examined based on its occurrence in both the source language (English) and the target language (Indonesian), and analyzed according to its type, the translation technique applied, and its back-translation to assess the equivalence.

These items were then categorized into seven distinct groups: ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations and customs (including activities, procedures, and conceptual beliefs), gesture and habit, anthroponyms, and fictional characters. The classification and distribution of the CSIs are summarized in the table below, which highlights the frequency and percentage of each category's occurrence in the dataset. Contoh Tabel:

Tabel harus diberikan penomoran, contohnya: Tabel 1. Descriptive Statistics Keterangan tabel (nomor dan judul tabel) diletakkan di tengah atas.

Table 2. Culture-Specific Items Classification Analysis

Book 1 <i>The Field Guide</i>			
Code	CSIs Category	Items	Percentage
1	Ecology	9	13,0%
2	Material culture	24	34,8%
3	Social culture	4	0,05%
4	Organizations, customs, activities,	25	36,2%

	procedures, concepts		
5	Gesture and habit	-	-
6	Anthroponyms	7	0,10%
7	Fictional character	-	-
Total		69	

The data reveal that the highest number of CSIs belongs to the category of Organizations, Customs, Activities, Procedures, and Concepts, accounting for 36.2% of the total items. This is followed by Material Culture with 34.8%, and Ecology with 13.0%. Anthroponyms represent 10.1%, while Social Culture accounts for a smaller portion at 5.8%. No items were found under the categories of Gesture and Habit or Fictional Characters, indicating that these cultural elements were either absent or not rendered as culturally significant in the translation.

This classification provides a clear overview of the types of cultural content encountered in the text and forms the foundation for the subsequent analysis of the translation strategies and equivalence types used in rendering these items into Indonesian.

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage of Translation Techniques Applied to Culture-Specific Items in The Field Guide

NO	TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES	NUMBER OF OCCURANCE	PERCENTAGE
1	Repetition	33	47.8%
2	Naturalization	16	23.2%
3	Universalization	1	0.01%
4	Synonymy	1	0.01%
5	Through translation	12	13.12%
6	Linguistic translation	1	0.01%
7	Compensation	1	0.01%
8	Couplet	-	0%
9	Glosses, Note, Addition	3	0.04%
10	Deletion	1	0.01%
	Total	69	

After conducting a thorough analysis of the data, the translator applied various translation techniques to render culture-specific items from the source language into the target language. Additionally, the method of back translation was employed to further evaluate the accuracy and effectiveness of these techniques. This process helped in identifying the specific translation strategies utilized and in quantifying their frequency of use.

The results revealed that Repetition was the most frequently used technique, appearing 33 times and accounting for approximately 47.8% of the total instances. This suggests that the translator often chose to repeat cultural elements to maintain their original significance.

Naturalization was the second most common strategy, occurring 16 times, which represents about 23.2% of the cases. This technique involves adapting the source cultural item to a form that is more familiar or natural in the target language culture.

Other techniques were used less frequently: Universalization and Synonymy each appeared once, making up about 0.01% of the instances respectively. Universalization involves replacing culture-specific items with more general or universally understood concepts, while Synonymy entails using a synonym that fits the cultural context.

Through translation was applied 12 times, constituting roughly 13.12% of the total. This method involves translating the cultural item literally, often word-for-word.

Several other techniques appeared rarely, each occurring only once or a few times. These include Linguistic Translation, Compensation, Deletion, and the combined use of Glosses, Notes, and Additions, with frequencies of 1, 1, 1, and 3 times respectively. Their percentages ranged from 0.01% to 0.04%, indicating selective but strategic use in particular contexts. Notably, the technique of Couplet was not observed in the translation process.

Overall, this detailed quantitative breakdown highlights the translator's preference for certain techniques—particularly repetition and naturalization—while demonstrating a nuanced approach to handling culture-specific items through a diverse array of translation strategies.

The Equivalence of Culture-Specific Items in *The Spiderwick Chronicles*

This study aims to examine the equivalence of culture-specific items found in the Indonesian translation of Tony DiTerlizzi's *Spiderwick Chronicles: The Field Guide* novel. A total of 69 culture-specific items, originally present in the English version of the novel, have been carefully identified and analyzed within their Indonesian translations.

