

CULTURAL-BACK TRANSLATION IN VIDEO GAMES: A CASE STUDY OF CULTURAL-SPECIFIC ELEMENTS IN *A SPACE FOR THE UNBOUND*

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ABSTRAK

*Video game, sebagai industri yang berkembang pesat, semakin banyak dikaji dalam studi penerjemahan, terutama seiring meningkatnya lokalisasi judul-judul gim ke dalam berbagai bahasa untuk menjangkau audiens global. Artikel ini menelaah penerjemahan balik budaya terhadap unsur-unsur spesifik budaya dalam video game produksi Indonesia *A Space for the Unbound* (2023), yang narasinya semula ditulis dalam bahasa Inggris dan kemudian diterjemahkan ke dalam bahasa Indonesia. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi unsur-unsur spesifik budaya berdasarkan kategorisasi Newmark (1988) serta menganalisis prosedur penerjemahan yang digunakan mengacu pada Shirinzadeh dan Mahadi (2014), sehingga ideologi penerjemahan yang mendasari proses tersebut (Venuti, 1995) dapat disimpulkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dari 157 unsur yang teridentifikasi, 52% diterjemahkan menggunakan prosedur yang berorientasi pada domestikasi. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pengembang dan tim lokalisasi berupaya memfasilitasi pemain Indonesia tanpa sepenuhnya mengasingkan pengalaman bermain bagi audiens berbahasa Inggris. Penelitian selanjutnya dapat mengkaji ketidakkonsistenan aset gim multibahasa serta penerjemahan unsur-unsur spesifik budaya ke dalam bahasa lain yang didukung oleh gim ini.*

Kata kunci: *A Space for the Unbound*, penerjemahan video game, penerjemahan balik budaya, prosedur penerjemahan.

ABSTRACT

Video games, as a rapidly expanding industry, have increasingly become a subject of translation studies, particularly as more titles are localized into multiple languages to reach global audiences. This paper examines the cultural-back translation of culture-specific elements in the Indonesian-produced video game *A Space for the Unbound* (2023), whose narrative was originally written in English and later translated into Indonesian. The study identifies culture-specific elements

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using Newmark's (1988) categorization and analyzes the translation procedures applied based on Shirinzadeh and Mahadi (2014), from which the underlying translation ideology is inferred following Venuti (1995). The findings reveal that, out of 162 identified culture-specific elements, 52% were translated using procedures aligned with domestication. This indicates that the developers, particularly the narrative writers and the localization team, aimed to accommodate Indonesian players while preserving a balanced experience for English-speaking audiences. The study contributes to video game translation research by highlighting cultural-back translation practices and suggests that future research may examine inconsistent multilingual in-game assets as well as translations into other supported languages.

Keywords: *A Space for the Unbound*, video game translation, cultural-back translation, translation procedures.

A. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of globalisation has significantly influenced the entertainment industry, including the video game sector. Globalisation refers to increasing economic and cultural interconnectedness driven by international trade, cross-border investment, and information flows (Kolb, 2018). Reflecting this expansion, Microsoft reported a 50% increase in gaming revenue during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Yin-Poole, 2021), and global video game revenue was projected to reach USD 384.90 billion by 2023 (Statista, 2020).

Unlike many mainstream entertainment industries, video games are not exclusively dominated by Western producers. Japanese franchises such as *Mario* remain among the best-selling series worldwide (Sirani, 2023). Simultaneously, the rise of indie games has enabled smaller studios to produce culturally distinctive titles with global reach.

Indonesia has emerged as a notable contributor to this development. The viral success of *DreadOut* (2014), which drew upon Indonesian folklore, marked a turning point for international recognition of Indonesian indie developers. Continuing this trajectory, *A Space for the Unbound*, developed by Mojiken Studio and published by Toge Productions, was officially released in 2023 after several years of development. Set in rural Indonesia in the late 1990s, the narrative-driven game centres on Atma and Raya and received international recognition, including a nomination at The Game Awards 2023.

Despite its strong Indonesian cultural setting, the game's credits indicate that Indonesian localisation was required, suggesting that English functioned as the original narrative language. This situation constitutes cultural-back translation, in which culture-specific elements in the source text derive from the target culture rather than the source culture (Klaudy & Heltai, 2020).

