

Home culture travel writing makes intercultural competence visible among Thai learners of Indonesian as a foreign language

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Abstract

Research on intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in language education has concentrated on learners engaging with a target culture, most often in English. Much less is known about learners who write about their own culture, in a language that is neither their first nor English, for readers from a third culture. This article examines fourteen travel articles produced in Indonesian by Thai undergraduates during a study sojourn in Indonesia, in which they described Thai destinations, festivals, performing arts, food and rituals for Indonesian readers. Using Byram's model of ICC and reflexive thematic analysis, the study asks how the texts make ICC visible and how the writers mediate between cultures while drawing on their full multilingual repertoire. The writers act as insider guides who mobilise cultural knowledge, gloss culture-specific terms, convert prices into the readers' currency and quote local voices, moves that align closely with Byram's *savoirs*. Critical cultural awareness is uneven and is often displaced by promotional discourse. The study repositions writing about the home culture, for a third-culture audience, as a mediation-rich site for ICC, and draws implications for teaching Indonesian and other languages beyond English.

1 Introduction

Language educators increasingly agree that learning a language is inseparable from learning to move between cultural worlds. The dominant way of framing that goal, intercultural communicative competence (ICC), was set out by Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey [1] and has since been refined and contested [2, 3]. Yet most empirical work on ICC shares two features that narrow what we know. It is overwhelmingly situated in English language teaching, and it treats the learner as someone who reaches outward toward a foreign target culture. The learner is positioned as a visitor to another culture rather than as a host who explains their own. This leaves a question that matters both theoretically and practically: what does intercultural competence look like when learners represent their own culture, in a language that is neither their first nor English, to an audience from a third culture?

This article addresses this question through an unusual yet revealing case study. Thirteen Thai undergraduate students majoring in ASEAN Studies at the Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration, Walailak University, Southern Thailand, produced short travel articles in Indonesian while participating in the Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA) programme at the Center for Indonesian Language and Culture Studies, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia. Rather than writing about Indonesia or the cultural environment in which they were studying, the students chose to represent their own homeland. Their texts introduce Thai temples, festivals, classical dance, community villages, beaches, waterfalls, heritage architecture and traditional cuisine, while explicitly addressing an implied Indonesian readership as prospective visitors. In doing so, the students position themselves as intercultural mediators who interpret Thai culture through the medium of Indonesian for Indonesian readers. This creates a distinctive communicative configuration that has received little scholarly attention: Thai writers using Indonesian to represent Thai culture to an Indonesian audience. Unlike the dominant body of research situated within English as a global lingua franca, this case unfolds entirely

within a Southeast Asian linguistic and cultural ecology, where neither the source nor the target culture is Anglophone, and Indonesian functions as a regional lingua franca for intercultural communication.

We argue that this configuration turns travel writing into a productive site for intercultural mediation, and that analysing such texts reveals dimensions of ICC that outward-facing, target-culture tasks tend to hide. The theoretical interest of the case is precise. It tests whether a model of ICC built largely from Anglophone, target-culture, reception-oriented settings still describes what learners do when the orientation is reversed, when the home culture is the whole content, the medium is a language other than English, and the reader belongs to a third culture. When learners write about their own culture for outsiders, they must decide what background knowledge to supply, which terms to gloss, how to convert unfamiliar references into familiar ones, and how to position themselves in relation to both their heritage and their readers. These are the operations that Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey [1] group under the skills of interpreting, relating and discovery, and that later scholars describe as the core work of the intercultural mediator [4, 5]. Because the writers work across Thai, Indonesian and, at the edges, other languages, the task also foregrounds the learner's full multilingual repertoire, which places the case squarely within debates on multilingualism and translanguaging rather than ICC alone [6].

The study also speaks to a gap in scholarship on Indonesian as a foreign language, known in Indonesia as BIPA (Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing). BIPA research has grown quickly, but it remains largely inward-looking and is seldom read against international theory on interculturality [7, 8]. Bringing a BIPA corpus into dialogue with ICC theory therefore serves two ends. It tests whether a framework developed largely for English travels well to a South to South, intra-Asian setting, and it gives BIPA a vocabulary for describing what its learners can already do. The study is guided by three questions. First, how is intercultural communicative competence made visible in the learners' home-culture travel writing? Second, what mediation moves do the writers perform for their Indonesian readers? Third, which components of ICC are strongly present, and which remain thin, and what does that imply for teaching?

2 Literature review

2.1 Intercultural communicative competence and the learner as mediator

Byram's model remains the most widely used account of what a learner needs in order to communicate across cultures. It distinguishes five components, often named in French to signal that they are more than knowledge. Attitudes (*savoir être*) involve curiosity and openness, and a willingness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own. Knowledge (*savoirs*) covers social groups, their products and practices, and the general processes of interaction. The skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) allow a person to explain a document or event from one culture to someone from another. The skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre* and *savoir faire*) let a person acquire new cultural knowledge and use it in real time. Finally, critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) is the capacity to evaluate perspectives and practices in one's own and other cultures [1].

