

Reconfiguring Craft Knowledge Across Languages: Relational Meaning in Guizhou Batik Terminology

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Abstract

This study examines how craft-related terminology functions beyond the level of individual terms in specialised translation, using Guizhou batik production terminology as a case study. It addresses the limited attention previously paid to the relational structures through which specialised craft knowledge is organised and transformed across languages. Adopting a qualitative, relation-oriented approach, the study analyses 51 production-related terms selected from four bilingual publications on Guizhou batik. The analysis focuses on three forms of relational organisation—process relations, role relations, and sequence structures—and compares how these relations are represented in the Chinese source contexts and their English translations. The findings show that Guizhou batik terminology constitutes an interconnected process-oriented system in which meaning emerges through relations among actions, tools, materials, participants, and production stages. In translation, these relations are frequently fragmented when process chains become separate procedural labels, functional interactions are reduced to isolated categories, and sequential structures are presented as descriptive listings. However, relational meaning is not simply lost. It is also reconfigured through object-based classifications, categorical stages, and inventory-like representations. The study therefore argues that specialised translation involves not only the transfer of individual terms but also the reorganisation of the relational structures through which domain knowledge is constructed and communicated. This relational perspective provides practical implications for translators and bilingual publishers seeking to represent procedural craft knowledge more coherently across languages.

1. Introduction

Terminology plays a central role in specialised translation because terms provide access to the concepts, practices, and knowledge structures of particular domains. Traditional terminology approaches have generally treated terms as relatively stable units whose meanings can be transferred across languages through appropriate equivalents (Wüster, 1931, 1979). This orientation has strongly influenced translation research and practice, where emphasis is often

placed on identifying terms, selecting accurate equivalents, and maintaining terminological consistency (Johnson & Sager, 1980; Komarova et al., 2023; Rogers, 2015). Although these concerns remain important, a predominantly term-centred approach may overlook the broader relations through which specialised knowledge is organised and communicated.

This limitation is particularly evident in the translation of traditional craft discourse. Craft-related terms do not merely name individual tools, materials, techniques, or participants. They are embedded in interconnected production processes, functional interactions, and procedural sequences. A term referring to wax application, for example, is meaningful not only as the name of an individual operation but also through its relationship with material preparation, dyeing, wax removal, and finishing. Similarly, the meanings of tools and materials depend on the functions they perform within specific stages of production. Craft knowledge is therefore fundamentally processual and relational, emerging through interactions among actions, materials, tools, participants, and practical contexts (Ingold, 2013).

More recent terminology theories provide a broader basis for understanding these relations. The Communicative Theory of Terminology conceptualises terms as multidimensional units shaped by cognitive, linguistic, and communicative factors rather than as isolated lexical labels (Cabr , 1999, 2003). Socio-cognitive terminology similarly emphasises that specialised concepts are influenced by human understanding, social interaction, and cultural experience (Temmerman, 2000). Frame-Based Terminology further demonstrates that specialised concepts acquire meaning through their position within interconnected knowledge structures and conceptual frames (Faber, 2009, 2012). These approaches suggest that terminology should be examined not only in terms of individual equivalence but also in relation to the systems of knowledge in which terms operate.

Such a perspective is particularly relevant to traditional crafts and intangible cultural heritage. Craft terminology frequently represents embodied knowledge that is acquired and transmitted through practice rather than through formal definitions alone. Terms may encode sequences of action, relationships between tools and materials, divisions of labour, and culturally specific forms of technical knowledge. Translation therefore involves more than finding target-language labels for source-language terms. It also involves representing the relations through which specialised practices become intelligible to target readers. When terms are translated separately, their individual referential meanings may be retained while the procedural and functional connections among them become less visible.

Guizhou batik provides an appropriate case through which to examine this issue. As a traditional textile practice in Southwest China, Guizhou batik involves interconnected stages such as material preparation, pattern design, wax application, dyeing, wax removal, cleaning, and finishing. Its production terminology includes terms referring to actions, tools, materials, participants, and production stages. Guizhou batik has been widely studied in relation to craft techniques (He, 2004; Zhao, 2020), artistic styles (Liu, 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Tang & Zhao, 2025), and cultural inheritance and preservation (Li, 2021; Quan et al., 2024; Uram, 2016). A smaller body of research has addressed the translation and communication of Guizhou batik terminology (Huang, 2021; Huang et al., 2021). However, these studies have paid limited attention to how relations among production terms are represented and transformed across languages.

More broadly, specialised translation research continues to focus largely on the accuracy, consistency, and equivalence of individual terms. This focus does not fully explain what happens when the organisational relations connecting terms are weakened, separated, or reorganised in translation. In process-based domains, a translation may be lexically acceptable while providing a different representation of how specialised knowledge is structured. Process chains may become lists of separate activities, functional relations may be reduced to labels, and sequential structures may be reorganised into static categories. At the same time, such changes should not necessarily be interpreted only as translation loss. Translation may also introduce new forms of conceptual organisation that make specialised knowledge accessible through target-language classificatory and communicative conventions.

Against this background, the present study examines Guizhou batik production terminology from a relational perspective. It analyses 51 production-related terms drawn from four bilingual publications, focusing on how they participate in process relations, role relations, and sequence structures in the Chinese source contexts and how these relations are represented in English translation. The study uses fragmentation to describe cases in which relational connections become weakened, separated, or less explicit. It uses reconfiguration to describe cases in which specialised knowledge is reorganised according to a different conceptual or classificatory logic in the target context.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How is Guizhou batik production terminology organised as a relational system in the source context?
2. How are these relational structures fragmented in English translation?
3. In what ways is relational meaning reconfigured in specialised translation?