Previous studies on Indonesian video game translation have primarily examined cultural negotiation in horror games such as *Pamali* (Setyawan et al., 2019; Anggraini et al., 2022). However, because *Pamali* was originally written in

Indonesian, it does not represent cultural-back translation. More broadly, research on cultural-back translation remains limited and has focused mainly on literary or heritage contexts (Klaudy & Heltai, 2020; Liao, 2020). To date, this phenomenon has not been examined in Indonesian video game translation.

Accordingly, this study investigates how Indonesian culture-specific elements in *A Space for the Unbound* are translated back into Indonesian, focusing on (1) the translation procedures employed and (2) the translation ideology reflected in those procedures.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Cultural-Specific Items

Cultural items are defined as objects, expressions, or elements that carry particular significance within a specific culture. This study adopts the classification of culture-specific items proposed by Newmark (1988) to identify and categorize cultural elements present in *A Space for the Unbound*. The use of this framework allows the data to be systematically narrowed and limits the analysis to relevant cultural items that emerge within the game. Newmark (1988) categorizes culture-specific items into five main groups, as outlined below:

- a. **Ecology**, including flora, fauna, and other ecological features.
- b. **Material culture**, encompassing food, clothing, housing, and transportation.
- c. **Social culture**, referring to activities related to work and leisure.
- d. **Organisations and customs**, covering political, international, historical, social, legal, religious, and artistic terms.
- e. **Habits or gestures**, consisting of culturally specific practices or actions performed by particular cultural groups.

2. Translation Ideology

The second theoretical foundation of this study is translation ideology as proposed by Venuti (1995). Venuti distinguishes between two major ideologies in translation: domestication and foreignization. Domestication aims to reduce the foreignness of the source text (ST) by producing a fluent and natural target text (TT), thereby bringing the author “back home.” In contrast, foreignization seeks to preserve the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of the ST, effectively “sending the reader abroad.” It is important to note that translators may not consistently adhere to a single ideology, as translation practices are often flexible and context-dependent.

3. Translation Procedures for Culture-Specific Items

To identify the dominant translation ideology reflected in the Indonesian localisation of the game, this study refers to the spectrum model of translation procedures for culture-specific items proposed by Shirinzadeh and Mahadi (2014), which is based on the classification developed by Ramière (2006). This model categorizes translation procedures according to their tendency toward either domestication or foreignization. In this study, the model is adapted by incorporating the repatriation procedure proposed by Klaudy and Heltai (2020). This adaptation is necessary because a significant portion of the data consists of cultural elements in the ST that originate from Indonesian culture and are translated back into

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Indonesian. Such instances are categorized as repatriation and are considered a direct outcome of cultural-back translation. The adapted spectrum of translation procedures and their ideological orientation is illustrated in Figure 1.

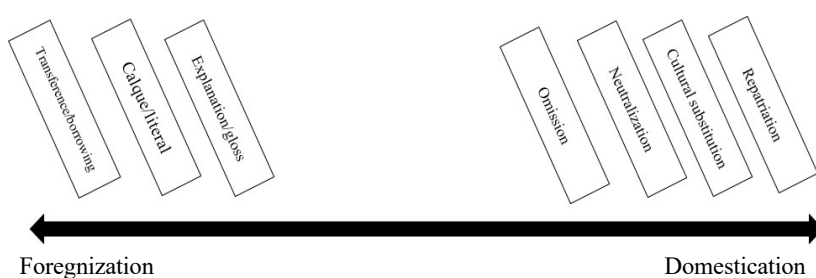


Figure 1. An adapted spectrum model of Shirinzadeh and Mahadi's translation procedures for culturally loaded items

The spectrum illustrated in Figure 1 presents the translation procedures applied in rendering culture-specific items and indicates their ideological orientation, ranging from foreignization to domestication. The procedures included in the model are briefly explained as follows:

- a. **Transference / borrowing**, referring to phonetic translation, also known as naturalisation, in which a source-text term is transferred directly into the target text.
- b. **Calque / through translation**, involving the literal translation of each unit of the source text into the target text.
- c. **Explanation / gloss**, involving the addition of explanatory information in the target text to clarify a culture-specific item.
- d. **Omission**, referring to the deletion of a culture-specific element from the target text.
- e. **Neutralisation**, involving the replacement of a culturally loaded term in the source text with a culturally neutral expression in the target text.
- f. **Cultural substitution**, involving the replacement of a culture-specific item in the source text with a culturally equivalent item from the target culture.

