



INSTITUTIONEN FÖR  
SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

# BETWEEN LANGUAGES & WORLDS:

Literary Multilingualism & Cultural Identity in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* (2017)

Filippa Kakavand

---

Degree Project:	MA Thesis
Program/course:	Language & Intercultural Communication/SIK240
Level:	Second cycle
Term/year:	Spring/2025
Supervisor:	Fredrik Fällman
Examiner:	Andreas Hallberg
Report nr:	



# Abstract

**Title:** *Between Languages & Worlds: Literary Multilingualism & Cultural Identity in Min Jin Lee's Pachinko (2017)*

**Author:** Filippa Kakvand

**Supervisor:** Fredrik Fällman

**Abstract:** This thesis examines how untranslated Korean culture-specific items (CSIs) are represented in the English-language novel *Pachinko* (2017) by Min Jin Lee, and how these terms contribute to identity formation, emotional depth, and reader engagement. The study focuses on three categories of CSIs: terms of address, interjections, and food words. Examples were selected based on frequency, contextual clarity, and narrative function. A qualitative close reading approach was applied, combining analysis of form and representation, narrative function, and reader experience, supported by literary discourse analysis (Maingueneau, 2023). The interpretation draws on the concepts of foreignization and domestication (Venuti, 2018), literary multilingualism and strangeness (Valdés, 2023; Locher, 2017), and hybridity (Bhabha, 2004). Findings show that kinship terms of address are often retained in Korean, signalling intimacy and social hierarchy, with meanings understood from context. Interjections maintain emotional tone but may lose impact when context is limited. Food terms alternate between Korean and English, shaping how readers perceive cultural details. Overall, the novel keeps Korean words visible while ensuring accessibility for a global audience.

**Keywords:** Culture-specific items, *Pachinko*, English, Korean, translanguaging, Postcolonial studies, translation strategies, identity, hybridity, discourse analysis

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1. Aim .....	4
1.2. Structure .....	4
<b>2. Background</b> .....	<b>6</b>
2.1. <i>Pachinko (2017) &amp; Historical Context</i> .....	6
2.2. <i>Language, Identity &amp; Multilingual Fiction</i> .....	9
2.3. <i>Culture-Specific Items &amp; Foreignization</i> .....	13
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	<b>16</b>
3.1. <i>Research Design</i> .....	16
3.2. <i>Material &amp; Analysis</i> .....	16
3.3. <i>Limitations &amp; Scope</i> .....	18
<b>4. Findings</b> .....	<b>19</b>
4.1 <i>Terms of Address &amp; Social Hierarchy</i> .....	19
4.2. <i>Food &amp; Memory</i> .....	23
4.3. <i>Interjections &amp; Emotions</i> .....	26
4.4. <i>Hybridity, Translanguaging, &amp; Culture</i> .....	29
<b>5. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<i>Image 1: Family Tree of Main Characters of Pachinko (2017).</i> .....	36
<b>Appendix B</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Table 2: Complete list of Korean Lexemes From The Three Analytical Categories in Pachinko (Lee, 2017).</b> ....	37

# 1. Introduction

Writing in more than one language is not simply a stylistic choice, but also a cultural act. In multilingual fiction, the decision to retain or translate certain words shapes how identity, history, and belonging are represented. Such works often position readers as cultural outsiders, asking them to navigate unfamiliar words and concepts as a deliberate narrative strategy that can bring forth difference as much as it conveys belonging. Lee Minjin's *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017) exemplifies this approach, weaving in Korean cultural-specific items (CSIs) within an English-language narrative to preserve cultural meaning while simultaneously negotiating accessibility for a global audience. From the very first page, the bilingual heading “*Gohyang/Hometown*” (p.1) sets the tone of this multilingual novel.

*Pachinko* (Lee, 2017) follows four generations of a Korean family from the 20th century, beginning in Korea and immigrating to Japan during the Japanese colonial rule. The novel explores how migration, discrimination, and resilience shape the lives of *Zainichi* Koreans, while also showing the details of everyday life. Although written primarily in English, the narrative incorporates Korean and Japanese words throughout, sometimes with minimal explanations and/or no translation at all. Her multilingual writing mirrors Lee's own background as a Korean American who grew up navigating multiple cultural and linguistic environments. Her writing shows how language reflects history and identity by creating a space where Korean, Japanese, and English can coexist, keeping cultural details intact and encouraging the reader to engage with unfamiliar terms.

Multilingual writing is more than decorative; it also functions as a narrative strategy that mirrors the hybrid realities of the characters, whose lives are shaped by more than one culture. Cristina Valdés (2023) argues that multilingual fiction can preserve “strangeness” while also guiding readers through it, creating a space where difference is not erased but instead made part of the reading experience. In *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017), this occurs through small but deliberate choices, where Korean terms are left as they are, others are given context, and some are replaced with English. Each choice balances cultural meaning with reader accessibility and raises questions about what is preserved and what is lost. Studying these choices matters as they reveal how multilingual literature navigates the tensions between preserving cultural identity and making the text readable to those outside of that culture. In diasporic narratives, these strategies are also tied to memory, belonging, and how communities represent themselves and to others.

By looking closely at untranslated Korean CSIs in *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017), it becomes possible to see these strategies at work and understand how they actively shape both the cultural world of the novel and the reader's experience.

As a final note, as the study deals with words written in romanization rather than the native script, the transcription and naming conventions must be determined. All Korean terms in this thesis are written according to the Revised Romanization of Korean (RR), following the same system used in the novel. Furthermore, in cases where Korean names of characters or authors are addressed, they will follow the traditional Korean order, with the family name first and the given name second (e.g., Lee Minjin), as is also the case in the novel. These conventions are applied consistently throughout the thesis unless otherwise specified.

## 1.1. Aim

The aim of the thesis is to examine how Lee Minjin's *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017) represents untranslated Korean CSIs as an English-language novel, and how these representations contribute to the construction of identity and intercultural meaning. It explores both the linguistic strategies used to represent CSIs (e.g., untranslated terms, narrative glossing, hybrid expressions) and the ideological and narrative functions these strategies perform, particularly in relation to themes of multilingualism and diasporic identity. The paper aims to answer the following question:

- How are untranslated Korean culturally specific items represented in *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017)?
- What narrative and linguistic strategies are used to convey cultural identity and intercultural meaning through English?

## 1.2. Structure

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 2 provides the background, including the historical and sociocultural context of the novel, Lee Minjin's background, and the theoretical perspectives on language, identity, translanguaging, and CSIs, which will be the foundation of the analytical framework. Chapter 3 presents the methodology, explaining the qualitative approach, as well as the material selection and analytical process. In Chapter 4, the findings and discussions will be presented and organized into the three CSI categories. Each section presents the chosen examples from the novel and connects them to the theoretical framework, which will contribute to the final chapter, which will reflect on the implications for understanding

multilingualism in literature. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings while highlighting their contribution to translation and multilingual literary studies.

## 2. Background

This chapter provides the contextual and theoretical foundation for the analysis of the CSIs and multilingual representation in *Pachinko* (2017). It is divided into four sections. Section 2.1 offers a historical and sociocultural overview of the novel's setting, including Japanese colonial rule and Korean migration to Japan. It also introduces the author's background and the diasporic lens through which the narrative is constructed. Section 2.2 explores the key theoretical perspectives on language, identity, and hybridity, drawing on sociolinguistic and postcolonial frameworks. Section 2.3 examines translanguaging and multilingualism in literary contexts, highlighting how hybrid language practices are used to express cultural dislocation and resistance to monolingual norms. Finally, section 2.4 outlines the concept of CSIs and introduces the analytical tools of foreignization and domestication, which will guide the representation analysis in the following chapters.

### 2.1. *Pachinko* (2017) & Historical Context

Lee's novel *Pachinko* (2017) is a multigenerational novel that follows the lives of a Korean family across the twentieth century. Spanning from 1910 to 1989, the novel follows four generations, primarily focusing on a woman named Sunja (second generation), who becomes the central thread that ties the generations together (see [Appendix A](#) for a family tree overview of the main characters). The story begins under Japanese colonial rule in Yeongdo, Korea, where Sunja is raised by her parents in a boardinghouse. After an unplanned pregnancy with Koh Hansu, a wealthy Korean man living in Japan and with ties to the yakuza, Sunja marries a sickly protestant pastor named Baek Isak and relocates to Osaka, Japan. There, she raises two sons: Noa, Hansu's biological child, who attempts to assimilate into Japanese society; and Mozasu, her second son, who finds economic success in the pachinko<sup>1</sup> business. In the final generation, Mozasu's son Solomon struggles with questions of belonging and identity in a globalized, yet still discriminatory, Japan. Through the different generations' experiences, the novel explores the shadow of colonialism, the complexities of diasporic identity, and the intergenerational burden of silence, shame, and resilience passed down through generations.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pachinko is a traditional Japanese game, similar to pinball, used today for low-stakes gambling in pachinko parlors.