Recent scholarship has both consolidated and questioned this model. Hoff [2] traces how ICC has been reconceptualised over two decades and warns that classroom practice often reduces it to the accumulation of cultural facts, leaving the more demanding, evaluative dimension underdeveloped. Schat, van der Knaap, and de Graaff [9] make a similar case for foreign language literature education, arguing that critical cultural awareness needs deliberate scaffolding rather than being assumed to emerge on its own. A systematic review by Zhou, Samad, and Perinpasingam [3] confirms that, across a large body of work, teachers value ICC in principle but struggle to move learners beyond knowledge and positive attitudes. These critiques matter here because they predict the uneven profile we find in the corpus.

A parallel strand recasts the interculturally competent speaker as a mediator rather than a near-native imitator. Liddicoat [4] describes intercultural mediation as the work of making meaning move between people who do not share the same cultural frame, an activity that involves interpreting, explaining and repositioning. Mediation has since become a central construct in language education more broadly, including in the descriptive apparatus now used for languages other than English [10]. Monroy [5], reviewing research on academic mobility, finds that mediation is central to how sojourners manage multilingual encounters and that translanguaging is one of its most effective strategies. The mediator lens suits travel writing, a genre whose whole purpose is to make an unfamiliar place intelligible and attractive to someone who has not been there.

2.2 Home culture as content, and the reversal of the usual orientation

A long-standing debate concerns whose culture should fill the curriculum. Materials, especially in English, have tended to foreground the culture of the target language, an emphasis that can leave learners fluent in describing others yet unable to talk about themselves. In response, a growing literature argues for bringing the learner's own, or source, culture into the classroom. Gómez Rodríguez [11] shows that engaging learners with topics of deep culture, including their own, fosters critical intercultural learning rather than surface comparison. Analyses of teaching materials in Indonesia reach convergent conclusions: textbooks often under-represent local and multicultural content, which limits learners' ability to speak from their own standpoint [12, 13]. Alwasilah [14] demonstrates, with young learners, that integrating regional heritage into language work strengthens both engagement and identity.

The idea of learners representing their own lives and communities in a new language is not itself new. Pedagogies of self-representation, telecollaborative exchanges in which partners present their home cultures to one another, and ethnographic approaches that send learners out to observe and report all share this impulse, and Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey [1] already fold such discovery work into ICC. What the present case adds is a specific and underexamined configuration. The source culture is not merely included alongside a target culture; it is the entire content. The medium is a language other than English, and the reader belongs to neither the writer's culture nor the culture of the language being written. Interculturality here is triangular rather than bilateral, and it is enacted in a single written genre with a real

communicative purpose. This is closer to what happens when a person hosts a guest than when they visit abroad, and it foregrounds the outward-explaining side of interculturality that reception-oriented tasks rarely reach.

2.3 BIPA and the place of culture in teaching Indonesian to speakers of other languages

Teaching Indonesian to foreign speakers has expanded into a distinct field with its own journals and pedagogies. Studies document immersion approaches [15], the role of non-verbal and pragmatic context [16], and, most relevant here, text-based instruction for developing descriptive writing among BIPA learners abroad [17]. A recurring theme is that culture is not an optional supplement to BIPA but its natural content. Mussaif [7] argues that Indonesia's cultural diversity should be the very basis of BIPA teaching, and later work develops plurilingual and pluricultural designs built around local heritage [8] or around the learner's own background culture [18]. This scholarship establishes that culture belongs at the centre of BIPA. It rarely, however, frames culture in terms of intercultural competence or mediation, and it seldom engages the international ICC literature. Even in the better-studied setting of English language teaching in Indonesia, teachers' own understanding of intercultural communicative competence is still consolidating [19], which makes the case for describing what BIPA learners already do all the more pressing. The corpus analysed here lets us make that connection, reading BIPA learners' writing through a framework that BIPA research has so far left to one side.

2.4 Travel writing, translanguaging and the design of the task

Travel writing is a persuasive, reader-oriented genre. It combines description, evaluation and practical guidance, and it assumes a reader who lacks the writer's local knowledge. These features make it well matched to project and genre based approaches to second language writing, which give learners an authentic communicative purpose and an explicit audience [20, 21]. Writing for a real readership also invites learners to take up an authorial stance and a voice, which studies of second language writing identify as a marker of maturing competence [22].

Because the learners write in Indonesian about Thai referents, they draw on their full linguistic and cultural repertoire, keeping some Thai terms, translating others, and framing everything for Indonesian readers. This is the everyday texture of translanguaging, understood not as error but as the strategic deployment of a whole repertoire to make meaning [6, 23]. Translanguaging and mediation are, in this setting, two descriptions of the same act: the writer brings Thai meanings into Indonesian words for an Indonesian reader. Taken together, the literature on ICC, source culture, BIPA and translanguaging frames our expectation that home-culture travel writing should surface mediation richly, while leaving open how far critical cultural awareness develops.