The six procedures outlined above are adopted from the model proposed by Shirinzadeh and Mahadi (2014). To account for the characteristics of cultural-back translation observed in this study, the model is extended by incorporating the repatriation procedure proposed by Klaudy and Heltai (2020). This addition is necessary because a substantial number of culture-specific elements in the source text originate from Indonesian culture and are translated back into the target language. Within this framework, repatriation is positioned under the domestication ideology, as the cultural elements involved are effectively re-borrowed into the target text, as defined below:

g. **Repatriation**, referring to the re-borrowing into the target text of culture-specific elements that were originally derived from the target language and appear as loan translations in the source text.

C. RESEARCH METHODS

The data of cultural-specific elements found in the video game *A Space for the Unbound*, including narrative dialogue and in-game assets, were obtained in both language versions directly from the game. The original game script was written by Brigitta Rena and Galuh Elsa A. N., while the Indonesian localisation was carried out by Lasheli Dwitri Witjaksana and Jendra Prahasta.

This study employed a qualitative research method to examine the translation procedures applied in the English and Indonesian versions of the game. Cultural-specific elements identified in the data were classified according to Newmark's (1998) five categories of cultural items: ecology, material culture, social culture, organisations and customs, and gestures or habits. The data were then analysed by identifying the translation procedures proposed by Shirinzadeh and Mahadi (2014), with a minor adaptation through the inclusion of the repatriation procedure proposed by Klaudy and Heltai (2020).

The identified data were organised into tables and arranged chronologically according to the chapters of the game. The data and selected examples presented in these tables were subsequently analysed and discussed to identify dominant translation procedures and to examine patterns of cultural-back translation across categories.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are compiled and presented in Table 1. The table displays the total number of culture-specific elements identified in *A Space for the Unbound* based on Newmark's (1998) categorization, along with the translation procedures applied to each item.

Table 1. Compiled Data of the Translation of Culture-Specific Elements in A Space for the Unbound

Categories	Total	Procedures						
		Transference/ Borrowing	Calque / Through Translation	Explanation /gloss	Omission	Neutralization	Cultural Substitution	Repatriation

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Ecology	11	1	3	2	-	-	4	1
Material culture	29	3	4	1	2	-	5	11
Social culture	32	3	9	7	3	-	8	1
Organizations, customs, ideas	48	6	16	5	3	-	11	6
Gestures and habits	42	2	8	5	3	-	24	-
TOTAL	162	15	40	20	11	0	52	19

Based on the data presented in Table 1, a total of 157 culture-specific elements were identified. Of these, 52 items were translated using the cultural substitution procedure (33.1%), followed by 40 items using calque or through translation (25.4%), 20 items using explanation or gloss (12.7%), 19 items using repatriation (11.7%), 15 items using transference or borrowing (9.5%), and 11 items using omission (7%).

Referring to the translation procedure spectrum proposed by Shirinzadeh and Mahadi (2014), the findings indicate that 52% of the culture-specific elements were translated using procedures that lean toward the domestication ideology. This suggests a dominant tendency toward domestication in the Indonesian localisation of *A Space for the Unbound*.

1. Ecology

The first category discussed is ecology, which includes flora, fauna, and natural features such as hills, winds, and plains. A total of 12 data were identified under this category, with cultural substitution emerging as the dominant translation procedure. Selected examples of cultural-back translation in the ecology category are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of Cultural-Back Translation in the Ecology Category

Chapter	Source text	Target text	Translation procedure	Translation ideology
Chapter 1: Raya	Hey, doggy doggy!	Hey, guguk!	Cultural substitution	Domestication

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Chapter 1: Raya	Kitty	<i>Pus</i>	Cultural substitution	Domestication
Chapter 3: Lulu	The beautiful flower of the <i>asoka</i> tree	<i>Bunga indah yang tumbuh dari pohon asoka</i>	Repatriation	Domestication
Chapter 3: Lulu	Do you want more camellia? Or maybe aster?	<i>Apa kau mau bunga kamelia? Atau mungkin aster?</i>	Transference/borrowing	Foreignization

The examples in Table 2 demonstrate the localisation team's use of procedures that lean toward both domestication and foreignization, including cultural substitution, repatriation, and transference.

The examples presented in Table 2 demonstrate the variety of translation procedures applied by the localisation team, including **cultural substitution** and **repatriation**, which lean toward domestication, as well as **transference**, which leans toward foreignization.