Lee's own experience as a Korean immigrant in the United States gives further depth to *Pachinko's* (2017) portrayal of diasporic identity. Born in Seoul in 1968 and raised in Queens from the age of seven, her own multilingual position mirrors the cultural and linguistic dislocation experienced by many characters in the novel. Despite her background, she describes herself as someone who "speaks, reads, and writes Korean poorly", often relying on translators for formal situations (Kovalenko, 2023). However, this distance from her heritage language does not lessen her Korean identity, but rather heightens her sensitivity to the politics of language, belonging, and representation.

The initial inspiration for the novel came about when Lee encountered the story of a Korean-Japanese boy who took his own life after experiencing racial bullying at school (Park, 2024; Strainchamps, 2017). She has described this story as a turning point, one that "burned into [her] brain" and ultimately became the emotional and ethical foundation for the novel (Strainchamps, 2017). Over the following decades, Lee conducted extensive fieldwork and interviews in South Korea, Japan, and elsewhere, revising multiple drafts to ensure historical and cultural accuracy (Park, 2024).

Although the novel is written in English, it intentionally preserves cultural and linguistic elements. Lee frequently includes untranslated Korean and Japanese terms and phrases, refusing to filter the novel entirely through Western expectations. Lee has said:

English is the language in which I dream and speak and write, when I write, especially about Koreans, the dialogue may be coming through me in Korean or in another language somehow accented by the nation in which the Korean makes her residence. (Kovalenko, 2023)

Rather than smoothing out cultural differences, this narrative practice reflects the layered linguistic realities of diasporic life and subtly unsettles the dominance of English by allowing other languages and perspectives to shape its use. Her narrative invites readers to inhabit a Korean diasporic frame, on Korean terms. This is an intention she has described by stating: "When I say I'm trying to make you Korean, they always laugh, but I'm serious" (Park, 2024). In this way, *Pachinko* (2017) becomes more than a historical novel; It acts as an intercultural space where English bears the influence of other worlds, encouraging the reader to engage with unfamiliar norms instead of translating them away.

The Japanese colonial rule in Korea between 1910 and 1945 left a deep and lasting impact on Korean society through forced assimilation and cultural suppression. Although justified by Japan at the time as a civilizing and modernizing mission (Dudden, 2005, p.9, p.20), colonial

authorities relied heavily on political repression, censorship, and policing to maintain control (Lynn, 2021, p.26). In the late 1930s and early 1940s, these measures would intensify. During this period, the colonial state restricted the use of Korean in public and educational contexts, promoted Japanese as the national language, shut down Korean-run newspapers, and required Koreans to adopt Japanese-style names (Lynn, 2021, p.26; Baek et.al, 2011, pp. 196-198). These assimilation efforts were accompanied by the mass mobilization of Korean civilians to support Japan's imperial expansion. Korean men were drafted into military service and forced to work in mines and factories, while women were coerced into sexual slavery as so-called "comfort women" (Lynn, 2021, p.26; Baek et.al, 2011, pp. 196-198). Worsening poverty and social dislocation further contributed to large-scale migration to Japan, where Korean communities lived in segregated and marginalized conditions (Tonomura, 2013, pp. 1-2).

Following the end of WWII and of Japan's colonial rule over Korea in 1945, a large number of Koreans remained in Japan. While approximately two million had been living there by the end of the war, and around 500,000 stayed after repatriation began (Tonomura, 2013, pp.2-3). These individuals and their descendants came to be known as *Zainichi* (lit. "residing in Japan") (Tonomura, 2013, p.1), a technically neutral term which has come to signify a postcolonial condition of exclusion and statelessness within Japanese society. They were neither returnees nor new immigrants, and their presence reflected the long afterlife of colonialism in which Japan's imperial subjects were abandoned without citizenship or belonging.

In the postwar years, Koreans remained legally and socially marginalized within Japanese society. Although many had lived in Japan for years, or even been born there, they were denied Japanese citizenship and classified as foreign nationals, leading to difficulties finding jobs and government aid (Tonomura, 2013, p.3). Even as Japan rebuilt its economy, Korean residents were largely excluded from formal labor markets, as most companies refused to hire foreigners, and Koreans were barred from civil service and elite corporate jobs well into the 1970s (Tonomura, 2013, p.4). Many turned to small-scale self-employment in sectors like restaurant work, scrap collection, and most notably, pachinko, which was an industry heavily associated with ethnic Korean ownership (Tonomura, 2013, p.4). Beyond economic marginalization, many Koreans also faced cultural pressure. One example was the continued use of Japanese names, which had been enforced under the colonial-era *Shoshi-kaimei policy* and continued after 1945 as many Koreans maintained aliases to avoid discrimination in everyday life (Kim, 2025, July

7). Masaru Tonomura (2013) notes how “despite the gains made from the 1950s to the early 21st century, a not insignificant share of the Zainichi population continues to believe that they face discrimination and hence conceal their identities as Koreans” (p.5), pointing to the lasting effects of social stigma and the limits of integration. Together, these experiences show how limited opportunities shaped the lives of many Zainichi.

## 2.2. Language, Identity & Multilingual Fiction

Traditional views of language and identity have long been shaped by the *monolingual orientation*, a view that connects language with a fixed community and geographical territory. This worldview became dominant in Western Europe during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, influenced by (among others) Johann Gottfried Herder (Canagarajah, 2012, p.20). Suresh Canagarajah (2012) writes:

Language embodied the innermost spirit, thought, and values of the community. And what made each language unique was the spirit of the community it embodied and the collective experiences in a place. Both language and community were rooted in a place, which helped territorialize them in a specific location. This equivalence of language, community, and place has been widely called the “Herderian triad”. (p.20)

*The Herderian triad* suggests that language, community, and place are interconnected, leading to the idea that a person’s identity is rooted in their native language, which in turn reflects the idea that a person’s identity is rooted in their native language, which in turn reflects the values, thoughts, and spirit of the community tied to a specific territory (Canagarajah, 2012, pp. 20-22). Canagarajah (2012) notes that this leads to the territorialized understanding of language, where mobility becomes a threat to linguistic purity and individuals who are displaced, culturally or geographically, become “out of place” (p.21). Consequently, multilinguals and immigrants often struggle to claim linguistic legitimacy, as their voices are viewed through the lens of deficiency rather than diversity.

Enlightenment thinkers reinforced the idea of language as something rooted in the mind and tied to rational thought. This shift treated language as a fixed, abstract system, separate from the real-life social settings where it actually creates meaning. Canagarajah (2012) warns that this view ignores how language is flexible and shaped by context, arguing that “we lose the notion that languages are mobile, heterogeneous, and hybrid resources” (p.23). This way of thinking also led to harmful hierarchies, where some languages were seen as more “logical” or

“developed”, reinforcing negative stereotypes about certain communities (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 23).

In literary contexts, especially in diasporic or multilingual fiction like *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017), a monolingual view of language and identity becomes insufficient. The characters in the novel move across countries, languages, and cultural norms, and the novel itself blends English with Korean and Japanese expressions. Like their languages, their identity is not static or pure, but shifting and context-dependent. Canagarajah (2012) critiques the dominant Western ideology that views language as separate, and instead, he argues that translingual practices, such as blending languages, have always existed, especially in multilingual societies (pp. 33-34). These practices are not new but have simply been ignored or devalued by dominant Western ideologies (Canagaraja, 2012, pp.33-34; Valdés, 2023, p.2). His goal is thus not to invent a new way of thinking about language, but to recognize and value the diverse language practices that already exist in everyday life. This would allow scholars and readers alike to move beyond fixed models of identity and better understand how language works in intercultural and literary contexts.

The concept of hybridity in postcolonial theory offers a way to understand how cultural identity is shaped through processes of negotiation and difference. Central to this framework is the idea of the *Third Space*, further developed by Homi Bhabha (2004) as a site where meaning is constructed in the interaction between different cultural systems. Rather than simply blending cultures into a uniform whole, the Third Space emphasizes the productive tensions that arise in moments of cultural contact. Bhabha (2004) writes:

These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. (pp.1-2)

Hybridity in this sense challenges fixed views of identity (such as East/West or native/foreign) by focusing on the in-between space, where identities are not fixed but constantly reshaped. In these hybrid zones, meaning is negotiated and shaped by the encounter between conflicting cultural values and social positions. As Bhabha (2004) explains, hybrid cultural identifications are often formed from “incommensurable elements – the stubborn chunks” that resist assimilation, and whose friction becomes the very basis for identity (p.219). The difference is

not resolved into unity, but becomes “something else besides”, a space that is at once disruptive and generative (p.219). The Third Space is then not simply a neutral middle ground but a productive site of tension, where new strategies of identification and cultural expression emerge. It challenges the idea that identity comes from one fixed culture or origin, and instead shows that identity is always changing, shaped by conflict, movement, and relationships. Bhabha (1994) writes: “the intervention of the Third Space of enunciation [...] challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as homogenizing, unifying force” (p.37). In this space, marginalized people can rethink and reshape who they are, beyond dominant cultural definitions.

