

The Cultural-Emotional Concept in Indigenous Languages and Its Implications for Intercultural Translation: A Theoretical Review

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous languages function not only as a means of communication but also as a medium that represents the cultural values and emotional experiences of their speech communities. Various concepts embedded in regional languages often reflect a close interconnection between cultural and emotional dimensions, making them difficult to understand and translate equivalently into other languages. Although the relationship among language, culture, and emotion has been widely discussed in previous studies, there has been no conceptual formulation specifically explaining the integration of these three aspects within the context of regional languages. This article aims to formulate the concept of cultural-emotional concepts in regional languages through a synthesis of theories from cultural semantics, the anthropology of emotions, and social psychology, and to explain its implications for intercultural translation. The study draws upon Wierzbicka's work on emotion and cultural semantics, Lutz's perspective on emotion as a cultural construct, and Haidt and Keltner's views on the social and moral functions of emotion. The synthesis indicates that cultural-emotional concepts in regional languages can be understood as units of meaning that represent emotional experiences shaped by cultural values, social norms, and the life practices of a speech community, and that are manifested through distinctive linguistic forms. These concepts not only reflect individuals' affective states but also embody important social and moral functions within the collective life of their communities. This article further demonstrates that cultural-emotional concepts constitute a category of cultural-specific concepts, creating challenges for translation because their meanings do not always have equivalent

counterparts in the target language. Therefore, cultural-emotional concepts in regional languages may be regarded as a relevant analytical category for cultural translation studies and translation research in the era of artificial intelligence.

Keywords: cultural-emotional concept, indigenous languages, culture and emotion, intercultural translation, culture-specific concepts.

INTRODUCTION

Language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a medium through which a community understands the world, constructs social relationships, and expresses emotional experiences. From the perspective of linguistic anthropology, language and culture are closely intertwined, such that the meaning of an expression cannot be fully understood without considering the cultural context in which it is embedded. Consequently, the concepts that exist within a language often reflect the distinctive values, norms, and social experiences of its speech community.

The relationship among language, culture, and emotion has attracted considerable attention across various disciplines. Wierzbicka (1999) argues that although human beings share universal emotional capacities, the ways in which emotions are conceptualized and expressed vary across cultural groups. Each language develops its own categories of emotion that do not necessarily have equivalent counterparts in other languages. A similar view is proposed by Lutz (1998) who demonstrates that emotion is not merely an individual psychological phenomenon but also a cultural construct shaped by a society's value system and social practices. Furthermore, Haidt (2003) and Keltner & Haidt (1999) explain that emotions function not only as individuals' affective responses but also as social and moral mechanisms that help maintain social relationships, regulate collective behavior, and reinforce cultural values within a community.

In translation studies, the relationship between language and culture has long been a major concern. Nida (1964) emphasizes that translation involves not only the transfer of linguistic forms but also the transfer of cultural meanings embedded in the source text. (Newmark, 1988) points out that various cultural words often pose translation difficulties because of their strong association with particular cultural contexts. Subsequent developments in translation research have focused on cultural-specific concepts and culture-specific items, namely concepts or cultural elements that do not always have direct equivalents in the target language (Aixelá, 1996);

Baker, 2018). According to Baker (2018), certain concepts embedded within a culture may represent experiences, values, or worldviews that are unfamiliar to other cultures, thereby creating problems of equivalence in translation. Consequently, intercultural translation involves not only differences between linguistic systems but also differences between systems of meaning shaped by the cultural experiences of their speech communities.

In the context of Indonesian regional languages, the interrelationship between culture and emotion can be observed in various concepts that carry affective, relational, and cultural meanings. Expressions such as *andhap asor*, *tabe'*, *siri' na pacce*, *peusijuek*, *ngeruwah*, and *mangulosi* reflect not only emotional experiences but also social values, cultural beliefs, moral obligations, and patterns of interpersonal relationships that characterize their respective speech communities. The meanings embedded in these concepts often extend beyond lexical definitions, making them difficult to translate directly into other languages. Such difficulties indicate the existence of meaning units that simultaneously integrate emotional experiences and cultural values.

Although cultural concepts in translation have been widely discussed within the framework of culture-specific concepts, and emotions have received substantial attention in studies of language and culture, no conceptual formulation has yet been developed to explain meaning units that integrate both cultural and emotional dimensions in regional languages and their implications for intercultural translation. Yet many regional languages contain concepts that not only embody particular cultural values but also convey emotional experiences unique to their speech communities. Such concepts have not received adequate theoretical formulation within translation studies, resulting in the absence of an analytical category specifically designed to explain their characteristics and the challenges they pose in intercultural translation.

