Cultural Positioning Strategies and Information Clarity: An Analysis of Japanese-Indonesian Translation in the JITCO Bulletin "Tomo"

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Abstract

Translating informational materials for foreign workers in Japan is essential for bridging linguistic, cultural, and legal divides, particularly for Technical Interns and Specified Skilled Workers. This study analyzes the translation strategies used to render the Japanese source text (ST) into the Indonesian target text (TT) in the April 2026 edition of the JITCO bulletin "Tomo". The research covers three text domains: an educational comic on coughing etiquette, a guide to labor rights regulations related to pregnancy, and a health article on the traditional food *natto*. Using Baker's (2018) theoretical framework of word-level and above-word incommensurability, this qualitative descriptive study identifies five principal translation strategies. The analysis demonstrates the effective application of these strategies: (1) cultural substitution to adapt sneezing and coughing onomatopoeia and local government bureaucratic terms; (2) omission to remove stylistic markers of cute characters that lack functional equivalents; (3) loan words with explanations for culturally specific culinary and medical enzyme terms; (4) generalization in classifying specific food supplements; and (5) paraphrasing to restructure incomplete or informal sentences into complete, formal information. The findings suggest that, within public informative texts, translators prioritize information fluency and cultural acceptability for target readers while maintaining the accuracy of legal and health messages crucial to the adaptation of Indonesian workers in Japan.

Keywords: *Mona Baker, Translation Strategies, Non-equivalence, JITCO Tomo Newsletter, Japanese-Indonesian.*

1. Introduction

The growing presence of foreign nationals in Japan, especially Technical Interns and Specified Skilled Workers under current migration schemes (Asato, 2019), poses significant challenges for linguistic, cultural, and legal adaptation. For migrant worker communities, including those from Indonesia, access to accurate, comprehensible public information is essential for daily life, workplace integration, and the protection of fundamental human rights (Badan Layanan Imigrasi Jepang, 2022; Taibi & Ozolins, 2016). To address these challenges, the Japan International Training Cooperation Organization (JITCO, 2026) publishes the JITCO bulletin "Tomo," which includes furigana in the Japanese version and is translated into nine languages, including Indonesian. The bulletin covers practical guides to daily life, labor regulations, cultural insights, and health information.

Translating these materials from Japanese (Source Language, SL) to Indonesian (Target Language, TL) requires far more than a literal code transfer (Munday, 2016). Translators encounter the central issue of non-equivalence at both the word and above-word levels, as outlined in Mona Baker's (2018) theoretical framework. This non-equivalence stems from differences in grammatical structures, cultural concepts, and language registers between Japanese and Indonesian (Sutedi, 2011). In the April 2026 edition of the JITCO bulletin "Tomo" (JITCO, 2026), these challenges manifest across three text domains:

1. **Educational Comic (Manga) Domain:** Employs a colloquial style rich in sound-mimetic expressions (onomatopoeia for sneezing and coughing) and visual character-stylization markers that lack direct functional equivalents in Indonesian.
2. **Legal and Labor Guide Domain:** Contains regulations on pregnancy-related worker rights, maternity leave procedures, and municipal bureaucratic terminology, requiring high precision to prevent legal misinterpretation.
3. **Health and Culinary Domain:** Covers traditional Japanese culinary terms (e.g., *natto*) and medical or enzymatic terms (e.g., *nattokinase*), requiring clear explanations for lay readers.

This study investigates how translators select cultural positioning strategies and sentence restructuring techniques to address non-equivalence, ensuring clarity and accuracy in the message. In translating public-facing community texts, translators must balance readability for the target audience with fidelity to the substantive content of the source text.

The practical significance of this research lies in its contribution to safeguarding the rights, health, and safety of Indonesian workers in Japan (Asato, 2019; Taibi & Ozolins, 2016). Accurate translation of labor laws, including prohibitions against pregnancy-based dismissal, maternity leave entitlements, health insurance benefits, and municipal reporting procedures, is critical. Errors or ambiguities in translating legal and bureaucratic terms may jeopardize migrant workers' legal rights. Conversely, clear communication of public health etiquette and nutritional benefits supports social adaptation and daily well-being (Badan Layanan Imigrasi Jepang, 2022).