An example of **cultural substitution** in the fauna subcategory appears in Chapter One, where the character Raya calls out to a dog using the expression “*Hey, doggy doggy!*”. In the target text, this expression is translated as “*Hei, guguk!*”, an Indonesian onomatopoeic expression deriving from barking sound commonly used as an endearment term for dogs. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, “*doggy*” is defined as a child’s word for a dog. In this case, the source-text term is substituted with “*guguk*”, which functions similarly in Indonesian as a familiar and affectionate expression.

Additionally, the literal Indonesian equivalent of “*dog*”, namely “*anjing*”, is frequently associated with profanity in everyday usage. This pragmatic consideration further supports the translator’s choice to apply cultural substitution rather than a literal or through translation.

A similar strategy is observed in the same chapter when Atma and Raya encounter a feral cat trapped in a tree. Atma addresses the cat by saying, “*Don’t worry, kitty. I’ll come up and get you!*”. The term “*kitty*”, defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as an informal word for “*cat*”, is translated into “*pus*” in the target text. In Indonesian, “*pus*” is an affectionate expression commonly used to call cats, including stray or feral ones. This usage aligns with the definition found in the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI), which defines “*pus*” as an exclamation used to call a cat. These examples illustrate how cultural substitution is employed to maintain functional equivalence through familiar endearment terms in the target language.

An example of the **repatriation procedure** within the floral subcategory appears in Chapter Three, where a character refers to “*the beautiful flower of the asoka tree.*” In the target text, this expression is translated as “*Bunga indah yang tumbuh dari pohon asoka.*” Although the flower is referred to as “*ashoka*” in English, the source text uses the Indonesian spelling “*asoka*,” which is

subsequently repatriated into the target text. This case exemplifies cultural-back translation, where a term originating from the target culture is reintroduced through the source text.

Another example from the same chapter involves a florist offering flowers by asking, “*Do you want more camellia? Or maybe aster?*”. This line is translated as “*Apa kau mau bunga kamelia? Atau mungkin aster?*”. In this instance, the floral term “*camellia*” is naturalised into the Indonesian spelling “*kamelia*,” while “*aster*” retains identical spelling in both languages. Additionally, the gloss procedure is applied through the insertion of the word “*bunga*” in “*bunga kamelia*.”

Although the flora mentioned in these examples are native to the Southeast Asian region, the localisation team applies varying translation procedures rather than consistently using repatriation. This variation suggests that the choice of procedure is influenced not only by cultural origin but also by contextual and pragmatic considerations within the game.

2. Material Culture

The material culture category includes culture-specific elements related to food, clothing, housing, transportation, and communication. A total of 31 data were identified under this category, with repatriation emerging as the dominant translation procedure. Selected examples illustrating the range of procedures applied to material culture items are presented chronologically in Table 3.

Table 3. Examples of cultural-back translation data of material culture.

Chapter	Source text	Target text	Translation procedure	Translation ideology
Chapter 3: Lulu	A bowl of <i>bakso</i> with extra noodles, please!	<i>Aku mau seporsi bakso dengan ekstra mi, ya!</i>	Repatriation	Domestication
Chapter 3: Lulu	a <i>Rujak</i> Fruit Salad	<i>‘Rujak’</i>	Omission	Domestication
Chapter 3: Lulu	<i>Legen</i>	<i>Es Legen</i>	Explanation/ gloss	Foreignization
Chapter 4: Marin	The <i>mawut</i> fried rice	<i>Nasi goreng mawut</i>	Repatriation	Domestication

As shown in Table 3, food-related items constitute the most frequent sub-category within material culture. One prominent example appears in Chapter 4, where the player is tasked with memorizing food orders for a character starting a food stall business. One of the orders, “*the mawut fried rice*,” is translated into “*nasi goreng mawut*.” This translation involves two procedures: the repatriation of the term “*mawut*,” which originates from Indonesian culinary culture, and the literal translation of “*fried rice*” into “*nasi goreng*.” In the source text (ST), only

“mawut” is borrowed from Indonesian, rather than the full dish name “nasi goreng mawut,” indicating partial cultural borrowing.