By shifting attention from individual terms to the relations connecting them, this study seeks to contribute to a more process-oriented understanding of terminology translation. It argues that specialised translation involves not only the transfer of lexical and conceptual content but also the reorganisation of the structures through which domain knowledge is constructed and communicated. This perspective also has practical relevance for translators, editors, and bilingual heritage publishers seeking to present procedural craft knowledge more coherently across languages.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Terminology in Specialised Translation

Terminology has long played a central role in specialised translation. Traditional terminology theories, particularly Wüster's (1931, 1979) General Theory of Terminology, conceptualised terms as stable designations associated with clearly defined concepts. Within this perspective, translation primarily involves identifying accurate target-language equivalents and maintaining terminological consistency (Sager, 1990; Wright, 1995).

This term-centred orientation continues to influence professional translation practice. Translators are expected to identify specialised terms, verify their meanings, select appropriate equivalents, and ensure consistency across texts (Gašpar et al., 2022; Komarova et al., 2023). Terminology databases and translation-memory systems further reinforce the treatment of terms as discrete lexical units that can be recorded and reused (Bowker, 2002; Bowker & Fisher, 2010; Bowker & Pearson, 2002; Fernández, 2017).

However, specialised meaning is not always contained within individual terms. In many domains, terms form part of broader conceptual and communicative systems. Cabré's (1999, 2003)

Communicative Theory of Terminology therefore understands terms as multidimensional units shaped by cognitive, linguistic, and communicative factors. Similarly, socio-cognitive terminology emphasises that specialised concepts are influenced by cultural experience and social interaction (Temmerman, 2000).

Frame-Based Terminology further demonstrates that specialised concepts are understood through networks of relations involving actions, participants, instruments, materials, and outcomes (Faber, 2009, 2012, 2022). These approaches shift attention from isolated lexical equivalence towards the systems of knowledge in which terms operate.

This broader perspective is particularly relevant to traditional crafts and intangible cultural heritage. Craft terminology often encodes not only technical reference but also procedural knowledge, material practice, and culturally situated experience (Diki-Kidiri, 2022; Istrate, 2022; Li & Hope, 2021; Zheng & Liu, 2022). Nevertheless, terminology translation research still frequently concentrates on individual equivalents, consistency, and translation strategies, with less attention to the relations connecting terms within specialised practice.

2.2 Relational Meaning and Knowledge Organisation

Relational meaning refers to the way a term derives part of its significance from its position within a broader system of knowledge. In process-based domains, terms frequently represent stages within procedures, tools used for particular functions, or materials involved in specific transformations. Their meanings therefore depend not only on what they denote individually but also on how they relate to other elements.

This is especially evident in traditional craft production. Craft knowledge develops through interactions among practitioners, materials, tools, and actions rather than through abstract classification alone (Ingold, 2013). A production term may refer to an individual action, but its full meaning depends on its place within a sequence and its relationship with preceding and subsequent activities.

In Guizhou batik production, for example, waxing, dyeing, and de-waxing form an interconnected process. Waxing prepares the cloth for resist dyeing, while de-waxing reveals the pattern after colour has been fixed. Likewise, tools such as the wax knife and dye vat acquire specialised meaning through the functions they perform within particular production stages.

Based on this understanding, the present study distinguishes three forms of relational organisation. Process relations connect mutually dependent production activities. Role relations connect actions with tools, materials, equipment, and participants. Sequence structures organise activities according to temporal and procedural order.

These relations show that craft terminology functions as an interconnected system rather than as an inventory of separate labels. For target readers unfamiliar with the production process, translating individual terms without representing their relationships may preserve basic reference while weakening the procedural logic of the craft.

2.3 Translation, Fragmentation, and Reconfiguration of Relations

Specialised translation is commonly evaluated in terms of accuracy, equivalence, and consistency. Although these criteria remain important, they do not fully explain how the organisation of specialised knowledge may change across languages.

When terms are translated separately, source-side relations may become less explicit. Process chains may appear as lists of individual procedures, functional relationships may be reduced to isolated labels, and ordered stages may become descriptive categories. The present study describes this weakening of relational information as fragmentation.

Fragmentation does not necessarily mean that a translation is incorrect. A target-language term may accurately identify an action, object, or participant while providing less information about its position within the broader production system. What becomes less visible is the connection among terms rather than their immediate referential meaning.

At the same time, translation does not simply remove relational meaning. It may reorganise specialised knowledge through target-language classifications and communicative conventions. Cognitive approaches to translation suggest that translation involves conceptual reframing and re-categorisation rather than simple lexical substitution (Halverson, 2010; Risku & Rogl, 2020). Process-oriented knowledge may therefore be reorganised into object-based categories, segmented stages, or inventories of tools and techniques.

The present study refers to this process as reconfiguration. Fragmentation concerns which source-side relations become weaker, whereas reconfiguration concerns how knowledge is reorganised in the target context. More specifically, this study distinguishes between relational reconfiguration and knowledge reconfiguration. Relational reconfiguration refers to changes in the organisation of process, role, and sequence relations among terms. Knowledge reconfiguration refers to the broader restructuring of how a specialised domain is represented and understood in the target context as a result of these relational changes. The two concepts are therefore related but not synonymous: relational reconfiguration is treated as a mechanism through which broader knowledge reconfiguration may occur. This distinction moves beyond a simple gain–loss model and recognises that translation may both reduce certain source-side relations and create alternative forms of knowledge organisation.