Against this background, this article aims to formulate the concept of the cultural-emotional concept in regional languages through a synthesis of theories concerning language, culture, and emotion, and to explain its implications for intercultural translation. The article proposes the cultural-emotional concept in regional languages as an analytical category that explains the integration of cultural and emotional dimensions within meaning units found in regional languages, an aspect that has not yet been adequately conceptualized in previous studies. Through this formulation, the article seeks to enrich the theoretical foundation of cultural translation studies, particularly in understanding and translating

meanings that carry both cultural and emotional significance across languages.

METHOD

This article employs a qualitative literature review approach aimed at formulating the concept of cultural-emotional concepts in indigenous languages through a synthesis of theories concerning language, culture, emotion, and translation. The study is conceptual in nature and does not involve the collection of empirical data. Accordingly, it relies on a critical examination of relevant theoretical literature and the integration of various scholarly perspectives that support the formulation of the proposed concept.

The data sources consist of books, journal articles, and scholarly works addressing cultural semantics, the anthropology of emotion, social psychology, and translation studies. The principal references include Wierzbicka's work on cultural semantics and emotion, Lutz's perspective on emotion as a cultural construct, Haidt's and Keltner's discussions of the social and moral functions of emotion, as well as translation theories concerning equivalence, culture-specific concepts, domestication, foreignization, and intercultural translation (Nida, 1964; Newmark, 1988; Baker, 2018; Aixelá, 1996; Venuti, 1995).

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, relevant theories on language, culture, and emotion were identified and examined to understand how emotional experiences are shaped and represented within particular cultural contexts. Second, theories in translation studies were analyzed to identify how culturally grounded meanings have been conceptualized and discussed in relation to translation. Third, insights derived from these theoretical perspectives were synthesized to formulate the concept of cultural-emotional concepts in indigenous languages as an analytical category and to explain its implications for intercultural translation.

The literature data were analyzed using a conceptual synthesis technique by comparing, connecting, and integrating key ideas from complementary theoretical perspectives. Through this process, the study develops a theoretical formulation of cultural-emotional concepts in indigenous languages and explains their relevance to cultural translation studies, particularly in understanding meanings that simultaneously embody cultural and emotional dimensions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Cultural-Emotional Concept in Language

a. *Emotion as a Cultural Construct*

The study of emotion has long attracted the attention of various disciplines, ranging from psychology and anthropology to linguistics. In classical psychology, emotion is often understood as a universal affective experience shared by all human beings regardless of their cultural backgrounds. However, developments in cross-cultural studies have shown that although humans possess the same biological capacity for emotion, the ways emotion is understood, categorized, expressed, and interpreted vary across societies. Consequently, emotion cannot be viewed solely as an individual phenomenon; it must also be understood as a cultural construct shaped by social experiences and systems of meaning embedded within a community.

One of the scholars who has extensively explored the relationship between language, culture, and emotion is Wierzbicka (1999). She argues that concepts of emotion cannot be separated from language because language provides the categories through which people understand and communicate their emotional experiences. Wierzbicka (1999) rejects the assumption that all emotion concepts are universal and have equivalent counterparts across languages. Instead, she demonstrates that each language develops its own emotional vocabulary that reflects the cultural worldview, values, norms, and social experiences of its speakers. Consequently, an emotion concept in one language cannot always be accurately translated into another because it often embodies culture-specific assumptions and meanings. Within this perspective, language functions not only as a tool for expressing emotion but also as a means of shaping and constructing people's understanding of emotional experience itself.

The view that emotion is a cultural construct is also advanced by Lutz (1998) through her anthropological study of the *Ifaluk* community in Micronesia. Lutz demonstrates that the emotion concepts used by the *Ifaluk* people cannot be fully explained through the emotion categories commonly employed in Western psychological traditions. Her findings reveal that the meaning of emotion is shaped by the value systems and social practices that characterize a particular society. Emotion is not merely a psychological response to events but also forms part of the cultural mechanisms that regulate social relationships and guide the behavior of community members. Consequently, every society develops its own ways of defining, evaluating, and expressing emotion, making the understanding of emotion inseparable from the cultural context in which it is embedded. This perspective shifts attention from emotion as a universal biological

phenomenon to emotion as a socio-cultural phenomenon that is produced and reproduced through everyday communicative practices

b. Social and Moral Functions of Emotion

In addition to being culturally constructed, emotion performs important social functions. Beyond individual affective experience, emotion facilitates social interaction, regulates interpersonal relationships, and contributes to the maintenance of social life within a community. Keltner & Haidt (1999) argue that emotion evolved as an adaptive mechanism that helps individuals interact with their social environment. From this perspective, emotion functions not only as a response to particular events but also as a form of social communication through which individuals convey attitudes, intentions, and evaluations to others. Emotions such as shame, respect, guilt, empathy, and pride carry social consequences because they influence how individuals behave and relate to other members of their community.