Another instance of repatriation occurs in Chapter 3, when Atma orders food from a bakso stall, saying, “*A bowl of bakso with extra noodles, please!*” This line is translated as “*Aku mau sepori bakso dengan ekstra mi, ya!*” In this case, “bakso” is fully borrowed from Indonesian into the ST and later repatriated in the target text (TT). Additionally, the translation of “noodles” into “mi” is noteworthy, as the English term “noodles” is culturally broad and may refer to various types of noodles from different culinary traditions. The use of a generic term in the ST arguably facilitates comprehension for international players, suggesting a degree of accommodation for a global audience. This contrasts with the more specific borrowing strategy applied to “bakso,” revealing an inconsistency in the treatment of food-related items.

Other procedures, such as omission and gloss, also appear in this category. In Chapter 3, the completed dish “*a Rujak Fruit Salad*” is translated simply as “*Rujak*.” Here, the descriptive phrase “*fruit salad*” is omitted, as Indonesian players are presumed to be familiar with the dish without additional explanation.

This omission is further justified by the cultural variability of rujak across regions. Conversely, glossing is applied to the term “*Legen*,” which is translated as “*es Legen*.” The addition of “*es*” provides contextual information that the item is a cold beverage, a choice likely reinforced by the in-game visual asset displaying the text “*ES LEGEN*.”

3. Social Culture

The social culture category encompasses culture-specific elements related to activities of work and leisure. A total of 30 data were identified in this category, with the dominant translation procedures being cultural substitution and calque, applied in equal measure. Representative examples are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Examples of Cultural-Back Translation of Social Culture

Chapter	Source text	Target text	Translation procedure	Translation ideology
Chapter 1: Raya	Civil defense officer	Hansip	Cultural substitution	Domestication
Chapter 1: Raya	Arcade	Ding dong	Cultural substitution	Domestication
Chapter 2: Erik	Game	game	Borrowing (direct)	Foreignization
Chapter 2: Erik	GameBot	<i>GimBot</i>	Borrowing (naturalization)	Foreignization
Chapter 4: Marin	You’ve done your part as a teacher	<i>Kamu sudah melakukan tugasmu sebagai guru</i>	Calque	Foreignization

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As illustrated in Table 4, the calque procedure is applied to work-related terminology. In Chapter 4, a conversation between two teachers, Pram and Niken, includes the line “*You’ve done your part as a teacher,*” which is translated as “*Kamu sudah melakukan tugasmu sebagai guru.*” The profession “*teacher*” is rendered literally as “*guru.*” While both terms originate from Sanskrit, their contemporary meanings differ. In Indonesian, “*guru*” refers specifically to someone who teaches as a profession, whereas in English, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, “*guru*” often denotes a spiritual guide or mentor. Despite this semantic divergence, the literal translation is contextually appropriate within the educational setting depicted in the game.

Instances of inconsistency are more apparent in the leisure sub-category. In Chapter 2, the term “*game*” is borrowed directly into the TT as “*game,*” even though “*gim*” is a naturalized loanword recognized in *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*. Later in the same chapter, the fictional console “*GameBot*” is translated as “*GimBot,*” indicating naturalization. This inconsistency is notable, as both terms appear within a similar context. “*GameBot*” itself references popular retro handheld consoles such as Nintendo’s *GameBoy* and *Game & Watch*, both of which are widely known in Indonesia, where “*GameBoy*” has historically functioned as a generic term for handheld gaming devices. The differing treatment of “*game*” and “*GameBot*” suggests variability in the localisation team’s approach to leisure-related terminology within the same narrative space.

4. Organisation, Customs, Ideas, or Concepts

Out of the 50 data collected in this category, the dominant translation procedure applied is calque. This category also exhibits the greatest variety of subcategories compared with other classifications of culturally specific elements. The subcategories identified under this classification include political, international, historical, social, legal, religious, and artistic elements. Representative examples from this category are presented in Table 5, arranged chronologically according to the chapters of the video game *A Space for the Unbound*.

