



Semantic Change and Cultural Representation in English Novels Across Literary Periods

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Abstract

*This study examines how lexical meanings and cultural scripts are reweighted across selected English novels from the Regency/Romantic period to modernist fiction, using Indonesian novels in English translation as a cross-cultural test of semantic portability. A comparative diachronic literary-semantic design was applied to eight English novels published from 1813 to 1925. The analysis focused on social-rank vocabulary, domestic and spatial lexemes, nature and interiority, and modernity and foreignness through contextual close reading. Three Indonesian novels—*This Earth of Mankind*, *The Rainbow Troops*, and *Beauty Is a Wound*—were examined through translation-focused evidence to trace how culturally embedded meanings are mediated in English. The findings indicate that social-rank vocabulary shifts from explicit classifications based on family and inherited position toward conduct, aspiration, performance, consumption, and social networks. Home and house retain their denotations but increasingly become unstable markers of belonging, while nature moves from a moral and epistemic counterweight toward aesthetic, technological, and urban configurations. The Indonesian comparison further shows that honorifics, colonial categories, taboo expressions, appraisal, and culture-specific terms may undergo borrowing, neutralization, explanation, substitution, or transformation in translation. Literary semantic change is therefore characterized by the reweighting of meanings within changing cultural scripts rather than by straightforward replacement of lexical senses.*

Keywords: Cultural Representation, English Novels, Indonesian Literature, Literary Semantics, Semantic Change.



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INTRODUCTION

Semantic change is usually described as a historical alteration in the senses, distributions, or evaluative associations of lexical items, yet contemporary research increasingly treats meaning as a dynamic outcome of usage, learning, processing, and contextual recurrence rather than as a stable property attached to words. Recent experimental and computational studies indicate that diachronic trajectories are constrained by how speakers encounter, learn, and repeatedly use linguistic forms, making semantic change inseparable from patterns of language use across time (Li & Siew, 2022). Computational research has consequently shifted from static before-and-after comparisons toward contextualized representations, incremental semantic-shift detection, and more fine-grained methods for distinguishing changes in senses and their distributions (Periti et al., 2025). Developments in lexical semantic change research have also expanded the methodological repertoire through sense induction and computational procedures capable of identifying historically differentiated meanings from large textual datasets (Schlechtweg et al., 2025). These developments are particularly relevant to literary research because novels preserve dense contextual environments in which lexical items repeatedly encounter social roles, spaces, institutions, emotions, and value judgments. A literary text therefore provides evidence not only of what a word can denote at a given historical moment, but also of the cultural situations in which one meaning becomes salient while another recedes. The central challenge is to connect these developments in historical semantics with literary interpretation without reducing literary language to a purely computational measurement of lexical frequency or distribution.

The difficulty is that lexical semantic change and literary semantic patterning are not identical objects, since a historical corpus can establish whether a sense becomes more or less common in a language whereas a novel deliberately selects, foregrounds, and organizes language for narrative purposes. Large-scale historical corpus research has demonstrated that the distribution of words can reveal changes in knowledge transmission and historically situated conceptual structures, but such evidence remains dependent on the relationship between lexical association and the broader textual environment (Regan, 2022). At the same time, computational literary scholarship has emphasized that increased scale does not eliminate interpretation, because quantitative patterns still require hermeneutic decisions concerning textual selection, contextual meaning, and historical significance (Ringler, 2022). The emergence of empirical approaches to changing narratological terminology further illustrates that literary concepts themselves can acquire differentiated meanings through transformations in critical and reading practices (Gittel & Haider, 2025). These findings suggest that diachronic literary research cannot simply transfer computational models developed for general-language corpora into literary texts without accounting for narrative mediation. A novel should instead be understood as a culturally organized site in which historically available meanings are selected, intensified, contrasted, ironized, or redistributed according to narrative and representational purposes. This distinction creates a conceptual space for investigating semantic change not merely as lexical replacement but as the changing cultural and literary weight assigned to particular meanings.