3 Methodology

3.1 Context, participants and the task

The study employed a qualitative, exploratory design based on a single, bounded corpus of learner-generated texts. The participants were thirteen undergraduate students majoring in ASEAN Studies at the Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration, Walailak University, southern Thailand, who participated in the Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA) programme at the Center for Indonesian Language and Culture Studies, Universitas Negeri Malang, East Java, Indonesia, from December 2025 to June 2026. As part of the Writing Skills course, each student produced a travel article in Indonesian introducing a Thai destination, cultural event or local tradition to Indonesian readers. The articles were subsequently published in Surya, a regional daily newspaper under the Tribun Network, providing an authentic public context for learner writing beyond classroom assessment. The writing task brought together three pedagogically and theoretically significant conditions: participation in a study-abroad programme, which has been widely associated with the development of intercultural communicative competence [24, 25]; production in Indonesian as a non-native, non-English target language; and the representation of learners' home culture for an audience from another Southeast Asian cultural community. This combination created a rich corpus for examining how intercultural meaning is constructed when students act simultaneously as language learners, cultural informants and intercultural mediators.

Several features of the data must be stated plainly, because they bound what can be claimed. First, this is a secondary analysis of texts that the students produced as coursework and that were then published in a newspaper, and the exact writing prompt, the time allowed, the drafting conditions, the use of dictionaries or translation tools, and the degree of teacher or editorial revision before publication were not documented. Some conventions of the genre, such as supplying prices, routes and opening hours, may therefore have been modelled in class rather than generated unaided. For this reason the textual features reported below are read as evidence of what the task afforded and made visible, not as proof of each writer's independent ability. Second, several texts quote local informants; it is not known whether these are verbatim records of interviews, reconstructions, or a genre convention the writers adopted, so the quotations are treated as a feature of the texts rather than as independent testimony. Third, although the articles were written for, and published to, a general Indonesian readership rather than an audience the students could observe, the writers could not know who their actual readers would be, so the analysis treats the audience as one the writers imagined and addressed rather than one they interacted with in real time. The writers' proficiency in Indonesian was not formally assessed, so the texts are read for their meaning-making rather than as calibrated to a known level.

Because the design analyses finished texts and includes no pre-test, post-test or learner reflection, the study does not claim to measure a longitudinal gain in competence. It asks what the finished texts reveal about the intercultural work the task afforded, an approach consistent with treating writing as evidence of competence in use.

3.2 The corpus

The corpus comprises fourteen articles totalling approximately 11,700 words, ranging from about 600 to about 1,200 words each. These fourteen texts were selected, to cover the main domains of Thai cultural tourism, from a larger set of travel articles the students published during the programme. The destinations and practices are drawn disproportionately from southern Thailand, the writers’ home region, with additional coverage of Bangkok, the Northeast and the North. The articles were written as coursework and published in the citizen-journalism section (Tribun Academy) of Surya (Tribun Network) between February and June 2026. The published title of each article and, where it could be traced, the e-paper edition date are listed in Table 1; twelve of the fourteen texts could be traced to a specific edition of the Surya e-paper (<https://surabaya.tribunnews.com/epaper>), while two (T6 and T14) could not be traced to a stable edition and are marked accordingly. Because the articles appeared publicly under the students’ own names, the codes T1 to T14 are used here for consistent reference rather than for anonymity, and the private individuals whom the students quote within their articles are not further identified.

Table 1
Overview of the fourteen learner travel texts.

Code	Destination or practice	Cultural domain	Region	Words	Published (Tribun Network)	Published title (Surya e-paper)
T1	Wat Arun temple	Religious and built heritage site	Bangkok (Central)	908	20 Apr 2026	Indahnya Pemandangan Wat Arun
T2	Khon masked dance	Performing art (intangible heritage)	National	749	22 May 2026	Sakralnya Tari Khon di Thailand
T3	Bun Bang Fai rocket festival	Festival	Isan (Northeast)	882	2 Mar 2026	Meriahnya Festival Bun Bang Fai Thailand
T4	Loy Krathong	Festival	National	606	5 Mar 2026	Kemeriahan Loy Krathong di Thailand
T5	Khiriwong village	Community and eco-tourism	Nakhon Si Thammarat (South)	844	28 Apr 2026	Pesona Desa Wisata Khiriwong
T6	Pad Kra Pao	Food and gastronomy	National	749	Not traced	Menikmati Sepiring Budaya Pad Kra Pao
T7	Manora (Nora) dance	Performing art (intangible heritage)	Southern Thailand	937	28 Feb 2026	Indahnya Tari Manora di Thailand Selatan
T8	Phuket Old Town (Sino-Portuguese)	Built heritage	Phuket (South)	973	27 Feb 2026	Keindahan Bangunan Sino-Portugis di Kota Tua Phuket
T9	Koh Tieb	Coast and nature, crab-bank conservation	Chumphon (South)	617	27 Apr 2026	Keindahan Pulau Tieb saat Senja
T10	Koh Samui beaches	Coastal and mass tourism	Surat Thani (South)	742	3 Mar 2026	Surga Tersembunyi Pantai Koh Samui
T11	Ai Khiao waterfall	Nature	Nakhon Si Thammarat (South)	985	6 Jun 2026	Keindahan Air Terjun Ai Khiao
T12	Wat Ai Khai	Belief and votive tourism	Nakhon Si Thammarat (South)	692	7 Mar 2026	Menelusuri Wisata Religi Wat Ai Khai