Furthermore, Keltner & Haidt (1999) emphasize that emotion operates at multiple levels, ranging from the individual to the cultural level. At the social level, emotion contributes to the development of cooperation, the strengthening of group solidarity, and the maintenance of social order. Through emotion, societies develop mechanisms that encourage socially desirable behavior while discouraging actions that deviate from established norms. In this sense, emotion is not merely a personal experience but also a social instrument that supports the continuity of collective life. Building on this perspective, Haidt (2003) argues that certain emotions perform specifically moral functions because they are closely linked to moral judgment and evaluations of human behavior. Emotions such as shame, guilt, respect, gratitude, and compassion not only reflect affective states but also embody the moral values upheld within a particular society. Through these emotions, individuals learn to recognize the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behavior within their communities.

The social and moral functions of emotion are often reflected in cultural concepts that have been lexicalized in language. Such concepts function not only as guides for behaviour but also as mechanisms for transmitting social values across generations. Consequently, emotion-related vocabulary frequently extends beyond the expression of psychological states to encompass social expectations, cultural norms, and broader worldviews. This phenomenon can be observed in various concepts found in indigenous languages. Terms such as *megibung*, *kawin herdek*, *junjung besaoh*, *daliha na tolu*, *dangai*, and *nyelung tanaa* do not merely refer to particular emotional experiences; they also encode values that regulate interpersonal relationships, promote social harmony, express

respect for others, and guide behavior in accordance with culturally accepted norms.

c. Cultural-Emotional Concepts in Indigenous Languages as Repositories of Cultural Knowledge and Local Affect

The discussion of emotion as a cultural construct and its social and moral functions demonstrates that human emotional experience cannot be separated from the cultural context in which it is interpreted and given meaning. In many societies, language functions not only as a means of naming or expressing emotion but also as a repository of cultural knowledge transmitted across generations. Through language, communities preserve their worldviews, social values, collective experiences, and culturally significant ways of understanding social life. Consequently, many concepts found in indigenous languages embody a close relationship between cultural and affective dimensions, making them difficult to interpret solely through their lexical meanings. Cultural-emotional concepts may therefore refer not only to concepts that directly denote emotional states but also to culturally embedded concepts whose meanings incorporate affective, relational, moral, or evaluative dimensions that are significant within a speech community. In this sense, indigenous languages function not merely as communication systems but also as repositories of cultural knowledge and local affect that sustain community identity and continuity.

Cultural-emotional concepts can be observed in various indigenous languages across Indonesia. In Javanese, for example, *ewuh pakewuh* refers to a feeling of reluctance or discomfort arising from considerations of social relationships, respect, and sensitivity toward others, while *tepa selira* embodies empathy, consideration, and attentiveness to the feelings and interests of others in social interaction. Similarly, *catur wedha* represents a set of moral teachings and life advice that conveys values of responsibility, respect, and harmony, whereas *pasok tukon*, a customary contribution from the groom's family to the bride's family, symbolizes commitment, sincerity, and mutual respect between families. Comparable concepts can also be found in other Indonesian languages. In Sundanese culture, *someah* is associated with friendliness and openness toward others; in Balinese culture, *menyama braya* emphasizes kinship, brotherhood, and social solidarity; in Batak culture, *hagabeon* reflects the importance of descendants and family continuity; and in Gorontalo culture, *apobilo bokato syarak, mako adat akan mengobah diri* expresses the close relationship between customary practices and religious values in guiding social conduct. Although these concepts differ in form and function, they collectively illustrate how indigenous languages encode cultural meanings

while simultaneously embodying relational, moral, and affective dimensions of community life.

Because the meanings of such concepts are closely tied to the cultural experiences, value systems, and social practices of the communities in which they are used, they cannot always be adequately represented through direct lexical equivalents. Consequently, important aspects of their significance may be lost in translation. These characteristics position cultural-emotional concepts as a particular category of meaning that poses challenges for intercultural communication and interlingual translation, where successful transfer depends on the ability to convey cultural and emotional dimensions simultaneously.