This theoretical approach is important for analyzing diasporic or multilingual literature, in which writers and characters navigate the meeting of different cultural systems and are often caught between conflicting loyalties or values. Identities in these texts do not appear from a single cultural origin, but from the friction and vagueness of in-between positions. Bhabha (1994) writes that “the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity [...] It is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image” (p.44). This formulation situates identity as performative and dependent, a process shaped by the tension between how subjects see themselves and how they are seen by others. In *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017), a hybrid identity is expressed not only through the characters’ displacement across nations but also through the way they negotiate cultural expectations, language use, and belonging.

Translanguaging challenges the view that multilingual speakers operate with strictly separated linguistic systems. Instead, they emphasize how individuals draw on their full linguistic repertoires fluidly, often blending features across named languages to construct meaning. These perspectives are particularly relevant in the analysis of literature that reflects hybrid identities and multilingual realities, such as *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017). Ofelia García (2009) defines translanguaging as:

Translanguaging is the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential. It is an approach to bilingualism that is centered, not on languages as has often been the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable in order to make sense of their multilingual worlds. (p.140)

This sees translanguaging as both a descriptive and ideological lens, acknowledging that bilinguals create meaning through a flexible, integrated repertoire instead of following strict

boundaries between standard languages. Ofelia García and Li Wei (2014) further stress that translanguaging is not simply a form of code-switching but a flexible process to make meaning in different contexts (p.22). They describe it as both a practical theory of language and a moral stance that resists monolingual norms and legitimizes the fluid communicative practices of multilingual individuals (pp.22, 37, 43).

Within literary studies, multilingualism has in recent years been examined both as a stylistic device and as a marker of cultural identity and resistance to monolingual norms. Scholars such as Miriam Locher (2017), Cristina Valdés (2023), and Fiona Doloughan (2022) argue that multilingual fiction offers a site where translanguaging becomes an artistic strategy that reflects and constructs cultural hybridity and dislocation. According to Valdés (2023), multilingualism in literature emphasizes foreignness and strangeness, revealing the complex experiences of “(un)belonging”, especially within diasporic or postcolonial contexts (p.9). This “combination of languages” is not neutral but functions to highlight cultural differences and signal hybrid or fluid identities (Valdés, 2023, p.2). Similarly, Locher (2017) argues that multilingual elements in fiction serve a social function, signaling power dynamics, shifting group allegiances, and emotional positioning within relationships. From this perspective, language mixing is not merely decorative but carries narrative and ideological weight. Doloughan (2022) further explains that even when a dominant language such as English is used, translanguaging writing can incorporate the sound, rhythms, and influences of other linguistic and cultural traditions, creating forms that are hybrid and shaped by border-crossing practices (p.33). She also notes that such writing can generate voices that cross boundaries and occupy a creative Third Space that goes beyond the sum of its parts (pp.33, 41). In this way, multilingual fiction resists the “monolingual paradigm” (Valdés, 2023, p.2) and instead reflects what Bar-Itzhak (as cited in Valdés, 2023) calls the *postmonolingual condition*, where authors negotiate identity through dynamic language practices that foreground difference rather than erase it (p.2).

This study draws on the concepts of translanguaging and translanguaging practice, which both challenge the idea that multilingual speakers operate with strictly separate language systems. Unlike traditional views of code-switching, which assume a shift between two distinct languages, translanguaging emphasizes the speaker’s use of a unified linguistic repertoire, treating language as fluid, dynamic, and shaped by context (García & Wei, 2014, p.22). Translanguaging practice, as developed by Canagarajah (2012), shares this repertoire-based view but places greater emphasis on the strategic negotiation of meaning across cultural and

linguistic boundaries. It highlights how multilingual speakers perform identity, align with audiences, and creatively adapt language in interaction.

### 2.3. Culture-Specific Items & Foreignization

In literary works that navigate between cultures, writers frequently encounter the challenge of depicting culture-specific items (i.e., terms, concepts, practices) tied to particular cultural settings. These elements, referred to here as CSIs, resist direct translation and often carry complex layers of meaning, complicating the translational process. According to Peter Newmark (1988), culture refers to “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression” (p.94), emphasizing that CSIs are typically “associated with a particular language and cannot be literally translated” (p.95). When authors write in a language different from their cultural background, decisions must be made about whether and how to convey these items in a way that retains cultural meaning. Newmark (1988) categorizes CSIs into five groups: ecology; material culture; social culture; organizations, customs, and concepts; gestures and habits ([Table 1](#)). These categories provide a practical framework for identifying and classifying CSIs in text.

**Table 1: Categorization of Culture-Specific Items based on Newmark (1988, p.95)**

Category	Description	Examples
(1) Ecology	Nature, Geography, and Environment.	Mountains, rivers, and native animals.
(2) Material Culture	Physical objects associated with a culture’s daily life.	Food, clothing, housing, and tools.
(3) Social Culture	Aspects of everyday life and leisure.	Sports, holidays, and daily routines.
(4) Organizations, Customs, Concepts	Institutions, political systems, religion, and	Religious events, harvest festivals, and congress.

---

abstract cultural ideas.

(5) Gestures and Habits	Non-verbal behavior, customs, and culturally specific practices.	Handshakes, removing shoes indoors, and eating habits.
-------------------------	--	--

---

When representing such items in a different language, authors (and translators) must decide how much cultural distinctiveness to retain. This decision is often viewed through Lawrence Venuti's (2018) definition of the concepts of *foreignization* and *domestication*:

- **Foreignization:** A strategy that entails preserving foreign elements and, as a result, emphasizing cultural difference and strangeness.
- **Domestication:** A strategy that adapts culturally unfamiliar elements to the norms of the target culture, making the text feel familiar.

(p.15)

These strategies reflect broader ideological positions in translation. Domestication relates to what Venuti (2018) calls an *ethnocentric reduction* of the foreign text, adapting it to target-language norms and minimizing cultural difference to create a sense of familiarity (p.15). This approach reinforces the illusion of transparency and supports the dominant expectation that translations should read fluently and naturally. In contrast, foreignization imposes what Venuti (2018) terms an *ethnodeviant pressure* on target-language norms, deliberately preserving traces of the source culture and confronting the reader with its linguistic and cultural otherness. By doing so, it resists the invisibility of the translator and challenges the ethnocentrism embedded in mainstream translation practices (p.15).

While Newmark's classification offers a practical way to classify CSIs, Venuti's framework of foreignization and domestication highlights the ideological effects of how such items are represented. In literary texts, especially those produced in multilingual or diasporic contexts, the handling of CSIs becomes more than a matter of linguistic faithfulness; it becomes an act of cultural positioning. The decision to translate, explain, substitute, or leave items untranslated reveals the author's (or translator's) stance on cultural visibility, identity, and readership expectations. Venuti (2018) emphasizes that foreignizing strategies are not simply aesthetic choices but carry ethical and political weight. By "deviating enough from native norms to stage an alien reading experience", foreignization acts as a strategic cultural intervention

(p.16). This resistance challenges what Venuti (2018) calls the *regime of fluency*, an expectation in English-speaking cultures that privileges smooth, transparent prose and hides the translator's labor (pp.1-2). In contrast, domestication corresponds with commercial needs and ideological comfort zones, producing what he describes as "eminently readable and therefore consumable" texts that erase the very foreignness translation is meant to convey (p.12). This contrast is especially relevant when examining untranslated words, honorifics, and cultural references in literary writing. Venuti (2018) argues that domesticated translations or adaptations risk supporting "an ethnocentric violence" that replaces cultural specificity with generality or familiarity (p.16). Foreignizing choices, on the other hand, allow readers to encounter cultural material on its own terms, even if that involves ambiguity or discomfort. These strategies, then, are not neutral techniques but decisions that reflect power relations between languages and cultures.

In the context of multilingual fiction or intercultural texts written in English, the inclusion of CSIs often functions similarly to foreignizing translation. Even when the author is not translating per se, retaining original terms or structuring dialogue around culturally specific norms can create a foreignizing effect that challenges monolingual reading practices. This perspective aligns with the notion of the postmonolingual condition, where multilingual texts resist linguistic uniformity and instead emphasize layered cultural meaning (Valdés, 2023, p.2). In literary analysis, the interaction between CSI categories and foreignization strategies offers a way to investigate how authors and texts manage cultural knowledge. Do they assume familiarity? Do they provide explanations? Do they refuse simplification? Such questions highlight the ideological and narrative consequences of representing cultural difference in a global language like English. The presence or absence of translation, the degree of narrative clarification, and the choice of linguistic framing all shape how cultural identity is communicated and perceived.

# 3. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological approach to the analysis of untranslated Korean CSIs in *Pachinko* (2017) will be presented. The analysis will be a qualitative close reading, with the goal of understanding how literary translanguaging conveys cultural identity, belonging, emotional stance, and how it positions the reader. The study applies an interpretative framework that builds on translation studies, multilingual literary analysis, and postcolonial concepts of cultural difference.

## 3.1. Research Design

The study applies a qualitative, interpretative methodology set within literary translation studies and multilingual literary analysis. The analysis focuses on the narrative function and cultural significance used to convey Korean CSIs to an international audience. To achieve this, the study makes use of literary discourse analysis (Maingueneau, 2023) to emphasize how language is used to construct cultural meaning in context. Rather than attempting to catalogue all CSIs in the novel, the study focuses on a strategically selected set of representative examples that reveal how cultural difference is narrated and negotiated within the English-language text.