Previous studies have examined conceptual shifts, contextualised translation strategies, and culture-bound terminology (Li, 2023; Liu & Wei, 2021; Noronha, 2023; Wei, 2018). Research on Guizhou batik has also addressed cultural communication and terminology translation (Huang, 2021; Huang et al., 2021). However, limited attention has been paid to how production terminology functions as a relational system and how that system is transformed in English translation.

The present study addresses this gap by examining how process relations, role relations, and sequence structures are organised in the Chinese source context, fragmented in translation, and reconfigured through alternative target-side structures.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, relation-oriented research design to examine how specialised craft knowledge is organised and transformed in translation. Rather than evaluating individual English equivalents primarily in terms of lexical accuracy, it focuses on the relations connecting production-related terms within broader systems of practice.

The analysis assumes that the meanings of craft terms are shaped not only by their referential content but also by their positions within production processes, their functional relationships with tools, materials, equipment and participants, and their connections with preceding and subsequent stages. Translation is therefore examined at two interconnected levels: the rendering of individual terms and the representation of the relational structures in which those terms operate.

A qualitative design was selected because the study aims to interpret patterns of knowledge organisation rather than measure translation accuracy statistically. The analysis involves close reading, contextual comparison and relational classification of Chinese terms and their English representations.

3.2 Data Sources

The data were drawn from four authoritative publication sets concerning traditional Guizhou batik production, as presented in **Error! Reference source not found.** (Chen & Fu, 1993; Fan, 2008; Ma, 2010a, 2010b; Zhang & Liu, 2019). These publications were selected because they provide substantial information on batik materials, tools, techniques, production roles and procedural stages, together with English translations or corresponding English representations.

No.	Books	Author/Editor	Translator	Publisher	Year	Page
1	Batik Art	Chen Ningkang, Fu Mulan (A)	Mao Guoan	Guizhou Educational Publishing House	1993	101
2	Guizhou batik in National Art Museum of China	Fan Dian (E)	/	Anhui Fine Arts Publishing House	2008	140
3	Guizhou batik (Chinese version)	Ma Zhengrong (A)	/	Guizhou Ethnic Publishing House	2010	70
	Guizhou batik (English version)	Ma Zhengrong (A)	/	Guizhou Ethnic Publishing House	2010	70
4	The Collection Set of Folk Arts and Crafts in Guizhou	Zhang Shishen, Liu Yonog (E)	Bogdan Andrei Prisoschi, Zheng Shishi	Guizhou People's Publishing House	2019	344

Table 1 Bilingual sources of Guizhou batik terminology

Note: Full bibliographic details of the source publications are provided in the reference list.

The sources cover different periods and publication contexts, including art books, museum publications and cultural heritage collections. They therefore provide a broad textual basis for examining how Guizhou batik production knowledge is described and translated across communicative settings.

Although the publications contain Chinese and English materials relating to the same specialised domain, they were not treated as a strictly parallel corpus. Some English texts correspond closely to the Chinese descriptions, whereas others summarise, adapt or reorganise the source information. The analysis consequently focuses on comparable terminological representations and their surrounding contexts rather than assuming sentence-by-sentence correspondence.

The study concentrates on production-related terminology because this category displays particularly clear relational organisation. These terms refer to production processes and techniques, tools and equipment, materials, craft practitioners, historical production roles and procedural stages. They frequently participate in practical sequences and functional interactions and are therefore suitable for examining how procedural knowledge is represented across languages.

3.3 Data Selection

The 51 terms analysed in this study were selected from a broader termbase compiled from the four publication sets. The termbase recorded the Chinese term, its English translation or corresponding English representation, its textual context, source publication and production-related category.

The selection followed two criteria. First, each term had to participate in an identifiable relational structure. This meant that it was connected to at least one other element through a production process,

functional role or procedural sequence. Terms functioning only as isolated labels without sufficient contextual evidence of relational meaning were not prioritised.

Second, the term had to have an English translation or comparable English representation that allowed examination of how its source-side relations were maintained, weakened or reorganised. Terms lacking sufficient bilingual contextual evidence were excluded from detailed analysis.

The selected terms therefore constitute a purposive qualitative sample rather than a frequency-based sample. They were chosen for their capacity to illustrate how craft knowledge is relationally organised and transformed in translation. Representative examples include 点蜡 (dian la, waxing), 染色 (ran se, dyeing), 脱蜡 (tuo la, de-waxing), 蜡刀 (la dao, wax knife), 蜂蜡 (feng la, beeswax), 染缸 (ran gang, dye vat) and 染人 (ran ren, dyer).

3.4 Analytical Categories

The analysis distinguishes three forms of relational organisation in the source context: process relations, role relations and sequence structures.

3.4.1 Process Relations

Process relations refer to connections among actions that jointly constitute a broader production activity. A process relation was identified when two or more terms represented mutually dependent operations within the production of batik. For example, 点蜡 (waxing), 染色 (dyeing) and 脱蜡 (de-waxing) were analysed as a connected process because wax application prepares the cloth for resist dyeing, while wax removal reveals the dyed pattern. The meaning of each operation is therefore partly determined by its relationship with the others.

3.4.2 Role Relations

Role relations refer to functional connections among actions, tools, materials, equipment and participants. A role relation was identified when the meaning of a term depended on the function it performed within a particular production activity. For example, 蜡刀 (wax knife) was analysed in relation to wax application, 蜂蜡 (beeswax) as the resist material applied to the cloth, 炭盆 (charcoal stove) as equipment used to maintain wax temperature, and 染缸 (dye vat) as equipment used during dyeing. Role relations therefore concern not only what an object or participant is, but also what it does within the production system.