2. Implications of the Cultural-Emotional Concept for Intercultural Translation

a. The Cultural-Emotional Concept as a Cultural-Specific Concept

The cultural and affective complexity of indigenous-language concepts becomes particularly evident in translation, where such concepts may be regarded as cultural-specific concepts. In translation studies, not all elements of meaning in a language can be directly transferred into another language. Certain concepts are so closely connected to the culture of their speech communities that their meanings are difficult to understand without reference to the social and cultural contexts from which they emerge. Such concepts are often referred to as cultural-specific concepts, namely concepts that are uniquely embedded within a particular culture (Baker, 2018; Newmark, 1988). According to Newmark (1988), cultural elements constitute one of the primary sources of difficulty in translation because fully equivalent expressions are often unavailable in the target language. Such difficulties arise when a concept embodies cultural knowledge, value systems, or social experiences that are familiar only to a particular community. In these situations, translation involves not only differences between languages but also differences in worldviews and cultural experiences between source and target communities.

These characteristics are particularly evident in the cultural-emotional concepts found in indigenous languages. For example, concepts such as *sieun nyingsieunan*, *Swastiastu*, *huma betang*, and *mappasitettongengngi* are often translated through approximate lexical equivalents or descriptive expressions. However, such translations rarely convey the full range of meanings associated with these concepts, including cultural values, social relationships, spiritual beliefs, and affective orientations embedded within their respective communities. As a result, important aspects of their

significance may be lost or reduced in translation. From Baker (2018) perspective, such difficulties are related to the phenomenon of non-equivalence at word level, a situation in which a word or concept in the source language lacks a truly equivalent counterpart in the target language. This non-equivalence may result from cultural differences, differing value systems, or different ways in which societies categorize and interpret human experience.

Accordingly, cultural-emotional concepts in indigenous languages may be understood as a particular form of cultural-specific concept that poses significant challenges for intercultural translation. Their translation cannot be adequately accomplished merely by identifying the closest lexical equivalent; rather, it requires sensitivity to the cultural knowledge, social values, and affective meanings that shape these concepts within their original contexts.

b. Equivalence in Translating the Cultural-Emotional Concept

The concept of equivalence is one of the central issues in translation studies. In general, equivalence refers to the relationship between a source text and a target text that enables a particular message, meaning, or function to be conveyed after the translation process. However, translation scholars have long recognized that equivalence cannot always be fully achieved, particularly when translation involves elements that are deeply embedded in the source culture.

Nida (1964) distinguishes between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence seeks to preserve the form and content of the source text as closely as possible to the original, whereas dynamic equivalence focuses on the effect or response produced in the target audience. In the context of translating cultural-emotional concepts, dynamic equivalence is particularly relevant because the objective of translation extends beyond transferring linguistic forms to communicating the cultural meanings and emotional experiences embodied in the concept.

While Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence emphasizes the communicative effect of translation on target readers, Baker (2018) highlights the difficulties that arise when equivalent concepts are unavailable across cultures. Non-equivalence may result from differences in cultural values, social experiences, or ways of categorizing reality. In such situations, translators must decide whether to preserve the distinctive meanings of the source concept or adapt them to facilitate understanding among target readers. This challenge demonstrates that equivalence involves not only relationships between linguistic forms but also the negotiation of

meaning across cultures. The challenge is particularly evident in the translation of cultural-emotional concepts found in indigenous languages. For example, the Javanese concept of *tepa selira* is frequently rendered as empathy or consideration, even though it also encompasses cultural dimensions related to respecting the feelings and interests of others within social life.

These examples demonstrate that equivalence in translating cultural-emotional concepts extends beyond lexical correspondence. Accordingly, equivalence should be understood as a multidimensional process rather than a purely linguistic relationship between source and target expressions. Such an approach recognizes that successful translation depends on the extent to which linguistic meaning, cultural knowledge, and affective significance can be conveyed across cultural boundaries.

c. Domestication and Foreignization in Translating the Cultural-Emotional Concept

When dealing with concepts that are deeply embedded in the source culture, translators often face a dilemma between preserving cultural distinctiveness and adapting it to the target culture. This dilemma becomes even more complex because such concepts carry meanings that are deeply embedded in the cultural experiences of the source community. In this context, the strategies of domestication and foreignization, Venuti (1995) provides a useful framework for understanding the various choices available in the translation process.