Table 5. Examples of cultural-specific translation data of organisations, customs, ideas, or concepts

Chapter	Source text	Target text	Translation procedure	Translation ideology
Chapter Prologue: Atma	<i>Keroncong</i> beat	<i>Musik keroncong</i>	Repatriation	Domestication
Chapter 1: Raya	Financial crisis	<i>Krismon</i>	Cultural substitution	Domestication
Chapter 4: Marin	The prosecution	<i>Jaksa Penuntut</i>	Explanation/gloss	Foreignization

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Chapter 4: Marin	<i>Suro</i> is the first month in the Javanese calendar	<i>Suro adalah bulan pertama dalam kalender Jawa</i>	Repatriation	Domestication
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The examples presented in Table 5 represent data from several subcategories that are considered significant due to their strong connection to Indonesian cultural contexts. The following discussion elaborates on four subcategories: historical, legal, religious, and artistic elements.

a. Historical cultural elements

An example of a historical term appears in the second chapter of the game, where Atma finds a bottle cap from a soda brand named *Koala Kola* and comments, “Koala Kola. After the financial crisis the price jumped to Rp.1000.” The term *financial crisis* in the source text (ST) is translated as *krismon* in the target text (TT). *Krismon* is an abbreviation of *krisis moneter*, which refers to the 1997 Asian financial crisis that had a significant impact on Indonesia’s economic condition. Considering that *A Space for the Unbound* is set in the 1990s, the use of this term is contextually appropriate. Although an abbreviated form is used in the TT, Indonesian players are likely to understand the reference due to their familiarity with national historical events, in contrast to foreign players who may lack the same cultural background.

b. Legal cultural elements

In the fourth chapter of the game, Atma is coerced into a supernatural courtroom and appointed as “the prosecution.” In the TT, this term is translated as *Jaksa Penuntut*. The translation employs a gloss procedure through the addition of the word *jaksa*, as the term *penuntut* alone can be used in a general, non-legal context. In Indonesian, *jaksa* specifically refers to a legal official appointed by the state to represent the government in legal proceedings.

This choice aligns with the in-game context, where Atma is appointed by Lulu, the queen of the supernatural kingdom, to act as the prosecution. The notion of appointment by a higher authority mirrors the structure of the Indonesian legal system. Furthermore, the title *jaksa* is also used in the term *jaksa pengacara negara*, which refers to an attorney representing the state or public interest in civil and administrative matters (Mardatillah, 2022). Therefore, the translation *jaksa penuntut* effectively clarifies the legal role portrayed in the game, namely an official representative responsible for prosecuting a defendant.

c. Religious cultural element

A religious term is found in the fourth chapter during a dialogue in which Atma asks a classmate about a school festival held to celebrate the first night of the Javanese calendar. The classmate responds, “Suro is the first month in the Javanese calendar.” The term *Suro* is repatriated in the TT as *Suro adalah bulan pertama dalam kalender Jawa*.

The event referred to is the annual celebration of the first night of Suro, which coincides with the Islamic New Year. In Javanese culture, the first night of Suro is

considered sacred, and people are traditionally discouraged from engaging in unnecessary activities other than praying and worshipping God. The Javanese calendar itself is a combination of Islamic, Hindu, and Gregorian calendar systems (Rifda, 2023). These cultural and religious associations support the classification of *Suro* as a religious cultural element.

d. Artistic cultural element

An artistic element appears in the prologue chapter, where Atma encounters a construction worker who asks for his opinion about a musical tape referred to as “keroncong beat.” In the TT, this term is translated as *musik keroncong*. The word *keroncong* is a repatriated Indonesian term referring to a traditional musical genre that originated during the Portuguese colonial era, as defined in the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI). Instruments commonly used in the keroncong genre of music include the ukulele, guitar, violin, flute, cello, and double bass.

In this instance, the word *beat* is substituted with *musik* in the TT. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, *beat* is defined as a rhythmic stress in music or poetry, whereas *musik* in the KBBI is defined as an arrangement of sounds containing rhythm, melody, and harmony, typically produced using instruments. Although this substitution involves a broader semantic shift, it does not alter the intended context. Therefore, the use of *musik keroncong* is considered appropriate and natural in the target language.

5. Gestures and Habits

This category is referred to as *non-cultural language* by Newmark (1988). It mainly concerns expressions or actions that are common in certain cultures but may not be familiar in others. In this category, the most frequently applied translation procedure is cultural substitution, with 22 data identified out of a total of 41. Selected examples illustrating the application of this procedure are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. *Examples of cultural-back translation data of gestures and habits*

Chapter	Source text	Target text	Translation procedure	Translation ideology
Chapter 4: Marin	Oh man, she was screaming like a banshee	<i>Oh, dia teriak-teriak seperti kesurupan</i>	Cultural substitution	Domestication
Chapter 4: Marin	Come here, we'll flatten you like a pancake!	<i>Sini, biar kami lumatkan kau seperti ayam penyet!</i>	Cultural substitution	Domestication