Code	Destination or practice	Cultural domain	Region	Words	Published (Tribun Network)	Published title (Surya e-paper)
T13	Sat Duan Sip ritual	Ancestral ritual (intangible heritage)	Southern Thailand	834	25 Feb 2026	Uniknya Ritual Sat Duan Sip
T14	Mae Kampong village	Community and eco tourism	Chiang Mai (North)	1,223	Not traced	Menelusuri Asrinya Kampung Mae Kampong

3.3 Analytical framework

Byram’s five *savoirs* provided the deductive backbone of the analysis. Because the model was designed for face-to-face interaction rather than for written texts, each dimension was operationalised as a set of indicators observable in travel writing, shown in Table 2. These indicators guided coding without foreclosing it, since the reflexive thematic analysis also allowed themes to emerge that cut across the model, notably translanguaging and promotional address. One caveat applies throughout: a written text can show the skills of discovery, such as gathering information, only as a trace, and can evidence the skills of interaction, which are real-time and face to face, only by inference, so claims about that dimension are made cautiously.

Table 2
Operationalising Byram's *savoirs* for home-culture travel writing.

ICC dimension (<i>savoir</i>)	Working definition	Indicator in travel writing
Attitudes (<i>savoir être</i>)	Curiosity, openness and valuing of cultures	Affective pride in the home culture; invitational, reader-directed address
Knowledge (<i>savoirs</i>)	Knowledge of social groups, products and practices	Historical, geographic, religious and culinary detail about the destination
Interpreting and relating (<i>savoir comprendre</i>)	Explaining an item from one culture to a member of another	Glossing culture-specific terms; comparison; converting prices into the reader’s currency
Discovery and interaction (<i>savoir apprendre / faire</i>)	Acquiring and operating cultural knowledge in real time	Gathering and quoting local informants; practical, actionable guidance
Critical cultural awareness (<i>savoir s’engager</i>)	Evaluating perspectives and practices critically	Reflection on heritage value, preservation and the tensions of modernity or tourism

3.4 Analytical procedure

The texts were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis as set out by Braun and Clarke [26], supported by the trustworthiness criteria described by Nowell et al. [27]. Analysis proceeded through

familiarisation, in which each text was read several times in full; systematic coding against the indicators in Table 2 and inductively where the data exceeded them; the grouping of codes into candidate themes; and the review, definition and naming of themes across the corpus. Coding was done by close manual reading rather than software, which allowed attention to the bilingual texture of the texts. To make the procedure concrete, a closing sentence urging the reader to visit was coded as invitational address under attitudes; a Thai term followed by an Indonesian explanation was coded as glossing under interpreting and relating; and a price given in baht and then in rupiah was coded as economic mediation, also under interpreting and relating.

Two points about counting should be clear. A move was recorded as present in a text if it occurred at least once, and the figures in Table 3 therefore report how widely a feature was distributed across the fourteen texts, not how often it occurred or how strong it was. These are the analyst's interpretive judgements, made without a second coder, and they should be read as descriptive rather than statistical. The excerpts presented in the findings were chosen as typical illustrations of patterns identified across the corpus, not as isolated highlights.

3.5 Trustworthiness, ethics and researcher stance

The analysis was conducted by a single coder, which is a limitation. Three measures offset it. The coding framework in Table 2 is explicit and auditable, so readers can judge how categories were applied; the findings report disconfirming as well as confirming evidence, most visibly the thinness of critical cultural awareness; and every interpretive claim is anchored to a short verbatim excerpt, so readers can evaluate the reading against the data. The first author teaches in the programme, a position that gives close knowledge of the context but also a stake in reading the texts favourably. The deliberate search for weak or absent ICC components was one way this bias was checked.

The material analysed here consists of travel articles that the students wrote as coursework and that were then published in a public newspaper (Surya, Tribun Network). Because the texts are public documents, and the study involves no intervention with human participants beyond the analysis of already-public writing, formal ethical clearance was not sought. The students published under their own names, and the private individuals whom they quote within their articles are not further identified here; no additional personal data were collected.

4 Findings

Six themes were developed from the corpus. The first five describe the intercultural work the texts accomplish, and they map onto Byram's knowledge, attitudes, interpreting and relating, and discovery and interaction. The sixth concerns critical cultural awareness, which was present but uneven. Table 3 summarises the themes, their link to the framework, their spread across the corpus and a characteristic move. Illustrative excerpts are given in the original Indonesian, with an English rendering in parentheses, and are kept short.