3.4.3 Sequence Structures

Sequence structures refer to the temporal and procedural ordering of production activities. A sequence structure was identified when the textual context indicated that one activity preceded, enabled, followed or completed another. The batik production sequence was organised into broad stages such as material preparation, pre-waxing design, wax application, dyeing, wax removal, and cleaning and finishing. More specific terms were then situated within these stages according to their procedural functions.

These three categories are interconnected rather than mutually exclusive. A term may participate simultaneously in a functional role and a procedural sequence. The categories were used as analytical perspectives for interpreting the organisation of craft knowledge, rather than as rigid lexical classifications.

3.5 Analytical Procedure

The analysis was organised into three analytical stages corresponding to the research questions and the dimensions illustrated in Figure 1. These stages are distinguished for analytical clarity rather than as a strictly temporal sequence. In actual translation, fragmentation and reconfiguration may occur simultaneously as interrelated dimensions of the same transformation.

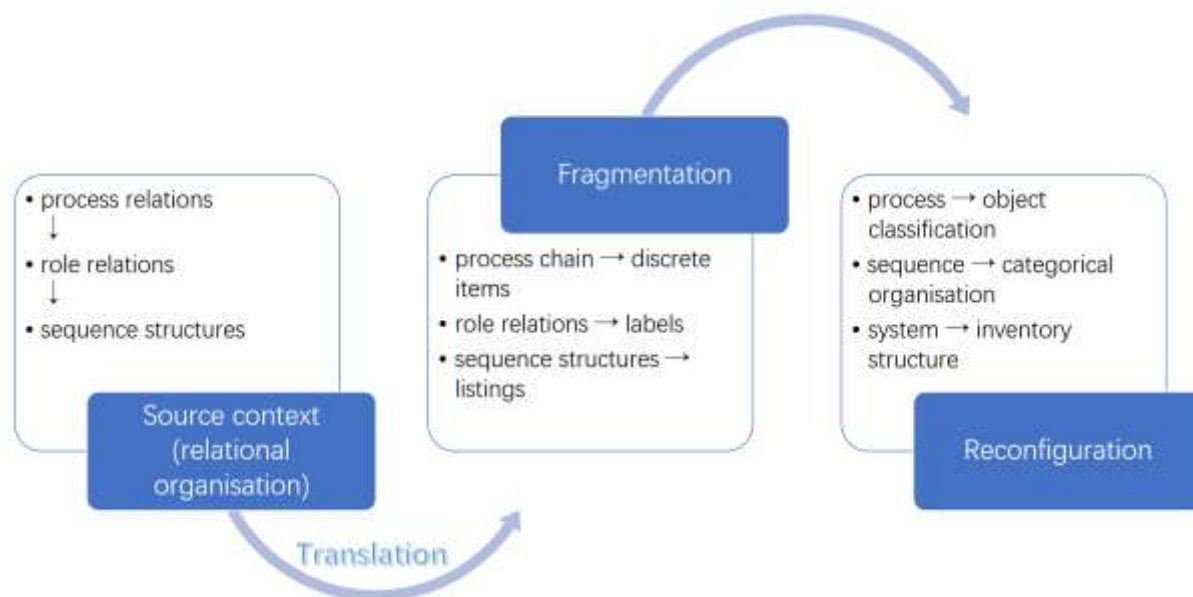


Figure 1 Analytical framework for relational transformation in specialised translation

Note: The arrows represent the analytical movement of the study rather than a fixed temporal sequence. Fragmentation and reconfiguration are analytically distinguishable but may occur simultaneously within the same translational transformation.

Stage 1: Identifying Relational Organisation in the Source Context

The first stage examined the Chinese terms and their surrounding descriptions to identify how production knowledge was organised. For each term, the analysis considered: (1) the action, object, material, participant or stage represented; (2) the other production elements with which it was connected; (3) its function within the broader batik-making process; (4) its position in the temporal or procedural sequence. The terms were then examined through the categories of process relations, role relations and sequence structures. This stage established the source-side relational organisation against which the English representations were compared.

Stage 2: Examining Relational Fragmentation in Translation

The second stage compared the Chinese contextual representations with their English translations or corresponding English descriptions. Relational fragmentation was identified when a relation visible in the Chinese context became weakened, separated or less explicit in English. The analysis focused on three recurring patterns: (1) a connected process chain becoming a series of separate procedural labels; (2) a functional relationship becoming an isolated tool, material or occupational label; (3) an ordered production sequence becoming a descriptive list of activities. Fragmentation was not automatically classified as mistranslation. An English term could be referentially acceptable while still presenting less information about its relationship with the broader production system. The analysis therefore distinguished lexical correctness from relational completeness.

Stage 3: Interpreting Relational Reconfiguration

The third analytical stage examined how specialised knowledge was reorganised in the English context when source relations were weakened or transformed. Although discussed separately, relational fragmentation and reconfiguration may occur simultaneously within the same translation. Relational reconfiguration was identified when the target representation introduced a different organisational logic, including: (1) process-oriented meanings represented through object-based categories; (2) continuous sequences divided into classificatory stages; (3) interconnected systems presented as inventories of separate tools, materials or activities; (4) procedural actions reframed as stable techniques or product categories. This stage moved beyond a simple interpretation of translation as loss. It considered how target-language descriptions reconstructed craft knowledge through alternative categories that may be more familiar or communicatively accessible to target readers.

In summary, the framework moves from identifying source relational organisation to examining two interrelated dimensions of target-side transformation: relational fragmentation and relational reconfiguration. These dimensions may overlap rather than unfold in a fixed sequence.

3.6 Data Interpretation and Presentation

The analysis was conducted through repeated close reading of the selected terms and their surrounding Chinese and English contexts. Interpretations were checked against descriptions of the relevant production stages within the same publication and, where available, across the other sources.