## 3.2. Material & Analysis

The material consists of selected excerpts from the original English edition of *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017). The novel was chosen for its intentional integration of untranslated Korean words, which are used both narratively and dialogically to mark cultural and emotional context. Although the novel also contains Japanese words and references, this study focuses exclusively on Korean to get a more fruitful analysis and discussion for this size of a qualitative thesis.

The analysis includes lexemes found within three categories: terms of address, interjections, and food-related. Each category reflects a different kind of cultural meaning: terms of address to express relationships and social hierarchy; interjections to convey emotional responses; food to signal cultural memory and belonging. Together, these categories offer representative ways in which language carries cultural values into the narrative. For this purpose, the entire novel was read closely, and all instances of Korean CSIs were identified and recorded. These were then organized into the three analytical categories chosen for this thesis,

and compiled into a dataset (see [Appendix B](#)). From this comprehensive list, the examples for the analysis were then chosen based on the following criteria:

- **Context** clarity: the scene in which the item appears offers sufficient context for interpretation.
- **Contrast**: the item is presented in a way that either retains or negotiates cultural difference.

Representative examples are selected for each category, and close contextual analysis is prioritized over comprehensive coverage. The analysis then proceeds through a close reading of each selected item, paying attention to three interconnected aspects: form and representation, narrative function and social or emotional meaning, and reader positioning. [Appendix B](#) in the appendix thus demonstrated the full scope of material, while the analysis chapters present a close reading of selected items that best illustrate the study's aims.

The first aspect considers how the Korean word is presented in the English text. This includes: whether the original form is retained, whether any explanation is provided (in-text glossing), whether the word is marked through italics, whether it is repeated to aid familiarity, and whether it is blended with English elements. These are then interpreted using Venuti's (2018) concepts of foreignization and domestication, looking at whether it either preserves or reduces cultural difference. As this study examines Korean words retained in an English-language novel, their presence in and of itself is a form of cultural foreignness. However, the degree to which that foreignness is maintained or lessened varies. When a Korean term is retained with little or no explanation, this typically suggests a foreignizing strategy that resists reader fluency, and when such terms are instead paraphrased, explained, or blended into English expressions, the strategy leans toward domestication (Venuti, 2018, p.16).

The second aspect concerns the narrative function of the CSI and the meaning it carries in context. This involves interpreting what the word signals about identity, emotion, or relationships at the moment of its use. For instance, a word like *umma* (mom) not only indicates a maternal role but also carries cultural associations tied to Korean norms of respect and care, depending on the speaker and situation. A perspective, which is supported by the view that literary discourse is inherently linked to the social and institutional contexts that shape it, highlighting that the role and placement of a CSI within a scene is part of the text's negotiation of cultural meaning (Maingueneau, 2023, pp.14-15). This aspect mainly draws on Locher (2017) pragmatic approach to multilingual fiction shows that even "small polyglottal snippet[s]" can serve deliberate functions such as "cultural enrichment, character and place positioning, the creation of in-groups and out-groups, the creation of humor" and

“defamiliarising/estrangement effects to social criticism and realism” (p.307). In other words, the mixing of languages is a strategic cue that not only colours a scene, but also fleshes out a character and signals social alignments. Valdés (2023) adds that multilingual elements in literature can “preserve an effect of strangeness on readers”, “reveal feelings of (un)belonging,” and “manifest a variety of identities” (p.1). These effects mean that untranslated words can shape how a scene is read, allowing it to convey cultural depth, emotional meaning, and layered identities that extend beyond the immediate plot.

The final aspect focuses on the reader’s experience. Here, the analysis considers how familiar or unfamiliar the Korean word might seem to an English-speaking reader, and whether the text provides support to aid interpretation. Some items may be left entirely unexplained, requiring the reader to conclude meaning from dialogue or repetition, while others may be accompanied by subtle in-text glossing. This aspect is informed by Venuti’s (2018) foreignization as well as Valdés’ (2023) analysis of multilingual fiction, which emphasizes how texts often rely on a balance between strangeness and guidance.

The above-described method allows for a systematic interpretation of each example, without relying on coding or quantitative counts. Each word is analyzed in its narrative context, followed by an interpretation of how its representation affects cultural meaning and reader positioning.

### 3.3. Limitations & Scope

The study is limited to the English-language version of the novel and does not compare it with Korean or Japanese translations. It also does not seek to quantify all CSIs in the text but instead aims to demonstrate how a selected example shows a broader narrative and cultural dynamics. While generalizations are avoided, the findings contribute insight into how literary multilingualism and untranslated terms can help shape the global reception of diasporic identity narratives.

## 4. Findings

This chapter analyzes untranslated Korean CSIs in the novel. It is organized into three categories: terms of address, food references, and interjections (sections 4.1-4.3). Each section examines examples from the novel, considering how these items are represented in the English text and how they convey cultural meaning, identity, and emotion. The findings will then be discussed in depth in section 4.4. The complete dataset of Korean CSIs found within the three categories is provided in [Appendix B](#).

### 4.1 Terms of Address & Social Hierarchy

Terms of address are a powerful indicator of social positioning and emotional intimacy in discourse, carrying culture-specific meanings that often cannot be replicated in a single English equivalent. In *Pachinko* (2017), Lee repeatedly retains Korean kinship titles throughout the novel, which often rely on the reader's ability to pick up on the contextual clues from the surrounding dialogue and narrative. This choice reflects Venuti's (2018) notion of foreignization, in which lexical retention signals cultural otherness, but is paired with narrative strategies that maintain accessibility. Such retention also corresponds with Valdés' (2023) view of multilingual fiction as a site where strangeness can be regulated through typographic and contextual cues, urging readers to actively interpret unfamiliar forms (pp.10, 13-14). In Korean, kinship terms often double as pronouns, replacing "you" in interactions (Sohn, 2020, p.281), which means that retention also preserves the pragmatic impact and politeness stance of the original speech event. The address forms convey relational information such as age, gender, and relative social status, and are thus inseparable from the pragmatic meaning of the utterance (Hwang, 1991, p.129; Sohn, 2020, p.289). Therefore, incorrect usage can be misinterpreted as a term of address that not only names the addressee but also signals the speaker's stance toward them.

In an emotionally charged scene where Noa sees his father, Isak, again after his release from prison, three kinship-related terms of address are used:

'It's *appa*,' the man said. Noa gasped and shook his head no. 'Where's your **mother, child** [emphasis added]?' It was his voice. Noa took a step forward. '*Umma*'s at the restaurant,' Noa replied. 'Where?' Isak was confused. 'I'll go now. I'll get *umma*. Are you okay?' The boy didn't know what to do exactly. He was still a bit afraid, though it was certainly his **father** [emphasis added]. The gentle eyes beneath the jutting

cheekbones and scaly skin were the same. Perhaps his **father** [emphasis added] was hungry. His shoulder bones and elbows looked like sharp tree branches beneath his clothing. ‘Do you want to eat something, *appa*?’ Noa pointed to the snack his **mother** [emphasis added] had left for him: two rice balls made from barley and millet. Isak shook his head, smiling at the boy’s concern. ‘*Aga*—can you get me some water?’ (Lee, 2017, pp.196-197)

In this scene, *appa* (dad), *umma* (mom), and *aga* (child) appear without in-text gloss, but are italicized, marking them visually as non-English terms and signalling their foreignness to the reader. From Locher’s (2017) perspective, this is a case of “selective reproduction” where the Korean lexeme is retained in full while its meaning is made clear through surrounding English support (p.301). The meaning of each term becomes clear from the context: the one we know is the father, who introduces himself as *appa*, *umma* is framed by Noa’s reference to his mother’s location, and *aga* appears in a request that indexes care and intimacy. The order in which these terms appear is also significant. Isak first addresses his son with the English “child” before later using the Korean *aga*. This shift moves from an accessible address to a culturally embedded term, mirroring the emotional trajectory of the encounter—from uncertainty to recognition and warmth. By placing *aga* after “child”, Lee makes sure its meaning is understood without an explicit gloss, while retaining its cultural specificity. Here, Venuti’s (2018) foreignization is balanced with reader accessibility, allowing the narrative to maintain authenticity without fully alienating the monolingual reader.

The vocative suffix *-ya/-ah*<sup>2</sup>, which is used after names to signal informal or intimate addresses, also contributes to this emotional register. In Korean interaction, the choice to use suffices is tied to relative age, which plays such an important role in determining address choice that even a one-year difference can shift from name use to kinship terms, particularly among peers (Sohn, 2020, pp. 288-289). These forms appear in scenes of high emotional intensity, like in Yoseb’s repeated use of “Isak-*ah*” during his brother’s illness, which expresses deep affection for his little brother as he reminisces about their childhood and pleads with him to stay (Lee, 2017, p.211). Similarly, Yangjin and Kyunghee’s use of “Sunja-*ya*” marks maternal instruction and sisterly unity, while, when used by Hansu, it becomes an intimate and potentially manipulative address. Furthermore, their presence, which is always untranslated and unitalicized, indicates both emotional closeness and social hierarchy. As Valdés (2023) notes, the absence of visual markers like italics can normalise the foreign term within the

---

<sup>2</sup> *-ya* after vowel-final names and *-ah* after consonant-final ones.

narrative world (p.10), reducing its perceived strangeness for the reader while still conveying a sense of closeness for those familiar with Korean politeness levels.