The primary objective is to determine how these culture-specific items have been rendered in Indonesian, specifically whether they reflect formal equivalence or dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence focuses on preserving the exact wording and form of the source text, striving for a close, literal translation. In contrast, dynamic equivalence emphasizes conveying the intended meaning and effect in a way that is natural and accessible to the target language readers, even if this requires some adaptation.

To support this analysis, I draw on the foundational theoretical framework proposed by Nida and Taber (1969), who distinguish between these two types of equivalence as key concepts in translation studies. Their theory provides a valuable lens through which to assess the fidelity and functional effectiveness of translated cultural elements.

The study not only categorizes each translated culture-specific item according to these equivalence types but also identifies which approach is most frequently employed by the translator in this particular work. This investigation sheds light on the translator's strategies and priorities when dealing with culturally embedded terms that may not have direct counterparts in Indonesian.

The detailed results of this equivalence analysis are presented in the chart below, illustrating the distribution and prevalence of formal and dynamic equivalence in the translation of culture-specific items throughout *The Spiderwick Chronicles: The Field Guide*.

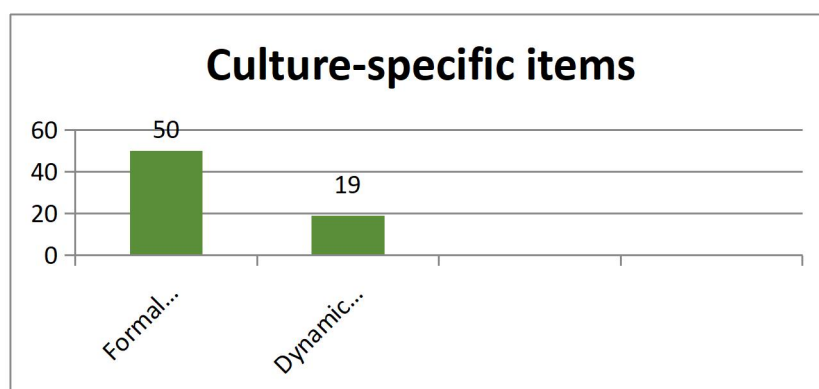


Chart 1. The result of Equivalence in the Translation of culture-specific items in “The Field Guide” novel (in Percentage)

The data presented above indicates that out of the total culture-specific items analyzed, 50 translations are classified as examples of formal equivalence. Formal equivalence prioritizes maintaining the lexical meaning and the structural form of the source language as closely as possible. In other words, the translator strives to preserve the original wording and sentence construction, ensuring that the translated text remains faithful to the source text's form and content.

On the other hand, 19 translations fall under the category of dynamic equivalence. Dynamic equivalence focuses primarily on the effect the translation has on the target language readers, rather than strictly adhering to the original structure. This approach allows for modifications in sentence structure or phrasing so long as the meaning and impact intended in the source text are accurately conveyed in the target text. The goal is to produce a natural and culturally appropriate reading experience, even if the wording differs from the original.

From this analysis, it is evident that the translator predominantly adopted a formal equivalence approach when rendering culture-specific items into Indonesian. This preference is reflected in the frequent use of techniques such as repetition, through translation, linguistic translation, and the addition of glosses, notes, and explanations, all of which helped to transfer 50 culture-specific items while preserving their original lexical and structural characteristics.

Meanwhile, the 19 culture-specific items translated with dynamic equivalence employed strategies like naturalization, universalization, synonymy, compensation, and couplet. These techniques involve adapting or modifying the source material to better suit the cultural and linguistic context of the Indonesian readers, making the translation more accessible and relatable.

Overall, the translator’s tendency to lean towards formal equivalence suggests a conscious effort to retain the original cultural terms as much as possible, rather than recreating or localizing them extensively. However, this literal approach does not always result in exact phrase-for-phrase translations; sometimes, slight modifications are made to fit the target language structure. Such literal translations may at times feel more alien or foreign to Indonesian readers, as the text maintains the source language’s form and expressions closely, which can challenge natural fluency or cultural familiarity.