Tables 2–9 present representative examples rather than all 51 terms. The broader dataset was used to identify recurring relational patterns, while the tables provide detailed evidence of the most characteristic cases.

No numerical scoring was used, and the terms were not ranked according to translation quality. The purpose was to describe how specialised knowledge is organised and transformed across Chinese and English contexts rather than to classify every relational change as a translation error.

4. Analysis

4.1 Craft Terminology as a Relational System

Craft-related terminology in the Guizhou batik corpus does not function as a collection of isolated lexical items but as part of an interconnected system in which meaning is organised through procedural, functional and sequential relations. Production-related terms derive significance not only from their individual referential meanings but also from their position within broader structures of craft practice. The analysis of the corpus demonstrates that batik terminology operates through multiple forms of relational organisation, particularly process relations, role relations and sequence structures. Together, these relations form a coherent network through which procedural knowledge and craft practice are structured and communicated.

4.1.1 Process Relations

One important dimension of relational organisation is constituted by process relations. In the batik corpus, production terminology frequently encodes interconnected stages of craft activity rather than isolated technical operations. Terms associated with waxing, dyeing and wax removal, for example, form part of a continuous production sequence in which each stage presupposes and enables the next.

Production stage	Chinese term	English translation	Relational function
Wax application	点蜡 (dian la)	waxing	creates a resist pattern before dyeing
Dyeing	染色 (ran se)	dyeing	fixes colour within wax-defined areas
Wax removal	脱蜡 (tuo la)	de-waxing	reveals the final pattern after dyeing

Table 2 Process relations in Guizhou batik production terminology

As shown in Table 2, the meanings of these terms are relational rather than self-contained. 点蜡 (dian la: waxing), for instance, cannot be fully understood independently of subsequent dyeing and de-waxing stages. Its function lies in preparing the cloth for colour resistance during the dyeing process. Similarly, 染色 (ran se: dyeing) derives significance from its position between waxing and de-waxing, functioning as the stage through which colour is fixed within wax-protected areas. 脱蜡 (tuo la: de-waxing), in turn, completes the process by removing the resist material and revealing the final design.

Meaning in such cases therefore emerges through procedural interdependence rather than through isolated lexical reference alone. The terms collectively form a process chain in which each stage acquires significance through its relation to preceding and subsequent actions. Process relations thus organise batik terminology into interconnected structures of procedural knowledge rather than discrete technical labels.

4.1.2 Role Relations

A second dimension of relational organisation is constituted by role relations, which connect terms associated with tools, materials, participants and actions within the production process. In the corpus, many production-related terms derive meaning from functional interaction rather than from independent object reference.

Participant/tool	Chinese term	English translation	Functional relation
Tool	蜡刀 (la dao)	wax knife	instrument used for waxing
Heating equipment	炭盆 (tan pen)	charcoal stove	maintains wax temperature
Dyeing equipment	染缸 (ran gang)	dye vat	container used for dyeing
Material	蜂蜡 (feng la)	beeswax	resist material applied to cloth

Table 3 Role relations in Guizhou batik production terminology

The terms shown in Table 3 do not function independently but through interactions within the production system. 蜡刀 (la dao: wax knife), for example, acquires meaning through its relation to the waxing process rather than as an isolated physical object. Similarly, 炭盆 (tan pen: charcoal stove) functions as the heat source required to maintain wax consistency during waxing, while 染缸 (ran gang: dye vat) derives significance through its role within the dyeing stage. Even 蜂蜡 (feng la: beeswax)

functions relationally, as its meaning depends on its role as a resist material within the broader production sequence.

These examples demonstrate that batik terminology organises specialised knowledge through functional interaction among tools, materials, participants and actions. Meaning therefore emerges not through static categorisation but through participation in interconnected craft activities.

4.1.3 Sequence Structures

A third dimension of relational organisation is constituted by sequence structures, which organise the temporal progression of batik production. In the corpus, production terminology does not merely refer to individual operations, but also encodes the order in which different stages of production unfold. The sequence is not a simple linear chain of isolated actions; rather, it consists of several interrelated phases, each containing more specific procedures.



Figure 2 Sequence structure in Guizhou batik production

As illustrated in Figure 2, Guizhou batik production can be organised into six broad stages: material preparation, pre-waxing design, wax application, dyeing, de-waxing, and cleaning and finishing. Within these stages, terms such as cloth washing and airing, indigo collecting and fermenting, wax preparation, pattern designing, wax dotting, wax outlining, first dyeing, repeat dyeing, boiling and wax removal, rinsing, drying and finishing indicate more specific procedures. These terms are meaningful not only because they name particular operations, but because they occupy particular positions within the overall production sequence.

This sequential organisation is both procedural and semantic. For example, wax application depends on prior material preparation and design work, while dyeing becomes meaningful only after wax has been applied to create resist patterns. De-waxing, in turn, depends on the completion of dyeing, and cleaning and finishing complete the transformation of the cloth into a finished batik product. The meaning of each term is therefore shaped by its relation to preceding and subsequent stages.

Sequence structures thus organise batik terminology into a layered procedural system. Rather than representing a list of separate actions, the terminology reflects an ordered logic of production in

which each stage prepares, enables or completes another. This layered sequence is central to understanding how craft knowledge is structured in the source context and why the relational organisation of such knowledge may become difficult to preserve in translation.

4.2 Fragmentation in Translation

While the previous section demonstrated that Guizhou batik terminology functions through interconnected processual and functional relations, the translated data reveal that these relational structures are frequently weakened in cross-cultural translation. Rather than preserving the organisational logic of the source system, translations often treat production-related terms as independent lexical units. As a result, the procedural and functional relations that structure meaning in the source context become less explicit in the target text.