These moments show that Korean terms of representing intimacy are consistently retained and often visually marked through italics, with meaning conveyed through interactional and emotional cues rather than explicit translation. This parallels Locher's (2017) observation that multilingual fiction often relies on "indexicality" (the ability of a term to evoke cultural meaning beyond its literal sense) (p.319), with Valdés' (2023) who argues that choices like leaving terms unmarked or using end glossaries shape how much inferential work readers must do, and, in some cases, readers understand the meaning from context (pp. 10, 14). When such forms are replaced with English equivalents in translation, the loss is not only lexical but cultural as it erases the hierarchy and intimacy that shape the interaction (Hwang, 1991, p.130). From a discourse-analytical perspective, these address forms also help build each character's "literary ethos", placing them within a cultural hierarchy that influences their speech acts. The shifts between English and Korean forms within the same scene guide the reader's perception of closeness, signalling when a relationship moves from social distance to intimacy. This pattern reflects Locher's (2017) observations that multilingual fiction can use code choice itself as an index of emotional stance (p.319), while also exemplifying Venuti's (2018) foreignization by preserving culturally embedded forms without full translation (p.20).

Polite address forms are used in both public and private settings to indicate respect and social distance. These forms often appear in market transactions, neighbourly exchanges, or formal encounters. An early market scene, where *ajumma* is first used, illustrates this:

Her shopping route didn't vary from what she had been taught by her mother and father: first, the fresh produce, next, the soup bones from the butcher, then a few items from the market *ajummas* squatting beside spice-filled basins, deep rows of glittering cutlass fish, or plump sea bream caught hours earlier—their wares arrayed attractively on turquoise and red waxed cloths spread on the ground. [...] and the *ajummas* hawked as loudly as they could, each from her square patch of tarp. Sunja was buying seaweed from the coal man's wife, who sold the best quality. The *ajumma* noticed that the new fish broker was staring at the boardinghouse girl. "Shameless man. How he stares! He's almost old enough to be your father!" The seaweed *ajumma* rolled her eyes. (Lee, 2017, p.29)

In this passage, *ajumma* is used both generically ("market *ajummas*") to describe a group of market sellers, and specifically ("seaweed *ajumma*") for one interlocutor who speaks to Sunja directly. The scene itself does not specify the gender or marital status of "market *ajummas*"; instead, only the "seaweed *ajumma*" is identified as a married woman. Thus, any wider cultural

association of *ajumma* (often linked to married, middle-aged women) is not made explicit or implied here. In the scene, the term's meaning is established through role and activity, rather than demographic attributes. In this case, the market setting offers the kind of role-based context that can help readers infer a term's basic meaning, as described by Locher (2017), yet it does not convey the full cultural connotation of *ajumma* (i.e., gender or social identity) as it remains accessible mainly to readers with prior knowledge.

Addresses such as *appa*, *umma*, and *ajumma* retained in their Korean form preserve the hierarchical and intimacy connotations that are important in Korean interaction (Hwang, 1991, p.129; Sohn, 2020, p.289). This choice supports foreignization strategies by making the reader actively assume meaning from the surrounding dialogue. Yet while this retention supports cultural authenticity, it can also create points of ambiguity: readers without prior knowledge of the Korean politeness system may miss distinctions that are socially and emotionally significant, such as the different connotations of *ajumma* in the market interactions versus personal address. In these moments, the pragmatic value of the term risks smoothing into a general label for a “market seller”, and thus misrepresenting the relational nuance.

Address terms can also be used aggressively, marking hostility and insult. The clearest example of this is the suffix *-seki*, a strongly derogatory term roughly equivalent to “bastard” or “son of a bitch”. In the novel, it appears in an early Busan scene, attached to personal names in the course of gossip, complaint, and political critique:

”Down the street, that **dirty dog Lee-seki** [emphasis added] won't cough up what he owes—” [...] ”The young fellow from the North. I met him last night, wandering around the streets looking for your house. Baek Isak. Sort of a fancy-looking fellow. I showed him your place and would have stopped in, but I had a late delivery for **Cho-seki** [emphasis added], who finally found the money to pay me after a month of dodging—” [...] Before Yangjin had a chance to say anything, Jun said, “That **Hirohito-seki** [emphasis added] took over our country, stole the best land, rice, fish, and now our young people.” [...] ”It's our own damn fault for losing the country. I know that,” he continued. “Those **goddamn aristocrat sons of bitches** [emphasis added] sold us out. Not a single **yangban bastard** [emphasis added] has a full set of balls.” (Lee, 2017, pp. 21-22)

Here, *-seki* is used repeatedly with Korean and Japanese proper nouns (Lee, Cho, Hirohito). Its meaning is never explicitly explained, but the surrounding English labels (“dirty dog”, “sons of bitches”) give tonal cues that allow non-Koreans to infer its derogatory force; it becomes implied that *-seki* probably doesn't mean anything positive. Another aspect to note is that neither the name nor the suffix is italicised, removing any visual cue that would signal them out as foreign. According to Valdés (2023), this absence of overt marking reduces the perceived

linguistic distance, embedding the insult into the fictional world, while Venuti's foreignization is still at play through lexical retention. However, the lack of typographic markings means that comprehension of its cultural intensity depends heavily on the reader's ability to interpret cues, leaving room for partial or incomplete understanding.

Across these scenes, the retention of Korean address terms reliably cues hierarchy and intimacy. However, marking is inconsistent (e.g., suffixes are unmarked), so readers unfamiliar with Korean can miss pragmatic intensity or status differences (e.g., *ajumma*). Overall, the pattern points to a foreignizing approach that keeps CSI forms while guiding readers through context and occasional typography. These choices improve access but can also lessen nuance when English substitutes are used or cues are minimal.

## 4.2. Food & Memory

In the novel, Korean food is used not purely as a sensory element but often as cultural descriptors that signify identity and survival in social spaces. While some terms are translated into English, many key Korean food items are retained in their original form, forcing the reader to understand their meaning from context or narrative framing. Within the material category, Newmark (1988) notes how “food is for many the most sensitive and important expression of national culture” (p.97), which holds true not only for the characters in the story but also for readers encountering these expressions of culture from the outside or inside. As Vaishnavi & M Senguttuvan (2024) note:

Food plays a critical role in terms of migrants' sense of home. It helps them in providing a sense of belonging in alienating cultures and upholding ethnic identities. Food traditions, for migrants, can be empowering but they can also be a means of discrimination and oppression. The entanglement of migrants with various cultures shapes their identities in novel ways resulting in an identity that bears resemblance with a hybrid of the hegemonic population as well as the minority migrant one. (p.397)

In *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017), the characters' engagement with Korean cuisine reveals how food both preserves tradition and becomes politicized through stigma or labor.

*Doenjang* (fermented soybean paste) and *gochujang* (fermented chilli paste) are staples in Korean cuisine that are presented differently in different scenes. Their presence in *Pachinko* is not only culinary but also cultural, carrying meanings tied to identity and foreignness. The first mention of these pastes occurs as part of a departure scene, where Yangji packs food items in preparation for her daughter Sunja's emigration to Japan:

In the days before the couple left, Yangjin kept thinking that she'd forgotten something, forcing her to unpack one of the four bundles and repeat the process. She wanted to send more pantry items like dried jujubes, chili flakes, **chili paste** [emphasis added], large dried anchovies, and **fermented soybean paste** [emphasis added] to give to Isak's sister-in-law, but Isak told her that they could not carry too much on the ferry. 'We can purchase things there,' he assured her. (Lee, 2017, p.101)

Here, the Korean terms *gochujang* and *doenjang* are substituted with the English descriptions. This domesticating strategy (Venuti, 2018) prioritizes transparency over cultural retention, ensuring that readers unfamiliar with Korean cuisine can immediately understand the reference. The substitution shifts the narrative focus from the cultural connotation of the food to the emotional significance of the gesture of a mother's practical and symbolic preparation for her daughter's uncertain future. In this moment, accessibility is more important than foreignization, as Lee's choice supports the scene's emotional path rather than presenting the food as a site of cultural interpretation.