Table 3
Themes, links to the ICC framework and distribution across the corpus.

Theme	ICC dimension	Distribution	Characteristic move
1. Positioning as an insider guide	Attitudes	9 of 14	Invitational address to the reader
2. Glossing and translating culture	Interpreting and relating	14 of 14	Explaining culture-specific terms
3. Mobilising home-culture knowledge	Knowledge	14 of 14	Historical and religious detail
4. Economic and practical mediation	Interpreting and relating	Dual currency 7 of 14; practical guidance 14 of 14	Converting baht into rupiah
5. Bringing in local voices	Discovery and interaction	13 of 14	Quoting resident informants
6. Emerging critical cultural awareness	Critical cultural awareness	7 of 14	Calls to safeguard heritage

Figure 1 renders this distribution visually. The mediation-oriented moves, glossing culture-specific terms, mobilising home-culture knowledge, offering practical guidance and quoting local voices, cluster near the ceiling of the corpus, appearing in almost every text, whereas the critical or evaluative stance sits well below them, in only half. This gradient, near-universal mediation set against uneven critique, is the pattern the following subsections unpack and the discussion explains.

4.1 Positioning as an insider guide who values the home culture

Across the corpus the writers adopt the voice of a knowledgeable host rather than a detached observer. They address the reader directly, anticipate the reader's worries and issue warm invitations, all of which express the openness and valuing that Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey [1] place under attitudes. The move is clearest in closing appeals. One piece on a historic quarter ends with the imperative "Ayo berlibur ke Kota Tua Phuket!" (Come and holiday in Phuket Old Town!; T8), while a piece on a northern village closes with "tunggu apa lagi? Segera rencanakan liburanmu" (what are you waiting for? Plan your holiday now; T14) and reassures the visitor, "jangan khawatir kalau kamu lapar atau haus" (do not worry if you are hungry or thirsty; T14). These are not neutral descriptions but acts of hospitality performed in the second language.

The stance is affective as well as practical. Writers describe their heritage with evident pride, presenting classical dance as "warisan kearifan budaya yang mencerminkan identitas dan semangat orang Thailand" (a heritage of cultural wisdom reflecting the identity and spirit of Thai people; T2). This pride is the attitudinal ground on which the rest of the intercultural work is built. It also carries a risk, discussed below, of sliding into promotion.

4.2 Glossing and translating culture as intercultural mediation

The most pervasive intercultural move in the corpus, present in every text, is the glossing of culture-specific terms. Aware that an Indonesian reader will not share Thai background knowledge, the writers name a Thai item and then explain it. A writer on Loy Krathong defines the krathong as “bunga yang dihanyutkan di sungai” (flowers set adrift on the river), made from banana leaves, flowers, incense and candles, and explains that it is released to ask forgiveness of the water goddess (T4). A writer on the ritual of Sat Duan Sip explains the preparation days Wan Jai, Wan Rap and Wan Song, the offering structure called a Marap, and the five ceremonial cakes “kue La, kue Phong, kue Di Sam, kue Kong, dan kue Ba” (T13). A writer on Manora glosses the terid crown as “simbol guru besar” (a symbol of the great master; T7). These are textbook instances of *savoir comprendre*, the skill of explaining a practice from one culture to a member of another [4].

The glossing is not merely lexical. Writers unpack whole belief systems for the outsider, as when the votive practice at Wat Ai Khai is explained through the story of a child spirit and the custom of returning to repay a vow, once a wish is granted, with firecrackers and rooster figurines (T12). In explaining such practices the writers must first interpret them for themselves and then reframe them for a reader who lacks the frame, the double movement that defines intercultural mediation [5].

4.3 Mobilising detailed knowledge of the home culture

The texts are dense with the cultural knowledge that Byram groups under *savoirs*. Writers supply history, geography, religion and gastronomy with some precision. The account of Wat Arun moves through the temple’s Ayutthaya-era origins, its earlier names, its restoration under later kings and the relic housed in its main prang (T1). The Phuket piece explains the Sino-Portuguese style as the material trace of Chinese and Portuguese traders who once settled and did business in the town (T8). Festival texts recount origin legends, linking the rocket festival to the figures of Phaya Kan Kak and Phaya Thaen and to the agricultural need for timely rain (T3). This knowledge is not ornamental; it is what allows the writer to explain why a place or practice matters, and it shows that the learners can speak about their culture with substance and not only enthusiasm.

4.4 Economic and practical mediation for the reader

A concrete form of mediation is the conversion of prices from Thai baht into Indonesian rupiah, which appears in half of the texts. A writer on a popular dish gives its price as 40 to 100 baht and immediately restates it as roughly Rp20,000 to Rp50,000 (T6); temple, waterfall, village and homestay texts do the same for fares, entry fees and rooms (T1, T5, T11, T12, T14). This small act condenses the logic of mediation: the writer holds two frames of reference at once and does the work of translation so the reader does not have to. It is audience design made visible in figures, although, as noted in section 3.1, such conventions may have been modelled in class. Alongside currency, every text offers the practical

apparatus of the travel genre, with routes, transport options, opening hours and advice on the best season to visit, guidance that corresponds to the skills of discovery and interaction.