The novelty of this research is reflected in three key aspects:

1) Use of Up-to-Date Empirical Data: This study uses the latest primary data from the April 2026 edition of the JITCO bulletin "Tomo," which reflects current public communication contexts and Japanese labor regulations.
2) Comprehensive Multi-domain Text Coverage: Unlike typical translation studies that focus on a single text genre, this research examines three distinct text domains simultaneously: visual/multimodal comics, formal legal regulations, and popular science and health articles, all within a single publication.
3) Identification of Five Adaptive Strategies: The study provides a detailed analysis of how five of Baker's translation strategies, namely cultural substitution, omission, loanwords with explanations, generalization, and paraphrasing, are used to manage cultural acceptability and message clarity in bilingual Japanese-Indonesian public information texts.

By examining these strategies, this research contributes theoretically to Japanese-Indonesian translation studies and community translation scholarship (Munday, 2016; Taibi & Ozolins, 2016) and provides practical insights for translators of public information materials.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design that uses textual content

analysis within Translation Studies (Munday, 2016). Data units include words, phrases, clauses, sentences, oral expressions, onomatopoeia, and specialized terms that reveal translation shifts or strategies across the three domains of the April 2026 JITCO bulletin "Tomo" (JITCO, 2026).

The theoretical foundation draws on Mona Baker's (2018) typology of non-equivalence at the word level and above, complemented by the taxonomy of translation techniques developed by Molina and Hurtado Albir (2002) and by functionalist translation principles (Nord, 2018). To address non-equivalence, Baker (2018) outlines five primary translation strategies:

1. Cultural substitution: replacing a source-culture element with one acceptable in the target culture.
2. Omission: eliminating specific elements or stylistic markers that lack a functional equivalent.
3. Loan word with explanation: adopting a foreign term, followed by an explanatory note.
4. Generalization: using a more general category or term; and
5. Paraphrasing: restructuring sentences to convey meaning fully and formally.

In public-facing community materials, these strategies operate alongside meaning-based translation principles (Larson, 1998) and practical Indonesian translation guidelines (Machali, 2000). Cultural positioning ensures that the target text is socioculturally natural and acceptable, while clarity of information ensures that substantive legal and health messages are conveyed explicitly to minimize misinterpretation among migrant workers (Taibi & Ozolins, 2016).

Furthermore, the diversity of registers and text domains within a single public medium creates complex translation challenges. The JITCO bulletin "Tomo" presents information in nine foreign languages, including Indonesian, across three distinct text domains: the Educational Comic (Manga) domain, which challenges translators to adapt spoken and visual elements to target-language conventions without compromising communicative function; the Legal and Employment Guide domain, which demands high precision and terminological accuracy because of its direct impact on legal certainty and the protection of workers' rights; and the Health and Popular Culinary Article domain, which requires clear translation of terminology so that lay readers can easily understand nutritional and health benefits.

Previous research on public media translation for foreign worker communities highlights that translation serves not only as a linguistic transfer mechanism but also as a tool for social and human rights protection. However, most prior studies have examined text genres in isolation. This study addresses this gap by comprehensively analyzing the flexible application of Baker's (2018) five translation strategies across three distinct text domains in the April 2026 edition of the JITCO bulletin "Tomo," with the goal of ensuring information flow and cultural acceptability while maintaining the accuracy of essential legal and health-related messages.



Figure 1. The April 2026 edition of the JITCO bulletin "Tomo" in Japanese and Indonesian

3. Result

Analysis of the April 2026 edition of the JITCO bulletin "Tomo," which includes an educational comic on cough etiquette, a guide to pregnancy-related labor rights, and a health article on natto, identified five primary translation strategies, as outlined in Mona Baker's (2018) framework, to address lexical and grammatical non-equivalence.

1) Cultural Substitution
   - Onomatopoeia Adaptation: Adapting sound-imitative expressions for sneezing (*Hatchi*) and coughing (*Uhuk*) to align with Indonesian auditory conventions, ensuring they sound natural to the target audience.
   - Bureaucratic Terminology Adjustment: Translating Japanese institutional and local government terms into functionally equivalent terms in the Indonesian bureaucratic system (e.g., using terms such as "kantor walikota/balai desa" and "pemerintah daerah").