Relational fragmentation was observed across multiple dimensions of the corpus, although it did not occur in every translated representation. Process chains are frequently reduced to discrete procedural labels, role relations become detached from broader systems of interaction, and sequence structures are flattened into descriptive listings. The following analysis examines how fragmentation occurs through these different forms of relational reduction.

4.2.1 From Process Chain to Discrete Procedural Labels

One major form of fragmentation occurs in the disruption of process relations. In the source context, production terminology functions through interconnected procedural sequences in which each stage derives meaning from its relation to preceding and subsequent actions. In translation, however, these process chains are frequently represented as separate procedural labels without explicit indication of their interdependence.

Source process chain	English translation	Fragmentation effect
点蜡 (dian la) → 染色 (ran se) → 脱蜡 (tuo la)	waxing → dyeing → de-waxing	process chain reduced to separate procedural labels
采蓝 (cai lan) → 发酵 (fa jiao) → 染色 (ran se)	indigo collecting → fermenting → dyeing	preparatory-production relations weakened
煮布 (zhu bu) → 点蜡 (dian la) → 染色 (ran se)	cloth boiling → waxing → dyeing	sequential dependency becomes less explicit

Table 4 Fragmentation of process relations in translation

As shown in Table 4, the source terminology encodes interconnected stages of production rather than isolated technical operations. 点蜡 (*dian la*: waxing), for example, acquires meaning through its function within the broader dye-resist process. Its significance depends on subsequent dyeing and de-waxing stages, which together form a continuous production sequence. In translation, however, expressions such as “waxing”, “dyeing” and “de-waxing” tend to foreground individual procedural actions rather than the relational continuity connecting them.

A similar pattern can be observed in the sequence 采蓝 (*cai lan*: indigo collecting) → 发酵 (*fa jiao*: fermenting) → 染色 (*ran se*: dyeing). In the source context, these terms form an integrated chain linking material preparation to dye production and application. Yet in translation, the terms are typically

interpreted as separate technical activities rather than components of a continuous process of indigo preparation and use. The organisational logic connecting preparation, transformation and application therefore becomes less visible.

Fragmentation in such cases does not necessarily involve lexical inaccuracy. Rather, it reflects a shift from processual organisation to procedural description. What is weakened in translation is not the referential meaning of individual terms, but the relational continuity through which specialised knowledge is structured.

4.2.2 From Relational Roles to Functional Labels

A second form of fragmentation concerns role relations. In the source system, tools, materials, participants and actions derive meaning through functional interaction within the production process. Translation, however, frequently isolates these elements from the broader systems of interaction in which they originally operate.

Source term	English translation	Relational reduction
蜡刀 (la dao)	wax knife	tool detached from waxing process
染人 (ran ren)	dyer	production role reduced to occupational label
染缸 (ran gang)	dye vat	process-oriented equipment reduced to container reference

Table 5 Fragmentation of role relations in translation

As shown in Table 5, many translations foreground surface referential meaning while backgrounding the relational functions embedded in the source system. 蜡刀 (la dao: wax knife), for example, is translated primarily as a physical tool, while its role within waxing practice becomes less explicit. Similarly, 染人 (ran ren: dyer) is often interpreted as a general occupational category rather than as a participant embedded within specific procedural relations of batik production. Likewise, 染缸 (ran gang: dye vat) tends to be interpreted as an isolated container rather than as equipment functioning within interconnected dyeing processes.

Relational fragmentation was not observed in every case. A counter-example is 蓝尹 (lan yin), translated as “official for indigo production”. Unlike translations that reduce a production role to an isolated occupational label, this rendering explicitly retains the functional relationship between the participant and the specialised activity through the phrase “for indigo production”. The target expression therefore preserves the central role relation by identifying both the participant and the production domain in which the role operates.

Although the translation does not fully communicate the wider historical and institutional context associated with the position, its core relational structure remains intact. This example indicates that relational fragmentation is a recurring tendency in the dataset rather than a universal outcome of translation. The degree of preservation depends partly on whether the target expression makes the relevant process, role, or sequence relation linguistically explicit.

4.2.3 From Sequence Structures to Descriptive Listings

A third form of fragmentation can be observed in the weakening of sequence structures. In the source context, production terminology is organised through ordered procedural stages in which

temporal progression constitutes an important dimension of meaning. In translation, however, these sequential structures are frequently flattened into descriptive listings of separate activities.

Source sequence structure	Target representation	Fragmentation effect
material preparation → waxing → dyeing → de- waxing	cloth washing, waxing, dyeing, drying	temporal dependency weakened
repeated dyeing cycles	repeat dyeing	cyclical process simplified procedurally
waxing → dye fixation → wax removal	waxing, dyeing, de-waxing	transformation process reduced to listing

Table 6 Fragmentation of sequence structures in translation

In the source system, terms derive meaning not only from their immediate procedural functions but also from their position within a larger sequence of transformation. Material preparation, for instance, establishes conditions necessary for waxing, while waxing itself creates the resist patterns that shape subsequent dyeing outcomes. De-waxing, in turn, completes the transformation by revealing the final pattern after dye fixation.

In translation, however, these interconnected stages are frequently represented as descriptive lists of technical activities. Expressions such as “cloth washing”, “waxing”, “dyeing” and “drying” foreground isolated procedures without clearly signalling their temporal and functional interdependence. As a result, the dynamic processual organisation of batik production becomes less visible.