4.5 Bringing in local voices

Thirteen of the fourteen texts incorporate at least one quotation attributed to a local informant, usually a peer or visitor. A dancer explains that performing Manora begins with “cinta dari hati” (love from the heart; T7); an older relative reflects that the Sat Duan Sip ritual matters less for the ceremony than for the family gathering it compels (T13). Whatever their evidential status, which is uncertain (section 3.1), these quotations show the writers performing a reporting move that, in a written text, is best read as a trace of the skills of discovery rather than of real-time interaction, and they lend the texts an ethnographic texture, letting the culture speak in more than the author’s voice.

4.6 Translanguaging as a cross-cutting resource

Cutting across every theme is the writers’ use of a full linguistic and cultural repertoire. The texts are written in Indonesian but populated with Thai referents that are variously retained, transliterated and explained, and prices sit in two currencies at once. This is translanguaging in the sense given by Li [6]: the strategic use of whatever semiotic resources make meaning, unconstrained by a boundary between named languages. Occasional traces of other languages surface too, including a stray connector from Russian in one text, a reminder that these are multilingual writers drawing on more than two systems. Read through a deficit lens, such features are interference. Read through a translanguaging lens, they are the mechanism of mediation, the means by which Thai meanings are carried into Indonesian words for an Indonesian reader [23]. The developmental imperfections in the Indonesian, which are real, do not prevent this mediation and at times make its effort visible.

4.7 Emerging but uneven critical cultural awareness

The one dimension present only unevenly is critical cultural awareness. In half of the texts, concentrated in those on intangible heritage, festivals and community tourism, writers move beyond description to evaluation. One argues that the ritual “harus terus dilakukan supaya budaya ini tetap hidup untuk generasi berikutnya” (must continue so that this culture stays alive for the next generation; T13). A piece on Manora notes that “teknologi canggih dan budaya eropa mulai memasuki kehidupan generasi muda” (advanced technology and European culture are entering young people’s lives) and concludes that the art “perlu dijaga oleh generasi selanjutnya” (needs to be safeguarded by the next generation; T7). A community-tourism text frames a village explicitly through environmental conservation (T5), and a festival text notes the shift toward eco-friendly materials so as not to pollute the river (T4). These are genuine, if brief, instances of *savoir s’engager*.

Yet the evaluative stance rarely turns reflexive in a fuller sense. Few texts examine tensions within their own account, question the effects of tourism on the places they promote, or weigh competing perspectives. The pieces on mass-market beaches and on food remain celebratory throughout. The dominant register is promotional, closer to destination marketing than to critique, which is unsurprising

given the travel genre but consequential for a competence whose highest component is evaluation. This pattern matches the warning in the ICC literature that classroom interculturality often halts at knowledge and positive attitudes and does not reach critical awareness without explicit support [2, 3, 9].

5 Discussion

Three findings deserve emphasis. First, home-culture travel writing surfaces intercultural mediation richly. Because the learners must explain their own culture to outsiders, glossing, comparison, currency conversion and the recruitment of local voices are not optional flourishes but structural features of the task. The genre positions the writer as the mediator that Liddicoat [4] and Monroy [5] describe, and it does so in writing, where the moves leave a durable trace that can be examined. This suggests that outward-explaining tasks, in which learners host rather than visit, may reach parts of ICC that reception-oriented, target-culture tasks leave dormant. The claim is bounded: the design cannot show that these moves were produced unaided, only that the task made them a routine requirement.

Second, the case extends the argument for source-culture content in a specific direction. Existing work makes the case for including the learner's culture alongside the target culture [11, 12, 14]. The present corpus shows what happens when the source culture becomes the whole content and the audience belongs to a third culture. Interculturality here is triangular rather than bilateral, Thai to Indonesian by way of Indonesian, and it unfolds entirely outside the Anglophone frame that dominates ICC research. That a model built largely from English settings still describes these texts is a modest finding about the model's reach, while the prominence of translanguaging and dual-currency mediation points to features that intra-Asian, multilingual settings may foreground more than English ones.

Third, the uneven development of critical cultural awareness has a clear pedagogical reading. The learners arrive at the task already able to mobilise knowledge, express valuing attitudes and mediate skilfully. What the task does not, on its own, elicit is sustained critique. If programmes want the highest component of ICC, they will need to design for it, for instance by asking writers to consider the effects of tourism on the communities they describe, to include a perspective that complicates their own, or to reflect on what their promotional choices leave out. The literature on critical cultural awareness supports exactly this kind of deliberate scaffolding [9].