A different approach appears when Sunja begins selling food in the marketplace in Osaka. In a tense interaction with other vendors, Korean words are retained:

Nearby the peddlers selling *gochujang* and *doenjang*, Sunja noticed two young Korean women selling fried wheat crackers. Sunja pushed her cart toward them, hoping to wedge herself between the cracker stall and the **soybean-paste lady** [emphasis added]. 'You can't stink up our area,' the older of the two cracker sellers said. 'Go to the other side.' She pointed to the fish section. [...] Sunja couldn't come up with a reply, because she was so surprised. None of them were even selling kimchi, and *doenjang* could smell just as pungently. (Lee, 2017, p.176)

In this scene, the Korean words are instead left untranslated, though the phrase "soybean-paste lady" is used to identify "the peddlers selling *gochujang* and *doenjang*". Although *gochujang* is mentioned, it is *doenjang* that carries the narrative focus, with no explanation other than it having a "pungent smell" and an unclear relation to "soybean-paste". Here, smell, in particular, becomes a powerful cultural cue. While it is not clearly defined (i.e., there is no direct connection between the term and soybean paste), its cultural meaning is sensed through this moment of social rejection. While *kimchi* is now a part of the English language and therefore not italicised, the novel does, in one instance, refer to the more general "pickled vegetable"<sup>3</sup>. In this scene, the words for some of the most important staples of Korean cuisine are named, which

---

<sup>3</sup> Should be noted that kimchi is not pickled but fermented cabbage. However it is directly referenced as such on p.171 when referring to kimchi.

further points to the intentional foreignization of the products, furthering the sense of othering in this space.

In one early scene, food functions not only as a material necessity but as a medium of emotional connection and cultural negotiation. Isak takes Sunja to a small Japanese restaurant and introduces her to *udon*, a Japanese noodle dish, by comparing it to *kalguksu*, a Korean equivalent:

Isak ordered two bowls of **udon** [emphasis added] for them. ‘It’s like *kalguksu*, but the broth is different. I thought maybe you might like it. I’m sure it’s sold everywhere in Osaka. Everything there will be new for us.’ (Lee, 2017, p.87)

Both terms are left untranslated, and the explanation occurs here through comparison rather than definition or substitution. However, even before Isak speaks, the narrative sets the scene as a “Japanese restaurant that serves noodles” and describes customers “slurp[ing] from their steaming bowl of soupy noodles” (p.106). This pre-frames the meaning of *udon* visually and contextually, reducing the need for an explicit in-text gloss.

The novel retains both cultural terms in their original form without direct translation and does not replace them with domesticated English equivalents (e.g., “Japanese soup noodles”). While this is an example of foreignization, allowing the cultural terms to retain their specificity, the use of narrative context (i.e., visual description, setting, and comparison) works to recontextualize the term in ways that support reader understanding without cultural substitution. This moment also illustrates recontextualization and envoicing. Isak frames the unfamiliar *udon* through a Korean referent (*kalguksu*), making meaning not by switching languages but by drawing from shared cultural associations. This comparative explanation reflects his awareness of Sunja’s frame of reference, softening the unfamiliar through a culturally grounded analogy. His explanation serves as a relational strategy that facilitates intercultural understanding and frames the encounter in terms of shared experience. The food thus becomes a means of intercultural bridging, marking not only the difference between Korean and Japanese cuisine but also the dynamics of care and adaptation between the characters. As Valdés (2023) argues, untranslated words in multilingual fiction often serve as identity markers and signs of strangeness that resist monolingual norms, while still allowing reader comprehension through strategic framing.

In the case of food-related terms, there is a wide variation between retention and substitution. In scenes where both forms appear, retention often functions as a cultural marker,

signaling heritage, supported by sensory details or situational framing. Retention supports foreignization by preserving the cultural distinctiveness of the items, often setting them in the narrative through sensory or comparative framing, as in the *udon/kalguksu* scene, where meaning is negotiated via a culturally familiar analogy. In the marketplace scene, *doenjang* and *gochujang* are retained, and their pungent smell becomes a key sensory cue, reinforcing the otherness in a moment of social rejection. This contrasts with the departure scene, where the terms are replaced with “chilli paste” and “soybean paste”, shifting focus from cultural marking to emotional, here prioritising reader comprehension. While substitution ensures accessibility, it can also reduce the depth of cultural associations, leaving them as simple food items for readers unfamiliar with their significance. The scene-level alternation between retention and substitution thus reflects a negotiation between authenticity and narrative function, but could also risk uneven visibility of Korean culinary identity. Overall, the treatment of food terms in *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017) shows a variation between domestication for emotional focus and foreignization for cultural marking. When translated (*doenjang/gochujang* as Soybean paste/chilli paste), the emotional or relational aspects are centered, and reader accessibility is prioritized. When retained, the terms act as cultural indexes, sometimes supported by sensory or visual cues that anchor meaning without removing strangeness. These strategies support the novel's broader negotiation between authenticity and accessibility, using food as both a marker of Korean identity and a site for intercultural exchange.

### 4.3. Interjections & Emotions

Often overlooked in literary analysis, interjections act as spontaneous emotional expressions that are culturally and socially shaped. Felix Ameka (1992) defines them as “relatively conventionalised vocal gestures (or more generally, linguistic gestures) which express a speaker’s mental state, action, or attitude or reaction to a situation” (p.106). While they may appear universal, interjections have been proven to be deeply shaped by culture, Anna Wierzbicka (1992) states:

Interjections differ considerably from language to language. In fact, far from being universal and ‘natural’ signs which don’t have to be learnt, interjections are often among the most characteristic peculiarities of individual cultures. (p.160)

The cultural specificity of interjections means that they not only express emotion but can also act as markers of group belonging and social identity. Therefore, examining interjections in

novels can reveal how these seemingly minor linguistic features can preserve cultural identity and emotional meaning across languages.

In *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017), Korean interjections (i.e., *uh-muh*, *aigoo*, *yah*, *wah*) appear in moments of distress or affection and are retained in the text without translation, preserving Korean modes of emotional expression and discourse structure. Sohn Homin (2020) explains Korean interjections as “ejaculatory words including exclamations, cries, calls, or inarticulate utterances expressing emotion, which are typically forms of speech lacking grammatical connection with other sentential elements” and which “abound in Korean” (p.495). In the novel, such interjections are used not only to embellish characters' speech but to convey emotional immediacy and cultural specificity, marking surprise, fear, affection, complaint, or shock in ways distinct from English equivalents. Furthermore, Korean interjections often involve heightened pitch, syllable elongation, and emotionally charged phonology (Sohn, 2020, p.501).

In an early chapter, the interjection *uh-muh* appears in a scene of sudden crisis as Isak has contracted a serious illness in the boardinghouse:

‘*Uh-muh*—’ Yangjin uttered, startled and anxious. ‘We have to move him immediately. The others could get sick. Dokhee-ya, take everything out of the storage room now. Hurry.’ (Lee, 2017, p.25)

In Korean, *uh-muh* is a common exclamation of surprise or alarm and typically occurs in moments of sudden emotional reaction, ranging from mild astonishment to genuine fear. Its placement here at the start of Yangjin’s utterance functions as an immediate response before any rational instruction follows. The term appears without an explicit explanation, but it gives an emotional frame for interpreting it.

In a later scene, the interjection *aigoo* appears twice when Yangjin worries about the likely fate of a family friend:

‘Yes, yes, you have always done your best for me. I wish Kim Changho could have stayed in Japan. Then he could have married you after your husband died. I worry that after I die who will take care of you. Sunja-ya, you must take care of Kyunghee. She can’t stay here by herself. *Aigoo*, if only Kim Changho hadn’t rushed off to the North and probably gotten himself killed. *Aigoo*. The poor man probably died for nothing.’ Kyunghee crumpled visibly. (Lee, 2017, p.460)

Here, *aigoo* functions both as a complaint and as an elder’s expression of weary resignation. In Korean, *aigoo* is a flexible interjection used to convey pity, frustration, and distress, often accompanied by a downward intonation or sigh. Its double repetition signals an emotional persistence; the feeling does not resolve after the first utterance, but lingers, deepened by

Yangjin's age and the gravity of her concerns. By retaining *aigoo* in its Korean form rather than substituting an English equivalent such as "oh dear" or "my goodness", Lee follows Venuti's (2018) foreignization, preserving the sound and rhythm of the original. Readers can infer its meaning from the tone of the scene, the gravity of Yangjin's words, and the way repetition marks the emotion as ongoing rather than momentary.

One example of Korean expressive speech occurs when a male shopkeeper responds to Yangji's request for white rice with the exclamation:

'Could you sell me some white rice?' '*Waaaaah*, you must have an important guest staying with you. I'm sorry, but I don't have any to sell. You know where it all goes,' he said. (Lee, 2017, p.95)

The elongated *waaaaah* introduces the utterance with audible surprise or social commentary, setting a tone that blends mild sarcasm with recognition of an unusual situation. While similar interjections ("wah") occur in other languages, including some varieties of English (Oxford University Press, 2016), the italics here mark it as Korean, aligning with Valdés' (2023) point about typography signalling foreignness (p.15). The elongated form creates a prosodic stretch that conveys heightened emotion before any propositional content is delivered. Here, the surprise has a hint of sarcasm, as the shopkeeper indirectly comments on the rarity of such a request by implying that rice is reserved for special occasions or high-status guests.