Table 4. Analysis of Culture-Specific Items (CSI) in Book 1 of The Spiderwick Chronicles: Translation Techniques and Equivalence Types

No	Book 1		Type of CSI	Translation Techniques	Dynamic equivalence	Formal equivalence
	ST	TT				
2	He would have said that his brother, Simon, would be either a veterinarian or a <i>lion tamer</i> . (p. 1)	Dia akan mengatakan saudara laki-lakinya, Simon, akan menjadi dokter hewan atau <i>penjinak singa</i> . (p. 17)	3	Ttrans		√

6	"It's a shack," Mallory said, getting out of the <u>station wagon</u> . (p. 2)	"itu pondok," kata Mallory, saat keluar dari <u>station wagon</u> . (p. 18)	2	Rep		√
7	He could see his mother's <u>station wagon</u> out in the gravel driveway. (p. 50)	Dia bisa melihat <u>station wagon</u> ibunya di jalan berkerikil. (p. 66)	2	Rep		√
9	Actually, considering what he'd packed into their tiny bedroom in <u>New York</u> , Jared figured it would take a lot of rabbits and hedgehogs and whatever else was out here to satisfy Simon. (p. 3)	Sebenarnya, mengingat apa yang dimasukkannya ke dalam kamar mereka di <u>New York</u> , Jared berpikir harus ada banyak kelinci, landak, dan berbagai binatang lain untuk membuat Simon puas. (p. 19)	2	Rep		√
10	But as he carried the suitcase to the dining room, Jared couldn't help thinking about their tiny apartment in <u>New York</u> and their family before the divorce. (p. 13)	Tapi saat dia membawa koper itu ke ruang makan, Jared tidak bisa menahan dirinya memikirkan apartemen kecil mereka di <u>New York</u> dan keluarga mereka sebelum perceraian. (p. 29)	2	Rep		√
13	There was a figure in the doorway, with a shapeless white <u>gown</u> and long, dark hair. (p. 17)	Ada bayangan di ambang pintu, dengan <u>gaun</u> putih panjang yang tak berbentuk serta rambut panjang berwarna gelap. (p. 33)	2	Nat	√	
14	It was Mallory in a <u>nightgown</u> . (p. 17)	Ternyata Mallory yang mengenakan <u>gaun tidur</u> . (p. 33)	2	Nat	√	

In translating culture-specific items (CSIs), two primary types of equivalence frequently emerge—formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence—as defined by Eugene Nida and Charles Taber (1969). These two concepts illustrate how translators approach the task of rendering meaning from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Formal equivalence emphasizes preserving the form and structure of the original text, while dynamic equivalence prioritizes the communicative effect and cultural appropriateness in the TL.

1. Formal Equivalence

Formal equivalence refers to a translation strategy that closely adheres to the lexical choices and grammatical structure of the source text. The goal is to remain as faithful as possible to the form and content of the original language, even if the result may sound slightly foreign or less idiomatic in the TL. This approach is particularly useful when the translator seeks to preserve the cultural, historical, or stylistic nuances of the original work.

- **Example 1: "Lion Tamer" → "Penjinak Singa"**

The phrase "*lion tamer*" is translated literally into Indonesian as "*penjinak singa*", a term that falls under the category of social culture. In this example, the translator utilizes the through-translation technique, rendering the term word-for-word without structural modification. This approach retains the original meaning while preserving the conceptual and grammatical integrity of the source phrase. Since both terms describe the same profession—someone who trains or controls lions—the translation achieves formal equivalence by maintaining both the form and sense of the SL expression.

- **Example 2: "New York" → "New York"**

In this instance, the proper noun "*New York*" is transferred directly into the TL without any alteration. This technique is known as **borrowing**, where the SL term is retained in its original form in the TL. Proper nouns, especially names of well-known places, are often preserved in translation to maintain clarity and universal recognition. By not altering the form of "*New York*", the translator ensures that the reference is instantly recognizable to TL readers, thus fulfilling the principles of formal equivalence—keeping both lexical identity and cultural context intact.

These examples demonstrate that formal equivalence prioritizes linguistic fidelity and structural consistency. It is most effective when dealing with terms or names that carry established meanings across cultures or when the original terminology holds specific significance that would be diluted or lost through adaptation.

2. Dynamic Equivalence

Dynamic equivalence, as conceptualized by Nida and Taber (1969), refers to a translation approach that emphasizes conveying the intended meaning, function, and emotional effect of the source language (SL) message in a way that is natural and easily understood by the target language (TL) audience. Unlike formal equivalence, which prioritizes the preservation of form and structure, dynamic equivalence adapts the linguistic and cultural expressions of the SL to align more closely with the cultural norms and linguistic expectations of TL readers.