These two findings, rich mediation and thin critique, are connected rather than separate. The same framing that makes the task so productive for mediation may be what keeps it shallow in critical terms. Writing to attract a visitor rewards warmth, clarity and enthusiasm, and it discourages the writer from complicating the picture, since a caveat about crowding, commodification or environmental strain would work against the invitation. The learners are, in effect, fluent in a promotional register about their own culture, and that fluency has a critical edge worth naming: representing one's heritage in the idiom of a tourism brochure can slide into self-exoticisation, presenting culture as a product to be consumed. Read this way, the criticality gap is not simply an absence to be filled with more scaffolding; it is produced by the genre and by the imagined audience. Developing *savoir s'engager* in this setting would therefore

mean helping learners notice, and if they choose resist, the marketing frame they have so competently adopted [2, 9].

For BIPA specifically, the study offers a vocabulary and a claim. BIPA scholarship has established that culture is its natural content [7, 8, 18] but has rarely connected that content to international theory on interculturality. Reading a BIPA corpus through Byram shows that BIPA learners routinely perform intercultural mediation, and that BIPA can therefore be described, and taught, as intercultural education and not only as language transmission. Framing home-culture writing as a genre based, project-like task with a real audience [20, 21] gives teachers a concrete way to build such work into a syllabus, in Indonesian and in other languages taught beyond English, where mediation is now a central goal [10].

5.1 Implications for practice

Several practical implications follow. Teachers of Indonesian and of other languages beyond English can use home-culture travel writing as a structured occasion for intercultural mediation, specifying an audience from a third culture to make the mediation demands explicit. The dual-currency move suggests a simple, teachable heuristic: ask learners to translate at least one culturally loaded reference, whether a price, a measure or a concept, into terms the reader already owns. To develop the critical dimension, tasks can require a second draft that introduces a complicating perspective or that weighs a cost against the attractions being promoted. Finally, treating learners' translanguaging as a mediation resource rather than as error reframes what look like imperfections as evidence of a repertoire at work.

6 Conclusion

This study set out to learn what intercultural competence looks like when learners write about their own culture, in a language that is neither their first nor English, for readers from a third culture. Analysing fourteen travel articles written in Indonesian by Thai students about Thailand, it found that the task makes intercultural mediation strikingly visible. The writers act as insider guides who mobilise substantial cultural knowledge, gloss unfamiliar terms, convert prices into their readers' currency and quote local voices, all moves that align closely with Byram's account of interculturality. The one component that remains thin is critical cultural awareness, which surfaces mainly around intangible heritage and is often displaced by the promotional pull of the genre.

The contribution is threefold. Empirically, the study brings a BIPA corpus into dialogue with ICC theory and documents intercultural mediation in an intra-Asian, non-Anglophone setting that this literature has seldom examined. Conceptually, it describes a task type that inverts the usual orientation of intercultural pedagogy: learners host rather than visit, explaining their own culture outward to a third-culture reader. Such host-position writing is unusually rich in mediation yet structurally prone to a promotional, low-critique stance, a pairing the study traces to the genre and its imagined audience. Practically, it offers teachers of Indonesian and of other less commonly taught languages a task design, and a set of moves, for building and assessing intercultural competence.

The limitations are real and shape the next steps. The corpus is small, single-cohort and drawn from one programme, so the findings are illustrative rather than generalisable. The analysis relies on a single coder, and because it examines finished texts produced under undocumented conditions, with no pre-test, post-test or learner reflection, it evidences the ICC the task makes visible rather than a measured gain over time or an unaided ability, and the title's reference to development should be read in that sense. Future research could pair such a corpus with learner interviews and reflective writing, document the task conditions and drafting process, use two coders to establish reliability, compare home-culture with target-culture tasks directly, follow a cohort across a semester to test for change, and extend the design to other language pairings. Even within these limits, the case makes a clear point: asking learners to write their homeland in a new language, for readers who do not share it, turns an ordinary writing task into a demanding act of intercultural mediation, and gives teachers a window onto competence that outward-facing tasks keep closed.

Declarations

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Competing interests The authors declare that they have no competing financial or non-financial interests relevant to the content of this article.

Ethical Approval and accordance Not applicable. This study did not involve any intervention or interaction with human participants, nor the collection of private or identifiable personal data from individuals. It is a secondary analysis of travel articles that the students had written as coursework and that were subsequently published, under the students' own names, in the public domain in the regional daily newspaper Surya (Tribun Network). Because the analysis was confined to documents that were already publicly available and involved no human-participant procedures, review or approval by an ethics committee or institutional review board was not required, and neither approval nor a waiver was therefore sought. The research was conducted in accordance with recognised standards of research integrity and research ethics governing the analysis of publicly available published materials.

Consent to participate Not applicable. The study did not recruit human participants and did not collect data directly from individuals; it is a secondary analysis of articles that had already been published in the public domain. As no human-participant procedures were undertaken, informed consent to participate was not applicable.