According to Venuti (1995), domestication is a strategy that seeks to bring the source text closer to target-language readers by adapting culturally unfamiliar elements so that they become more accessible and understandable. In contrast, foreignization aims to preserve the distinctiveness of the source culture, allowing readers to remain aware of the cultural differences embedded in the text. These two strategies should not be viewed as mutually exclusive alternatives but rather as points along a continuum of choices that may be employed depending on the objectives of the translation and the needs of the target audience.

In translating the cultural-emotional concept, domestication may be achieved by using target-language expressions that are considered semantically close to the source concept. For example, the Sundanese concept of *someah* may be translated as friendly or hospitality, while the Javanese concept of *tepa selira* may be rendered as empathy or consideration. This strategy facilitates comprehension for target readers but may result in the loss of some of the cultural and

affective meanings associated with the original concept.

Conversely, foreignization enables translators to retain source-cultural terms in their original form, either by preserving the term itself or by providing additional explanations. For instance, the term *ewuh pakewuh* may be retained in the target text with an accompanying explanation indicating that it refers to a feeling of reluctance arising from considerations of social relationships and respect for others. Through this approach, readers gain access to aspects of meaning that are more closely tied to the source culture, although the strategy may increase the cognitive burden on those unfamiliar with that cultural context. The choice between domestication and foreignization therefore requires translators to balance readability and cultural representation when conveying concepts that are deeply rooted in local cultural experiences. Consequently, translating cultural-emotional concepts requires strategic decisions about the extent to which source-cultural meanings should be adapted or preserved for target readers.

d. Challenges in Translating the Cultural-Emotional Concept in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The development of artificial intelligence-based translation technologies has transformed translation practices across various contexts of global communication. Modern translation systems, particularly Neural Machine Translation (NMT), can produce translations that are increasingly natural and fluent compared to earlier generations of machine translation. In recent years, the emergence of Large Language Models (LLMs) has further expanded the capabilities of translation systems by enabling the use of broader contextual information in generating target-language texts. Nevertheless, successful translation depends not only on processing linguistic structures but also on representing meanings that are rooted in the cultural and social experiences of a speech community.

These challenges become particularly evident when translation systems encounter cultural-emotional concepts in indigenous languages. Such concepts encompass layers of meaning that extend beyond lexical content and are closely tied to the cultural experiences of particular communities. As a result, translation cannot rely solely on identifying lexical equivalents but requires sensitivity to the cultural contexts that shape interpretation.

In practice, NMT-based systems often produce linguistically acceptable outputs, yet they do not always preserve the meanings embedded within culturally specific concepts. Similar challenges may arise in LLM-based systems. Although these models generally

demonstrate greater contextual awareness and can generate more natural translations, interpreting meanings that depend on local cultural knowledge remains difficult. Consequently, the quality of translating cultural-emotional concepts cannot be assessed solely in terms of lexical accuracy or linguistic fluency; it must also consider how effectively culturally embedded meanings are conveyed in the target language.

From the perspective of translation studies, cultural-emotional concepts provide a valuable framework for examining the capabilities and limitations of AI-based translation systems. Their translation highlights the importance of cultural understanding in addition to linguistic processing and offers a useful perspective for evaluating and improving AI-assisted translation technologies in intercultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that the relationship between language, culture, and emotion is essential for understanding the complexity of meaning embedded in indigenous languages. Drawing on theories from cultural semantics, the anthropology of emotion, and social psychology, the study argues that emotional experiences are shaped by cultural values, social norms, and community practices. Based on this theoretical synthesis, it proposes cultural-emotional concepts as a distinct category of meaning that integrates cultural and affective dimensions within particular linguistic forms.

The discussion further suggests that these concepts can be understood as a type of cultural-specific concept that poses significant challenges for intercultural translation. Because their meanings extend beyond lexical content, issues of equivalence require attention to the cultural and affective dimensions associated with them. In this context, domestication and foreignization offer alternative strategies for negotiating cultural differences. The relevance of this category becomes even more apparent in the age of artificial intelligence, where the translation of culturally embedded meanings continues to challenge both Neural Machine Translation and Large Language Model-based systems.

As a conceptual study based on the synthesis of existing literature, this article has not empirically examined cultural-emotional concepts using data from specific indigenous languages. Future research should therefore test and refine the proposed concept through the analysis of linguistic data from various indigenous languages in Indonesia, while also exploring its implications for the evaluation of contemporary translation technologies.

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