This shift transforms craft knowledge from an ordered procedural system into a series of descriptive operations. The relational logic through which production stages prepare, enable and complete one another is weakened, reducing the interpretive coherence of the source system. These patterns should therefore be understood as recurrent tendencies rather than universal outcomes, since some target expressions retain the central relational connections encoded in the source context.

4.3 Reconfiguration of Relational Meaning

While the previous section demonstrated how relational structures become fragmented in translation, fragmentation does not necessarily imply the complete disappearance of relational meaning. The translated data show that relational structures are frequently reorganised within new conceptual and communicative frameworks. Translation therefore does not simply eliminate relations but reconfigures them through alternative modes of organisation shaped by target-language interpretive structures.

This reconfiguration can be observed across multiple dimensions of the corpus. Process-oriented relations are frequently transformed into object-oriented categories, sequential structures are reorganised into classificatory stages, and interconnected systems of craft knowledge are reconstructed as inventories of separate items. Rather than preserving the relational logic of the source system, translation introduces alternative organisational frameworks through which specialised knowledge becomes interpretable in the target context.

4.3.1 Reclassification: From Process to Object

One important form of reconfiguration involves the transformation of process-oriented relations into object-oriented representations. In the source context, many production-related terms derive meaning through actions, procedures and embodied interactions within the craft process. In translation,

however, these processual meanings are frequently reorganised into object-based or product-oriented categories.

Source-oriented relation	Target-oriented representation	Reconfiguration effect
点蜡 (dian la: waxing process)	wax application	process reduced to operation
绘蜡 (hui la: wax painting)	wax design	action transformed into product-oriented category
发酵染色 (fa jiao ran se: fermented dyeing process)	indigo dyeing	procedural transformation simplified into product label

Table 7 Reclassification of process relations in translation

As shown in Table 7, source terminology frequently encodes actions embedded within broader processual relations. 点蜡 (*dian la*: waxing process), for example, refers not merely to the application of wax but to a procedural stage within the dye-resist production system. In translation, however, expressions such as “wax application” foreground the technical operation itself rather than its relational position within the production sequence.

A similar transformation can be observed in 绘蜡 (*hui la*: wax painting), which in the source context emphasises the embodied act of wax painting as part of craft practice. The translation “wax design”, however, shifts interpretive focus towards the resulting product or visual outcome rather than the action-based process through which the pattern is created. Likewise, 发酵染色 (*fa jiao ran se*: fermented dyeing process) foregrounds the procedural transformation involved in fermentation-based dyeing, whereas “indigo dyeing” compresses this process into a more general product-oriented category.

These examples indicate that translation frequently reclassifies procedural relations into object-oriented representations. Meaning is therefore reorganised from “how production operates” towards “what the product or category is”, reflecting a shift from processual understanding to categorical interpretation.

4.3.2 Restructuring: From Sequence to Category

A second form of reconfiguration concerns the restructuring of sequential relations into categorical frameworks. In the source system, production terminology is organised through continuous procedural progression in which each stage acquires meaning through temporal and functional dependency. In translation, however, these sequential structures are frequently reorganised into segmented categories or classificatory stages.

Source sequence structure	Target reorganisation	Reconfiguration effect
material preparation → waxing → dyeing → de-waxing	preparation stage / decoration stage / dyeing stage	process reorganised into segmented categories
repeated dyeing cycles	repeated dyeing technique	cyclical process reframed as technical category

waxing → dye fixation → wax removal	wax-resist technique	procedural flow compressed into craft type
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Table 8 Restructuring of sequence relations in translation

In the source context, production stages form a continuous sequence in which each operation prepares, enables or completes another. Meaning therefore emerges through temporal progression and procedural interdependence. Translation, however, frequently restructures this processual organisation into segmented conceptual categories that are easier to classify within target-language descriptive frameworks.

For example, the interconnected progression from material preparation to waxing, dyeing and de-waxing may be reorganised into broader classificatory stages such as “preparation stage”, “decoration stage” and “dyeing stage”. This restructuring shifts the interpretive focus from procedural continuity to categorical segmentation. Similarly, repeated dyeing cycles that function as iterative processual relations in the source system are frequently reframed as stable technical categories such as “repeated dyeing technique”.

Such transformations reorganise craft knowledge from continuous procedural flow into classificatory structures. Relations based on temporal progression are therefore replaced by relations based on categorisation and descriptive organisation.

4.3.3 Reorganisation: From System to Inventory

A third form of reconfiguration involves the transformation of interconnected craft systems into inventories of separate items. In the source context, terminology operates within a broader relational network linking production stages, tools, materials, actions, and production roles. In translation, however, these interconnected structures are frequently reorganised into itemised collections of terms.

Source relational system	Target representation	Reconfiguration effect
tools–materials–actions network	list of craft tools and materials	interactive system reorganised as inventory
indigo preparation– fermentation–dyeing network	list of dyeing procedures	interconnected process reorganised as separate activities
production-role interactions	occupational descriptions	relational roles reorganised as labels

Table 9 Reorganisation of relational systems in translation

As shown in Table 9, relational systems embedded within the source context frequently become itemised descriptive inventories in translation. Terms associated with tools, materials and actions, for example, may be reorganised into lists of “craft tools” or “production materials”, reducing the functional interactions among them.

A comparable transformation can be observed in production-role terminology. Roles embedded within broader systems of craft organisation and interaction are frequently translated as isolated occupational descriptions detached from the procedural networks in which they originally functioned. Translation therefore reorganises relational systems into descriptive inventories composed of separate, classifiable units.

This transformation does not simply simplify specialised knowledge. Rather, it introduces a different organisational logic in which meaning is structured through classification and categorisation rather than through interaction and processual relation.