Consent to publish Not applicable. This manuscript does not contain any individual person's unpublished identifiable data, images, or personal details for which consent to publish would be required. The materials analysed had already been published, under the students' own names, in the public domain, and only short excerpts from those published articles are reproduced to illustrate the textual analysis.

Data Availability Statement The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request. The data comprise the fourteen learner travel articles listed in Table 1 (coded T1 to T14), written as coursework and published in the citizen-journalism section (Tribun Academy) of the regional daily newspaper Surya (Tribun Network); because the e-paper platform does not provide stable per-article web links, the full texts of all fourteen articles are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request. Short excerpts from the articles are reproduced within the manuscript to illustrate the analysis. No other datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Author contributions All authors contributed to the study in proportion to the order of authorship. Tassana Nualsomsri: conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, data curation, and writing – original draft. Nisachon Chuchai: investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and writing – original draft. Gatut Susanto: conceptualisation, supervision, project administration, and writing – review and editing. Ade Eka Anggraeni: methodology, validation, and writing – review and editing. Khusnul Khotimah: investigation, visualisation, and writing – review and editing. Nanang Syaiful Rohman: data curation, visualisation, and writing – review and editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Figures

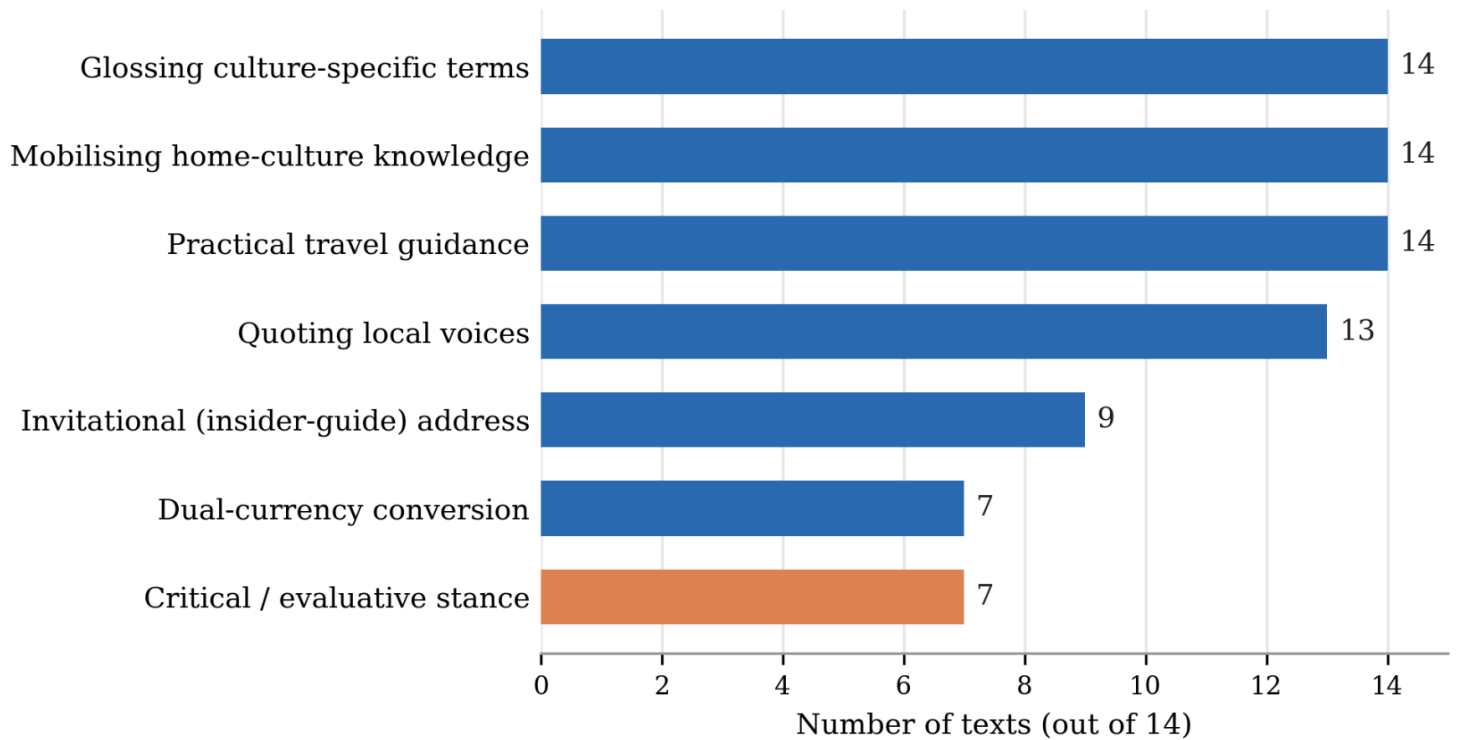


Figure 1

Distribution of the principal textual moves across the fourteen texts (number of texts in which each move appeared at least once). The bar in orange marks the critical or evaluative stance, the component of intercultural competence that remains uneven.