The final category, interjections, is similarly retained in the examples, carrying tone through phonetic form and placement to show cultural emotional meaning. Interjections are culturally shaped, and their meaning is often conveyed through situational context, repetition, or prosodic elongation (Ameka, 1992, p.106; Wierzbicka, 1992, p.160). By retaining these expressions, it reflects Venuti's (2018) foreignization, preserving phonetic and prosodic qualities rather than substituting for domesticated forms. At the same time, such retention creates a "strangeness", signalling linguistic difference without hindering comprehension. In Locher's (2017) terms, these act as indexical markers, guiding readers to interpret the emotional stand through both verbal and paralinguistic cues (p.319). The strategy inserts cultural difference into the novel's rhythm and voice, maintaining immediacy while requiring active reader interpretation. Overall, these examples show how Lee retains Korean interjections in the novel to preserve their emotional immediacy and cultural resonance. Whether signalling alarm (*uh-muh*), resignation (*aigoo*), or socially marked surprise (*waaaaah*), each instance uses contextual anchoring, repetition, or prosodic shaping to make the meaning accessible without

explicit translation. This aligns with Venuti's (2018) foreignization, as the original form is preserved, and with Valdés' (2023) observation on how typography can modulate strangeness (p.15). Most importantly, the placement and sound patterning of these interjections act as indexical cues in Locher's (2017) sense, guiding readers to interpret emotional stance and social meaning through surrounding narrative and interactional cues (p.319). Together, these strategies position the reader as an active interpreter, preserving cultural specificity while maintaining narrative accessibility.

#### 4.4. Hybridity, Translanguaging, & Culture

The representation of untranslated Korean CSIs in *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017) reveals a commitment to preserving cultural markers while also managing accessibility for an English reader. Rather than following a single approach, Lee's use of these items shifts according to their narrative function and emotional charge. This variation creates a dynamic balance between what Venuti (2018) calls a "ethnodeviant pressure" and the demands of reader fluency (p.15), allowing the novel to maintain authenticity without excluding those unfamiliar with the Korean language and culture. Such alternation demonstrates both the possibilities and constraints of embedding Korean identity into English-language fiction, producing the postmonolingual condition, where multilingual texts highlight difference while still negotiating with dominant monolingual norms (Valdés, 2023, p.2).

Across these selected scenes, Lee's strategies involve a deliberate shifting between foreignizing and domesticating moves, with the choice shaped by the priorities of the specific scene. In some moments, this mix preserves cultural nuance while supporting reader comprehension, while in others, it can dilute or obscure the meaning of culturally loaded terms. While these choices may also reflect the novel's dual audience, as diasporic readers versed in Korean cultural codes as well as global readers encountering them for the first time, the focus here is on how these strategies function within the scene itself. Moreover, reader positioning is managed through typographic cues (italics vs. unmarked forms), contextual support, and selective repetition, which Valdés (2023) observes, can regulate the degree of perceived strangeness (pp.10, 14). These devices prevent unclear terminology from overwhelming readers while resisting full assimilation into English norms. Still, the absence of consistent marking (i.e., *-seki* appearing without italics or explanation) can leave certain cultural meanings

inaccessible unless readers seek them out independently. This suggests that even in consciously foreignizing scenes, comprehension gaps are both possible and, to some degree, inevitable.

Viewed through Bhabha's (2004) concept of hybridity, this shifting between foreignization and domesticating strategies can be read as an enactment of the Third Space, as it becomes a site where cultural meaning is renegotiated rather than simply translated or erased. The coexistence of Korean words and English narration does not resolve into one cultural frame but instead sustains the productive tension of in-betweenness, allowing identity and meaning to be continuously redefined in relation to shifting narrative contexts. However, as the examples showed, it is not always maintained in the text. In certain scenes, such as the departure passage where *doenjang* and *gochujang* are replaced with soybean paste and chilli paste, the in-betweenness turns into domestication, favoring target-culture accessibility over preservation of productive difference. In such cases, the Third Space is not sustained but closed, as the Korean term is fully assimilated into English without retaining its cultural friction. Yet does not necessarily erase meaning. For the character, the substitution can center the emotional or relational core of the scenes, as in the case of Yangjin's maternal care and preparation of Sunja's uncertain future. Without the reader becoming preoccupied with decoding unfamiliar terms, the domesticated form may create immediate empathy and narrative immersion, shifting focus from cultural decoding to shared human experience. This suggests that hybridity in the novel is both selective and strategic, used where cultural friction is both selective and strategic, used where cultural friction enhances meaning and suspended where emotional immediacy takes priority.

This selective use of hybridity at the cultural level is seen at the linguistic level through translanguaging. From a translanguaging perspective (Garcia & Wei, 2014), the novel's multilingual writing also shows how Korean and English work together in the text to create meaning, rather than functioning as two separate systems. These moments are not simply code-switching between bound systems, but rather creative meaning-making acts that draw on multiple linguistic and cultural resources at once. In the novel, translanguaging becomes a literary strategy where Korean terms of address, food words, and interjections are embedded in English in a way that preserves their pragmatic and cultural force, inviting readers into a communicative space where boundaries between languages are deliberately blurred. When seen alongside hybridity, translanguaging provides the means through which the Third Space is enacted at the linguistic level, making it not just a conceptual in-betweenness but a lived one within the reader's experience.

This pattern reinforces Maingueneau's (2023) observation that literary works are "a network of apparatus where practices considered to be literary are stabilized and guaranteed, where individuals can set themselves up as writers and as readers or spectators" (p.15). *Pachinko's* (Lee, 2017) use of untranslated Korean terms, strategically alternated with substitutions or contextual explanations, reflects the novel's position within the global English-language literary market by being close enough to preserve cultural distinctiveness, yet integrated enough to remain widely readable. The novel thus illustrated how a work can occupy a "paratopic" position which is grounded in a specific cultural source while moving in a linguistic and institutional environment that demands negotiation between difference and accessibility (Maingueneau, 2023, p.17).

These observations echo broader tendencies in multilingual diasporic fiction. Selective usage of original-language terms, as Locher (2017) notes, relies on narrative context to convey meaning, making the reader an active interpreter (p.319). Similarly, translingual authors can insert multiple cultural reference points into a dominant language (Doloughan, 2022, p.39) to challenge linguistic homogeneity. The analyzed scenes from the novel reflect both tendencies: Korean CSIs act as cultural signals that resist monolingual smoothing, even as they adapt to the narrative's immediate demands. Ultimately, the handling of untranslated Korean CSIs in these selected excerpts shows that cultural representation in English-language fiction is a process of negotiation rather than a binary choice between foreignization and domestication. The exchange between retention and substitution mirrors the hybrid identities of the characters and the diasporic communities they represent. By inviting readers into moments of partial understanding, the novel enacts the lived reality of intercultural encounter, functioning as a space where some meanings resonate deeply, while others remain just out of reach, and both outcomes are part of the truth the text chooses to tell.

## 5. Conclusion

Having explored the issue of how untranslated Korean CSIs are represented in Lee Minjin's *Pachinko* (2017), this study has examined their role in conveying cultural identity, social hierarchy, and emotional meaning in an English-language literary context. Through close reading of selected examples in three categories (terms of address, food-related words, and interjections), the analysis looked at how representational strategies shift between foreignization and domestication, reflecting the novel's negotiation between cultural authenticity and reader accessibility.

The findings indicate a selective alternation between foreignization and domesticating strategies, shaped by the narrative and emotional priorities of each scene. Retained Korean terms, often marked by typography or supported by contextual clues, create what Venuti (2018) calls "ethnodeviant pressure" (p.15), resisting full assimilation into English and sustaining the cultural and pragmatic force of the original expressions. This further aligns with the postmonolingual condition, where multilingual fiction brings forth linguistic difference while remaining accessible to readers without prior knowledge (Valdés, 2023, p.2). At the same time, domestication appears in moments where cultural specificity is paired with accessible English equivalents (e.g., *doenjang*/soybean paste), shifting the reader from cultural decoding to immediate engagement. The Third Space (Bhabha, 2004) is strategically narrowed, prioritizing immersion over cultural friction. Used selectively, domestication can reinforce character relationships, such as Yangjin's maternal care, by avoiding reader distraction with unfamiliar terminology.

The findings also discussed inconsistent typography marking and shifting levels of contextual support directly influencing how strangeness is perceived and managed by the reader (see Valdés, 2023). For instance, *-seki* appears without italics or in-text glossing, making its derogatory force less immediately accessible unless inferred from tonal cues. Similarly, *ajumma* is at times reduced to a purely functional label, removing its layered social and gendered associations. These examples indicate that, although hybridity and translanguaging enable Korean and English to operate as shared, integrated resources rather than separate systems, the balance between familiarity and estrangement remains uneven across the text.

These findings, while informative, point to further areas that could be explored in studies on multilingual representation in the novel. Future research could build on these findings by

examining the frequency and distribution of both Korean and Japanese CSIs across the novel, identifying patterns in their retention, substitution, or explanation. Such a study could reveal whether the novel applies similar or contrasting strategies to each language, and whether it correlates with thematic or character-driven factors. Reader reception research could further clarify how different audiences (including Korean, Japanese, and international readers) interpret and respond to these multilingual elements, providing insight into whether untranslated CSIs enhance or reshape cultural meaning.

In conclusion, the representation of Korean CSIs in *Pachinko* reflects a process of negotiation rather than a fixed commitment to either foreignization or domestication. The alternation between retention and substitution mirrors the characters' hybrid identities and the diasporic communities they represent. By inviting readers into moments of both recognition and partial understanding, the novel shows the lived realities of intercultural encounters, where some meanings resonate deeply, others remain obscure, and both are vital to its cultural truth.