This strategy often involves modifying cultural references, idioms, or lexical items to produce a similar communicative impact. In the context of translating **culture-specific items (CSIs)**, dynamic equivalence becomes particularly important when the SL contains concepts or objects that may not exist in the TL culture.

- **Example 1: "Jeans" → "Jins"**

The word "*jeans*" originates from Western fashion culture and refers to sturdy, denim

trousers typically worn for casual or practical purposes. In Bahasa Indonesia, there is no exact indigenous equivalent that fully encapsulates this cultural item. To address this, the translator employs the **naturalization** technique, adapting the foreign word phonetically and morphologically into a TL-friendly form—"jins." This transformation allows Indonesian readers to recognize the term while preserving the original concept associated with the garment. As described in the *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*, jeans symbolize a specific type of durable clothing linked to youth, informality, and modernity. The use of the naturalized form "jins" represents a typical example of dynamic equivalence, in which the translator bridges the cultural gap by modifying the foreign term without altering its core meaning. Through this method, the translator ensures that TL readers experience a similar cognitive and emotional response to the term as SL readers would.

- **Example 2: "Gym" → "Gimnasium"**

The translation of "gym" into "gimnasium" further illustrates the application of dynamic equivalence. In the English language, "gym" is an abbreviated form of "gymnasium," which refers to a facility equipped for physical exercise and sports activities. The TL equivalent, "gimnasium," is a borrowed and adapted version that retains the concept while adjusting its form to fit the phonological and orthographic norms of Bahasa Indonesia. This adaptation reflects an effort to maintain both semantic clarity and cultural familiarity. The term "gimnasium" is widely understood by Indonesian readers as a place designated for physical training, thus replicating the communicative purpose of the original word. The translation does not preserve the shortened informal form "gym," but rather chooses the more formal and standardized "gimnasium," which is still functionally equivalent and culturally relevant in the TL context. This demonstrates the translator's sensitivity to linguistic accessibility and audience expectations.

In both examples, dynamic equivalence allows the translator to prioritize meaning over literal form. This strategy is particularly effective when dealing with lexical gaps or cultural disparities between the SL and TL. While "jins" and "gimnasium" may not be exact replicas of their source terms in form, they fulfill the same communicative role and are culturally resonant within the Indonesian context.

By adopting dynamic equivalence, translators can enhance readability, relatability, and effectiveness of the translated text—especially when addressing audiences from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This approach acknowledges that successful translation is not merely about replicating words, but about recreating meaning in ways that are meaningful to the intended audience.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the translator utilized nine translation techniques as outlined by Molina and Albir, with borrowing emerging as the most dominant method. Borrowing accounted for 50.7% of the total translation strategies applied, signifying its crucial role in rendering culture-specific items (CSIs). This technique proved especially effective in translating terms related to ecology, religion and belief systems, and anthroponyms. The frequent use of borrowing reflects the translator's need to preserve original lexical items when no direct equivalents exist in the target language (Bahasa Indonesia), thereby maintaining both cultural authenticity and lexical integrity.

In terms of equivalence, the analysis revealed that formal equivalence was employed in 69 instances when transferring CSIs into Indonesian. Drawing on Nida and Taber's (1969) definition, formal equivalence emphasizes fidelity to the form, structure, and meaning of the source language (SL), aiming to produce a translation that closely mirrors the original. This strategy is particularly vital when translating culturally bound terms that require literal accuracy to prevent semantic distortion or cultural misrepresentation.

The translator's predominant reliance on both formal equivalence and borrowing indicates a deliberate emphasis on preserving the cultural depth of the source text. By retaining both the original form and meaning, the translator allows the target audience to engage more deeply with the cultural nuances embedded in the SL, thus bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. This approach demonstrates how formal equivalence, complemented by borrowing, serves as a powerful strategy in conveying not only meaning but also cultural identity.

Moreover, this combination underscores the inherent complexity in translating CSIs, where the translator must strike a delicate balance between fidelity to the source culture and clarity in the target language. The findings of this study highlight the importance of carefully selecting translation strategies that are contextually appropriate—ensuring that the translation remains faithful to the original while still being accessible, intelligible, and culturally relevant for the target audience.

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