2) Omission
   - Elimination of Character Stylization Markers: Omitting spoken-style elements characteristic of "cute characters" in manga (e.g., speech quirks) that lack functional equivalents or corresponding expressions in Indonesian.
   - Functional Focus: Applying this strategy ensures the primary emphasis remains on conveying the health-related educational message without distraction from visual stylization.

3) Loan Words with Explanation
   - Adoption of Culinary & Medical Terms: Directly adopting culturally specific terms such as *natto* (a traditional fermented soybean food) and the medical enzyme *nattokinase*.
   - Provision of Explanatory Notes: Following the loan words, include descriptions of the nutritional context and health benefits, such as explaining *nattokinase*'s role in preventing blood clots and improving blood flow.



Figure 2. Loan Words Strategy applied in the JITCO bulletin "Tomo" within the Health and Culinary Domain

4) Generalization
   - Category Simplification: Using more general terms (superordinate) to classify specific types of dietary supplements or technical nutritional terms.
   - Translation Objective: To enhance comprehension for lay readers by avoiding unnecessarily complex scientific classifications.

5) Paraphrasing
   - Restructuring Incomplete Sentences: Transforming the structure of casual or incomplete sentences, which is characteristic of Japanese, into formal, complete, and communicative declarative sentences.
   - Application to Legal Texts: Evident in the breakdown of articles and regulations regarding pregnancy, such as reorganizing explanations of leave rules (6 weeks pre-delivery and 8 weeks post-delivery) and detailing health insurance benefit plans.

4. Discussion

The empirical findings from the April 2026 edition of the JITCO bulletin "Tomo" (JITCO, 2026) illustrate how translation serves as a vital bridge for social adaptation, legal protection, and public health communication. To evaluate these findings, this section synthesizes them within broader translation theories, focusing on cultural positioning, pragmatic equivalence, and functionalist quality assessment.

4.1 Cultural Positioning: Balancing Domestication and Foreignization in Community Translation

Translating public community media for foreign workers requires a nuanced balance between foreignization and domestication (Venuti, 2008). In the educational comic domain, the translator often adopts domesticating strategies to enhance cultural acceptability and naturalness. For instance, translating Japanese onomatopoeia for sneezing (*hakushon*) into *Hatchi* and for coughing (*konkon*) into *Uhuk* exemplifies dynamic equivalence (Nida & Taber, 1969; Newmark, 1988). Because Japanese sound-symbolic words possess distinct phonetic structures and affective nuances (Sutedi, 2011), a literal transfer would create cognitive friction for Indonesian readers. By substituting them with familiar Indonesian sound-mimetic terms, the translator aligns the visual narrative with target-culture expectations (Molina & Hurtado Albir, 2002).

Similarly, omitting sentence-final stylistic markers (such as character-specific verbal suffixes common in Japanese manga) aligns with Venuti's (2008) concept of making the target text fluent and natural. In Japanese visual culture, character markers build rapport and cute personae (kawaii culture) (Sutedi, 2011). However, in Indonesian public informative texts, retaining non-functional stylistic markers can obscure the core message. Omitting these markers ensures that the primary communicative function—educating readers about cough etiquette and mask-wearing—remains prominent, thereby fulfilling the demands of communicative translation (Newmark, 1988).

4.2 Pragmatic Equivalence and Information Clarity Across Diverse Text Domains

The application of Mona Baker's (2018) framework across the three domains highlights how pragmatic equivalence is negotiated depending on the text genre:

1) **Health and Culinary Domain:** The use of loanwords with explanations for terms like *natto* and *nattokinase* demonstrates a strategic hybrid of foreignization and explanatory adaptation (Baker, 2018; Larson, 1998). Retaining natto preserves cultural authenticity, while adding explicit notes on its nutritional attributes (such as enzyme benefits for blood circulation) transforms a potentially unfamiliar concept into actionable health knowledge. This approach aligns with Larson's (1998) meaning-based translation model, which holds that unknown target-culture concepts must be supplemented with descriptive modifiers to prevent information loss. Furthermore, generalizing complex food supplement categories simplifies specialized jargon, making popular health science accessible to readers without a medical background (Molina & Hurtado Albir, 2002).
2) **Legal and Labor Guide Domain:** In contrast to the comic domain, legal and labor texts require high terminological precision and formal syntactic restructuring. Japanese administrative and legal writing frequently relies on contextual ellipsis, high-context passive constructions, or complex sentence chaining (Sutedi, 2011). The translator resolves these structural gaps through paraphrasing and explicit syntactic restructuring (Baker, 2018; Machali, 2000). For instance, regulations governing maternity leave (6 weeks prior to birth, 8 weeks after birth) and municipal registration procedures are

restructured into complete, formal Indonesian declarative clauses. Restructuring incomplete or high-context Japanese phrases into explicit target sentences ensures legal clarity and eliminates ambiguity, directly serving the protective function of community translation (Taibi & Ozolins, 2016).

4.3 Functionalist Skopos Theory and Translation Quality Assessment in Migrant Worker Protection

According to Skopos theory (Nord, 2018), translation is a target-driven, purposeful activity in which the intended function (Skopos) of the target text determines the choice of translation strategies. The primary Skopos of the JITCO bulletin "Tomo" is to empower Technical Interns and Specified Skilled Workers to navigate daily life and the legal framework in Japan safely and effectively (Asato, 2019; JITCO, 2026).

The translator's decisions align with standard parameters of Translation Quality Assessment (TQA): accuracy (*keakuratan*), acceptability (*keberterimaan*), and readability (*keterbacaan*) (Nababan et al., 2012; House, 2015).

- **Readability and Acceptability:** Prioritized in comic and culinary sections through cultural substitution and omission, ensuring that public health advice is easily understood and culturally appropriate.
- **Accuracy:** Rigorously maintained in the labor rights domain through clear paraphrasing, ensuring that critical legal rights, such as protection against illegal termination due to pregnancy, entitlement to health insurance, and local municipal reporting, are conveyed without distortion.

In Julianne House's (2015) taxonomy, the translation of the JITCO bulletin functions primarily as a covert translation. A covert translation does not enjoy the status of an original ST in its source culture alone; rather, it functions as a functional equivalent text, specifically recontextualized for the target-culture audience. By neutralizing source-culture constraints through flexible strategy selection (Baker, 2018; Molina & Hurtado Albir, 2002), the target text achieves functional pragmatic equivalence, serving as an effective educational tool for the Indonesian migrant community in Japan (Badan Layanan Imigrasi Jepang, 2022; Taibi & Ozolins, 2016).

5. Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive analysis and discussion, four key conclusions can be drawn:

1) Translating public information texts for the Indonesian migrant worker community requires an approach that balances readability for the target audience with substantive fidelity to the source text.
2) Translators dynamically tailor strategy selection across text domains, prioritizing cultural naturalness in visual media while demanding high precision in legal materials.
3) Flexibility in applying Mona Baker's (2018) translation strategies, including cultural substitution, omission, loanwords with explanation, generalization, and paraphrasing, effectively bridges linguistic, cultural, and institutional gaps.
4) Information clarity regarding vital legal protection and health guidance is maintained, directly supporting migrant workers' social adaptation and rights protection.

This research highlights three key implications.

1) **Theoretical Implications:** Enriches Japanese-Indonesian translation studies by validating the integration of Mona Baker's (2018) non-equivalence model, Skopos

theory (Nord, 2018), and community translation frameworks (Taibi & Ozolins, 2016) within multimodal public media.

2) **Practical Implications for Translators & Publishers:** Provides a practical methodological blueprint for translators compiling bilingual public health and legal guides, emphasizing contextual adaptation without compromising legal precision (Machali, 2000; Nababan et al., 2012).
3) **Policy Implications & Social Protection:** Demonstrates that high-quality, culturally adapted translation of public media serves as a fundamental instrument for guaranteeing human rights, legal protection, and social welfare for foreign workers in host countries (Asato, 2019; Badan Layanan Imigrasi Jepang, 2022).

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