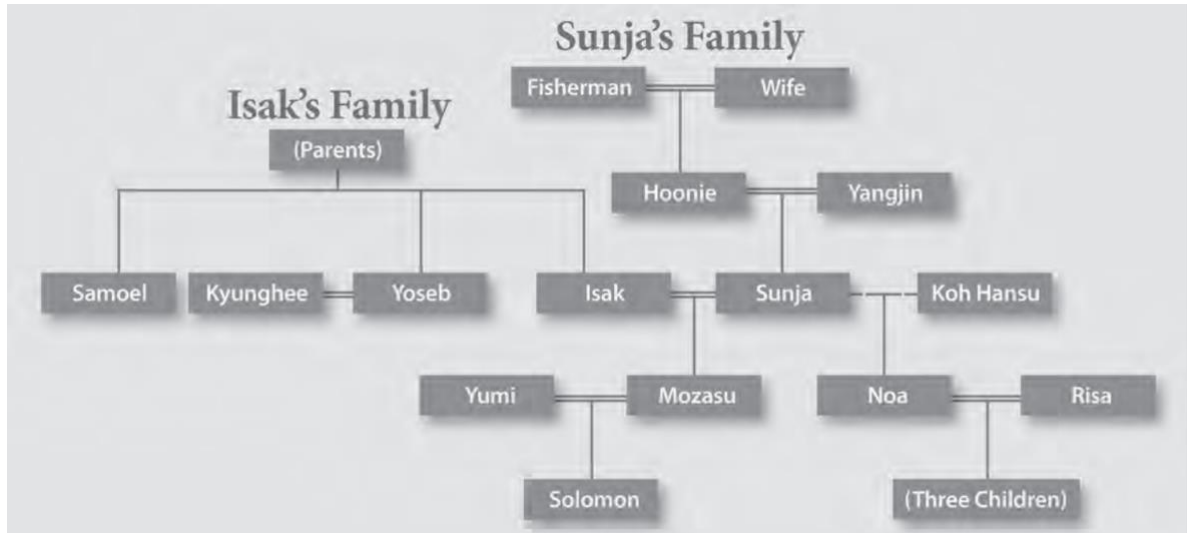
# References

- Ameka, F. (1992). Interjections: The universal yet neglected part of speech. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 18(2), pp. 101–118. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(92\)90048-G](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(92)90048-G)
- Baek, O., Cho, J., Ham, D., Jung B., Ham., & Sohn, J. (2011). *Understanding Korean History*. Paju: Jimoondang.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Canagarajah, S. A. (2012). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Doloughan, F. (2022). Literary Translingualism and Fiction. In S. G. Kellman & N. Lvovich (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism* (pp.31-42). New York: Routledge. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.4324/9780429298745>
- Dudden, A. (2005). *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- García, O. (2009). Education, Multilingualism and Translanguaging in the 21st Century. In T. Skutnab-Kangas., R. Philipson., A. K. Mohanty., & M. Panda (Eds.), *Social justice through multilingual education* (pp.140-158). Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691910>
- García, O., Wei, L. (2014). *Language, Bilingualism and Education*. Palgrave Pivot, London. [https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1057/9781137385765\\_4](https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1057/9781137385765_4)
- Hwang, S.J. (1991). Terms of Address in Korean and American Cultures. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 1(2), 117-134. Retrieved from <https://www.kent.edu/stark/iaics-journals>
- Kim, M. (2025, July 7). What Does Colonization Look Like? The Case of Soshi Kaimei 創氏改名 in Colonial Korea. Pacific Atrocities Education. <https://www.pacificatrocities.org/blog/what-does-colonization-look-like-the-case-of-soshi-kaimei-in-colonial-korea>
- Kovalenko, J. (2023, March 22). *Language and Power: The Pachinko Author Discusses Teaching, Her Novel in Progress, and the Desire to Make a Difference*. Lit Hub. <https://lithub.com/min-jin-lee-on-the-relationship-between-language-and-power/>
- Lee, M. J. (2017). *Pachinko*. Head of Zeus.
- Locher, M. (2017). Multilingualism in fiction. In M. Locher & A. Jucker (Ed.), *Pragmatics of Fiction* (pp. 297-328). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/10.1515/9783110431094-010>
- Lynn, H.-G. (2021). The History of Korea, 1905–1945. In Jeong Hun Han et. al (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of South Korean Politics* (pp.17-33). <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780192894045.013.2>
- Maingueneau, D. (2023). *Paratopia. Postdisciplinary Studies in Discourse* In: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-50970-4\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-50970-4_2)
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Norrick, N. (2012). 9. Interjections. In G. Andersen & K. Aijmer (Ed.), *Pragmatics of Society* (pp. 243-292). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1515/9783110214420.243>
- Oxford University Press. (2016). Wah. In *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press.
- Park, G. Y. (2024, December 24). *Min-jin Lee hopes to make all readers Korean*. The Korea Herald. <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/2930939>

- Sohn, H.-M. (2020). *Korean*. Routledge.
- Strainchamps, A. (2017, October 13). *What It Means To Be A Permanent Outsider, To The Best of Our Knowledge*. <https://www.ttbook.org/interview/what-it-means-be-permanent-outsider>
- Tonomura, M. (2013). Japan: Korean Zainichi migration. In *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration, I. Ness* (Ed.). <https://doi.org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1002/9781444351071.wbeghm322>
- Vaishnavi., & Senguttuvan, M. (2024). Re-constructing Food Identities in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*. *World Journal of English Language*, 14(3), p394-398. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n3p394>
- Valdés, C. (2023). Multilingualism as a Mirror of Strangeness in the Translation of Contemporary Literary Texts. *Languages (Basel)*, 8(2), 140. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8020140>
- Venuti, L. (2018). *Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315098746>
- Wierzbicka, A. (1992). The semantics of interjection. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 18(2), 159–192. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(92\)90050-L](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(92)90050-L)

# Appendix A

*Image 1: Family Tree of Main Characters of Pachinko (2017).*



*Image of Family tree of the main character of Pachinko (2017). Found in Munson, T. (2019). Contextualizing Lee Minjin's Pachinko. Asian Literature in the Humanities and the Social Science, 24(3). <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/contextualizing-min-jin-lees-pachinko/>*

# Appendix B

**Table 2:** Complete list of Korean Lexemes From The Three Analytical Categories in *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017).

Category	Romanized	Translation	Page
Terms of Address	Ajumma/s	Middle-aged woman; madam,	29, 33,
		ma'am	143, 144, 166, 167, 177, 179, 186, 278, 374,
	Ajumoni	[Polite] Middle-aged woman; madam, ma'am	14, 15, 16, 21, 24, 58, 65, 74, 75, 82, 95, 352, 353, 354, 355, 528,
	Ajeossi	Middle-aged man; mister	95, 101, 149, 238, 239, 250,
	Agasshi	Young lady; miss	180,186
	Oppa	[for female] Older brother; older male friend; [Slang] boyfriend	40, 42, 46, 48, 49, 52, 53, 257

---

Umma	[Informal] Mom	158, 168, 197, 198, 200, 203, 204, 206, 212, 235, 250, 262, 264, 266, 294, 295, 346, 347, 355, 422, 423, 425, 455, 459, 460, 461,
Appa	[Informal] Dad	196, 198, 203, 204, 205, 212, 213, 249, 250, 264, 266,
Aga	Baby; infant	197, 199,
Yobo	Honey; darling	98, 119, 124, 156, 165, 166, 191, 200, 207, 290, 528
-ya/-ah	[Informal] Particle used when calling someone by name affectionately	19, 30, 43, 91, 116, 143, 211, 220,

---

	abuji	[Polite] father	101,
	-seki	bastard; son of a bitch	21, 22,
	Omoni	[Polite] mother	104, 373,
	Halmoni	grandmother	466
	Jebi		55
<b>Food</b>	Kalguksu	Korean knife-cut noodle soup.	88
	Gochujang	Korean fermented chili paste.	176,
	Doenjang	Korean fermented soybean paste.	176,
	Banchan	Korean side dishes.	181, 188,
	Galbi	Marinated grilled meat.	182, 193,
	(Bellflower) muchim	Seasoned (bellflower)	217
	Gimbap	Filled seaweed rice rolls.	273
	(Fish) jeon	(Fish) pancake	387
	(Chicken) jorim	Braised (chicken)	387
	Seollongtang	Beef bone soup	140
	Bulgogi	Marinated grilled meat	387
	Pajeon	Scallion pancake	497
	Kimchi	Fermented cabbage	141, 143, 144, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 187, 188, 498
	Soju	Korean distilled alcohol	245, 337
<b>Interjections</b>	Uh-muh	Oh my goodness, why	25, 113, 148, 158,

---

		159, 198,
		203, 207,
		246, 302,
		379,
Aigoo	Oh goodness; oh no	129, 264,
		460
Waaaah/Waaah/ wah	Wow	19, 95,
		166, 499,
Yah	hey	211

---