Corpus stylistics offers a practical bridge between linguistic evidence and literary interpretation because it enables recurrent lexical patterns to be identified systematically while retaining their relationship to thematic and narrative structures. Research using semantic domains in Dickens demonstrates that corpus-based lexical groupings can illuminate major literary themes while making the evidential basis of interpretation more explicit (Ibrahim, 2022). Comparative corpus stylistics similarly shows that literary patterns become more analytically meaningful when a target corpus is interpreted against historically, stylistically, or generically relevant reference materials rather than examined in isolation (Bjerring-Hansen & Wilkens, 2023). Recent corpus-stylistic work on translated fiction demonstrates that English-language translations can preserve recognizable semantic macro-patterns suitable for systematic investigation, although the translated status of the texts remains essential to their interpretation (Zhang & Zhao, 2026). Corpus stylistics consequently provides a methodological middle ground between exclusively computational approaches that privilege measurable lexical shifts and exclusively close-reading approaches that may leave the distributional basis of interpretation implicit. The same methodological principle is important for a study spanning multiple literary periods because lexical patterns need to be interpreted in relation to historical textual environments rather than treated as self-evident indicators of cultural change. The present study therefore adopts a corpus-informed rather than purely computational model, using periodized lexical-semantic coding to identify recurrent functions without presenting selected novels as a substitute for a representative historical corpus of English.

A second problem concerns cultural representation because lexical choices in fiction are not neutral labels attached to pre-existing realities but participate in the organization of class, gender, domesticity, morality, foreignness, belonging, and social hierarchy. Experimental research on semantic prosody shows that even apparently neutral lexical items can acquire evaluative force through recurrent collocational environments, demonstrating how contextual association contributes to the interpretation of meaning (Hauser & Schwarz, 2023). Translation scholarship reaches a parallel conclusion from another direction by showing that cultural meaning is shaped not only by lexical equivalence but also by the social conditions and expectations governing what can be retained, transformed, naturalized, explained, or omitted for target readers (van de Pol-Tegge, 2023). Studies of literary translation further conceptualize translation as a form of cultural mediation in which textual meaning is reconstructed through relations among language, identity, literary history, and receiving cultures rather than transferred mechanically from one linguistic system to another (Gosetti et al., 2025). This perspective is especially important for semantic change because a lexical meaning that appears stable across English-language texts may acquire different cultural associations when embedded within distinct historical and cultural systems. Literary semantics must therefore attend to the point at which recurrent lexical meanings become attached to specific social scripts, such as when *gentleman* denotes social rank while simultaneously being evaluated through expectations of moral conduct, or when *home* denotes a residence while organizing ideas of inheritance, intimacy, security, and belonging. The unresolved issue

is not simply whether lexical meanings change, but how their changing evaluative and cultural associations become narratively consequential across literary periods and across culturally mediated English texts.

English fiction from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth century offers a productive period span for examining such semantic reweighting because major novels from this period register transformations in class relations, gender norms, domesticity, modernity, colonial encounter, urban life, and cultural identity. The interpretive value of this periodization is strengthened when literary history is understood as involving changing relations between language, cultural knowledge, and systems of representation rather than as a succession of isolated stylistic periods (Raveendran, 2023). *Pride and Prejudice* and *Frankenstein* emerge from different parts of the Regency and Romantic fields but both negotiate inherited social categories against ethical, epistemic, and interpersonal judgments. *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations* place Victorian social mobility, gendered dependency, domestic space, and aspiration under sustained lexical pressure, while *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Dracula* intensify fin-de-siècle tensions around aestheticism, degeneracy, technological modernity, urban circulation, and foreignness. *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs Dalloway* subsequently relocate status and belonging within metropolitan consumption, memory, interiority, and fragmented social experience, allowing the study to trace whether semantic reweighting corresponds to broader transformations in literary representation. Across these works, semantic change is therefore unlikely to appear as a clean replacement of one dictionary definition by another; it is more plausibly registered as a change in which sense, evaluative association, or cultural script carries the greatest narrative weight.