Table 6 demonstrates the use of cultural substitution in translating gesture-related expressions found in Chapter Four of the game. One example occurs when a group of bullies describes the reaction of their victim using the expression “*Oh man, she was screaming like a banshee*,” which is translated into “*Oh, dia teriak-teriak seperti kesurupan*.” In the source text, “*screaming like a banshee*” refers to

a female spirit in Gaelic folklore known for its piercing scream (Merriam-Webster). In the target text, this expression is substituted with *kesurupan*, a culturally familiar concept in Indonesian society referring to spirit possession. Despite the substitution, the supernatural connotation of the original expression is preserved, allowing Indonesian players to grasp the intended meaning effectively.

Another example is found in the same chapter when a group of thugs threatens the protagonist Atma by saying, “Come here, we’ll flatten you like a pancake!” This expression is translated as “Sini, biar kami lumatkan kau seperti ayam penyet!” The substitution draws on a culturally familiar Indonesian dish, *ayam penyet*, which is prepared by pounding seasoned chicken until softened. The verb *lumatkan* is derived from *melumatkan*, defined in the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI) as “the act of pounding until softened.” While *pancake* and *ayam penyet* belong to different culinary traditions, both expressions rely on the shared gesture of flattening or pounding. Although this example could also be classified under material culture, particularly food, the emphasis of the expression lies in the violent gesture conveyed metaphorically, making it more appropriately categorized under gestures and habits.

E. CONCLUSION

This study examined the translation procedures applied to cultural-specific elements in the localisation of *A Space for the Unbound* and identified the dominant translation ideology underlying these choices. The findings show that, out of the 157 cultural-specific elements identified in the game, the majority were translated using procedures that lean toward the domestication ideology (52%). Among these, cultural substitution emerged as the most frequently applied procedure. This indicates that the localisation team prioritised accessibility and immersion for target-language players by adapting culturally embedded expressions into forms that are more familiar within the Indonesian cultural context. Accordingly, the first and second research questions concerning the translation procedures used and the dominant translation ideology can be answered by concluding that domestication is the prevailing strategy in the Indonesian version of the game.

Despite the fact that the cultural setting and narrative of *A Space for the Unbound* are deeply rooted in Indonesian culture—particularly in evoking nostalgia for the 1990s—only 19 instances (11.7%) of the repatriation procedure were identified. This relatively small proportion suggests that the original English narrative deliberately incorporated Indonesian cultural elements in a moderated manner. Such an approach appears to balance two objectives: preserving cultural significance for Indonesian players while maintaining comprehensibility for international audiences who may not share the same cultural background. In this sense, the localisation reflects the developers’ intention to position the game as a culturally grounded yet globally accessible narrative experience.

The findings of this study are also consistent with previous research on cultural-back translation. As noted by Klaudy and Heltai (2020), this type of translation may involve losses in terms of foreignness but can result in gains in cultural contextual relevance for the target audience. In *A Space for the Unbound*,

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the omission procedure was applied in 11 cases (7%), resulting in the removal of certain culturally explicit elements from the source text. However, the analysis shows that these omissions generally function to streamline the narrative for Indonesian players, who are already familiar with the omitted cultural references and therefore do not require additional explanation. This supports the argument that omission, in this context, serves a facilitative rather than reductive function.

A further parallel can be drawn with Liao's (2020) study on the translation of ethnographic artefacts in museum settings, which highlights how spatial and medium-related constraints influence translation choices. Although *A Space for the Unbound* relies solely on written dialogue without voice narration, the flexibility of the video game medium—particularly in terms of text length and player interaction—allows for greater freedom in applying translation procedures compared to more restricted media such as museum labels. This flexibility enables localisation teams to negotiate cultural meaning more dynamically through selective substitution, glossing, or omission.

Finally, this study is limited to the analysis of cultural-specific elements found in the narrative text of *A Space for the Unbound*. Future research could expand this scope by examining in-game visual text assets, which appear inconsistently across different language versions. Further studies may also investigate how Indonesian cultural elements are translated into other target languages beyond English, given that the game supports multiple international languages. Additionally, research focusing on players' reception could provide valuable insights into how different translation strategies affect the gaming experience of players from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly in culturally nostalgic games such as *A Space for the Unbound*.

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