5. Discussion

5.1 Beyond Term-Level Translation

The findings of this study suggest that specialised translation cannot be adequately understood through term-level equivalence alone. Existing approaches to terminology translation have frequently focused on lexical accuracy, consistency and conceptual correspondence between source and target terms. While such approaches remain important, the analysis presented here demonstrates that meaning in craft-related discourse is organised not only through individual terms but also through the relations connecting processes, tools, materials and production stages.

From this perspective, translation involves more than the transfer of lexical units. The fragmentation and reconfiguration identified in Sections 4.2 and 4.3 indicate that translation reshapes the organisational structures through which specialised knowledge is constructed and interpreted. Meaning therefore becomes transformed not simply at the level of terminology, but at the level of relational organisation. This finding highlights the limitations of approaches that treat terms as self-contained units independent of the systems within which they operate.

The study thus supports a broader shift in specialised translation research from isolated lexical equivalence towards relational and process-oriented understandings of meaning. Translational change should not be viewed solely in terms of semantic gain or loss, but also in terms of how relations among concepts, actions and procedures are reorganised across languages and communicative contexts. The findings extend rather than challenge Cabré's Communicative Theory of Terminology and Temmerman's socio-cognitive approach. They show that specialised meaning depends not only on the cognitive, linguistic, and communicative properties of individual terms, but also on the process, role, and sequence relations connecting them. The study therefore adds a relational level of analysis to existing communicative and socio-cognitive accounts of terminology.

5.2 Translation and the Reorganisation of Specialised Knowledge

The findings further suggest that translation participates in the reorganisation of specialised knowledge across linguistic and cultural systems. In the Guizhou batik corpus, craft knowledge is structured through processual relations linking actions, tools, materials and sequential stages of production. Translation, however, frequently restructures these relations through classificatory and object-oriented forms of organisation. In this sense, the object-based, categorical, and inventory-like representations identified in Section 4.3 constitute forms of relational reconfiguration, while their cumulative effect is a broader reconfiguration of how Guizhou batik production knowledge is structured and interpreted in English.

This transformation has important implications for how specialised domains become interpretable in translation. Processual knowledge organised through embodied practice may be reconfigured into descriptive categories, technical labels or inventories of separate items. As a result, the target representation may privilege static classification over procedural continuity. Translation therefore reshapes not only how terms are interpreted, but also how the domain itself is conceptually organised.

Such transformations are particularly significant in craft-related and heritage discourse, where specialised knowledge is often embedded within material practice, procedural interaction and culturally situated forms of production. The relational structures identified in the source system are not merely linguistic patterns but mechanisms through which craft knowledge is organised and transmitted. When these structures are reorganised in translation, the interpretive orientation of the domain may also shift.

5.3 Implications for Craft and Heritage Translation

The relational perspective adopted in this study also has broader implications for the translation of craft-related and intangible cultural heritage discourse. Existing translation practices frequently prioritise the transfer of referential meaning at the level of individual terms. However, the findings of this study suggest that preserving lexical reference alone may be insufficient for representing domains in which meaning emerges through processual and relational organisation.

For example, the three terms 点蜡 (*dian la*: waxing process), 染色 (*ran se*, dyeing), and 脱蜡 (*tuo la*, de-waxing) may be presented in a translated text simply as “waxing, dyeing, and de-waxing”. Although the individual translations are referentially acceptable, this listing does not explicitly show how the three stages depend on one another. A relation-oriented revision could present them as a numbered process:

- (1) Waxing: applying molten wax to selected areas of the cloth to create a resist pattern;
- (2) Dyeing: immersing the waxed cloth so that colour penetrates the unprotected areas;
- (3) De-waxing: removing the wax after dyeing to reveal the completed pattern.

This revised presentation retains the individual English terms while making their procedural relationship explicit: waxing prepares the cloth for dyeing, dyeing produces the colour contrast, and de-waxing reveals the final design. The same principle can be applied through process diagrams, functional glosses, or brief cross-references. For instance, 蜡刀 (*la dao*: wax knife) may be glossed as “a specialised tool used to apply molten wax and draw resist patterns on cloth”. Such contextualisation preserves target-language accessibility while making the relational organisation of craft knowledge more visible.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined Guizhou batik production terminology from a relational perspective, focusing on how specialised meaning is organised and transformed in translation. Rather than functioning as isolated lexical units, the analysed terms operate within interconnected systems of process, role and sequence relations through which craft knowledge is structured and communicated.

The analysis demonstrates that these relational structures are frequently altered in translation. Process chains become fragmented into discrete procedural labels, role relations are reduced to isolated functional categories, and sequential structures are reorganised into descriptive or classificatory forms. At the same time, translation does not simply eliminate relational meaning. Instead, it reconfigures relational organisation through alternative conceptual frameworks shaped by target-language communicative and interpretive structures.

The findings suggest that specialised translation cannot be adequately understood through term-level equivalence alone. Meaning in craft-related discourse emerges not only through individual terms but also through the organisational relations connecting actions, materials, tools and production stages. Translation therefore involves not only lexical transfer but also the reorganisation of specialised knowledge across linguistic and cultural contexts.

By introducing a relational level of analysis, the study extends communicative and socio-cognitive approaches to terminology from the interpretation of individual terminological units to the organisation of the networks through which specialised knowledge is constructed. It proposes that translation should be understood not merely as the transfer of specialised vocabulary, but as a process that reshapes the structures through which knowledge is organised and interpreted across languages. Understanding translation as a process of relational reorganisation may therefore offer a more nuanced account of how specialised knowledge is interpreted, transformed and communicated across languages.

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Competing interests

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