A cross-cultural comparison is necessary because English-language evidence alone can make culturally specific meanings appear more portable than they actually are, particularly when translated literature enters the English literary field through processes of lexical and cultural negotiation. Research on *Bumi Manusia* demonstrates that the translation of address terms is strongly conditioned by social and cultural context, indicating that apparently equivalent English forms may reorganize interpersonal relations and social indexicality (Tumbole & Cholsy, 2022). Comparable evidence from Indonesian literary translation shows that appraisal patterns in *This Earth of Mankind* may shift across Indonesian and English versions, illustrating how characterization and evaluative meaning can be reshaped through linguistic mediation (Sodiq et al., 2022). Studies of Indonesian cultural terms likewise identify lexical transformation as a central site where translation strategies negotiate culturally embedded meanings rather than merely replacing source-language expressions with dictionary equivalents (Azka & Sutrisno, 2025). Research on *Pengakuan Pariyem* further demonstrates that Javanese cultural terms require strategic negotiation because their meanings are embedded in ideological, social, and cultural structures that cannot always be reproduced directly in English (Lahay et al., 2026). Work on *Beauty Is a Wound* and *The Rainbow Troops* extends this problem to gendered experience, local material culture, proper names, institutions, and culturally marked practices, showing that translation can preserve referential information while modifying the cultural resonance of literary expression (Lie et al., 2025). These findings make Indonesian fiction in English translation particularly useful as a comparative dimension because it allows the study to test the apparent portability of semantic patterns while recognizing translation as a constitutive layer of meaning. The comparison consequently moves beyond treating translated novels as supplementary examples and instead positions them as evidence for examining the cultural limits of semantic continuity across literary and linguistic contexts.

This study asks two related questions: how are recurrent lexical meanings reweighted across selected English novels published between 1813 and 1925, and what does Indonesian fiction in English translation reveal about the cultural limits of that apparent semantic portability? It positions literary semantic change at the intersection of diachronic lexical semantics, corpus stylistics, literary history, and translation studies, treating meaning as simultaneously linguistic, contextual, narrative, and culturally mediated. The study contributes a periodized model of literary semantic change that distinguishes language-historical inference from text-internal literary evidence while allowing recurrent lexical meanings to be examined through their changing narrative and cultural functions. Methodologically, it integrates corpus-informed lexical-semantic coding with comparative interpretation across literary periods and with translated Indonesian texts, avoiding the assumption that selected novels constitute a representative historical corpus of English. The approach also treats translation not as an external complication but as an analytical condition through which the stability, transformation, and cultural specificity of meaning can be observed. By connecting semantic

reweighting to literary representation, the study seeks to explain how words participate in the historical organization of social categories, cultural identities, and evaluative frameworks. Its broader contribution lies in establishing a framework through which semantic change can be studied as a culturally situated literary process rather than solely as a measurable alteration in lexical meaning.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a non-empirical comparative diachronic literary-semantic design in which the primary data consisted of eight English-language novels distributed across four two-text period bands: Regency/Romantic (1813–1818), Victorian (1847–1861), fin-de-siècle (1891–1897), and modernist/interwar (1925). The novels were selected purposively according to three criteria: sufficient canonical circulation to support reproducible textual comparison, sustained engagement with social and cultural organization, and chronological spacing broad enough to examine shifts in semantic weighting across literary periods. The Indonesian comparison comprised the English translations of *This Earth of Mankind*, *The Rainbow Troops*, and *Beauty Is a Wound*, which were treated as a separate comparative corpus rather than inserted into the English diachronic sequence because their function was to test how culture-specific semantic information survives, changes, or becomes mediated when Indonesian social meanings are rendered in English. The unit of analysis was the contextualized semantic function rather than the isolated lexical token, with six analytical domains established before interpretation: social rank and personhood; domesticity and place; nature and embodiment; mind, feeling, and interiority; modernity and technology; and foreignness or cultural marking. Within each domain, recurrent anchor lexemes and their immediate narrative environments were examined in terms of denotation, evaluative orientation, social indexicality, and relation to broader cultural scripts, consistent with approaches that distinguish lexical semantic change through contextualized sense distributions rather than simple word-form comparison (Teodorescu et al., 2022). The analytical framework also recognized that contemporary lexical-semantic research increasingly evaluates semantic change through multiple dimensions of meaning rather than a single undifferentiated measure of lexical shift (Baes et al., 2025).

The analysis proceeded through four stages: identification of recurrent contexts within each semantic domain, coding of their dominant narrative functions, paired comparison within each literary period, and cross-period interpretation followed by comparison with the Indonesian translated corpus. Narrative functions were coded as denotational classification, moral evaluation, social performance, affective belonging, epistemic framing, or cultural boundary marking, while semantic developments were classified as retention, expansion, evaluative inversion, indexical weakening, or functional redistribution. The English corpus was interpreted as evidence of literary-semantic reweighting rather than as a statistically representative historical corpus of English, allowing period labels to function as comparative coordinates rather than totalizing descriptions of their respective eras. The Indonesian component was examined through documented translation phenomena involving address terms, cultural terms, taboo expressions, appraisal, proper names, and culture-linked characterization, with published studies serving as comparative evidence rather than as a source of newly generated numerical claims. Particular attention was given to the possibility that translation can preserve referential meaning while modifying social indexicality, evaluative force, or cultural accessibility, a concern demonstrated in research on Indonesian-English literary translation (Tumbole & Cholsy, 2022). Analytical rigor was maintained through explicit coding rules, contextual rereading, retention of counterexamples, comparison between paired novels within each period, and separation of textual evidence from broader claims about language-historical change, consistent with the view that large-scale humanities analysis requires an interaction between formal measurement and contextual hermeneutic interpretation (Ringler, 2022).

Table 1. Primary Literary Corpus and Comparative Function

Period / Corpus Role	Text	Status in Design	Principal Semantic Domains
Regency/Romantic	Jane Austen, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> (1813)	English core	Rank, gentility, marriage, estate, social evaluation
Regency/Romantic	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> (1818)	English core	Nature, knowledge, home, estrangement, human identity

Victorian	Charlotte Brontë, <i>Jane Eyre</i> (1847)	English core	Class, gender, home, autonomy, moral personhood
Victorian	Charles Dickens, <i>Great Expectations</i> (1861)	English core	Gentlemanliness, aspiration, money, shame, mobility
Fin-De-Siècle	Oscar Wilde, <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> (1891)	English core	Status, aesthetic value, performance, urban leisure
Fin-De-Siècle	Bram Stoker, <i>Dracula</i> (1897)	English core	Modernity, technology, foreignness, domestic/national boundary
Modernist/Interwar	F. Scott Fitzgerald, <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (1925)	English core	Class performance, consumption, house, mobility, desire
Modernist/Interwar	Virginia Woolf, <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> (1925)	English core	Urban space, social rank, memory, mind, affective fragmentation
Indonesian Comparison	Pramoedya Ananta Toer, <i>This Earth of Mankind</i> (English trans. Max Lane)	Cross-cultural test	Colonial hierarchy, address, appraisal, race/class indexicality
Indonesian Comparison	Andrea Hirata, <i>The Rainbow Troops</i> (English trans. Angie Kilbane)	Cross-cultural test	Ecology, education, material culture, local social categories
Indonesian Comparison	Eka Kurniawan, <i>Beauty Is a Wound</i> (English trans. Annie Tucker)	Cross-cultural test	Culture-specific terms, taboo, gendered violence, historical memory

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Rank and the Recalibration of Personhood

The diachronic comparison indicates that social-rank vocabulary undergoes semantic reweighting rather than a simple replacement of older meanings by newer ones. In *Pride and Prejudice*, terms such as *gentleman* and *lady* function primarily as social classifications connected to family background, property, inheritance, and marriage. At the same time, Austen repeatedly places inherited status in tension with conduct, responsibility, and interpersonal judgment, allowing social identity to become morally testable (Regan, 2022). In *Frankenstein*, the organization of personhood is less dependent on conventional aristocratic titles and more strongly structured through contrasts such as human/creature, master/servant, insider/outsider, and stranger. The Creature's exclusion demonstrates that recognition, sympathy, and social belonging can become decisive components in determining who is treated as a legitimate person (Li & Siew, 2022). These early-nineteenth-century texts therefore establish a semantic field in which social classification and personhood are already related but not completely equivalent.

The contrast between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Frankenstein* becomes particularly significant when social rank is examined as a contextualized semantic category. In Austen's novel, the meaning of *gentleman* remains strongly anchored in institutional structures such as property, family, inheritance, and marriageability. In Shelley's novel, however, the absence of a comparable aristocratic vocabulary shifts attention toward recognition, embodied difference, social exclusion, and ethical responsibility. Such variation illustrates how the meaning of a lexical category can depend on the contextual features that repeatedly accompany it rather than on its dictionary definition alone (Teodorescu et al., 2022). The two novels consequently represent different configurations of personhood within the same broad historical period. Their difference also demonstrates that diachronic literary analysis should not treat a literary period as semantically homogeneous (Ringler, 2022). The early corpus instead provides a

foundation from which later novels develop increasingly complex relationships among status, identity, and social recognition.

The Victorian period expands this semantic tension by making social status more aspirational while simultaneously exposing the limits of social mobility. In *Jane Eyre*, the opposition between *gentleman*, *governess*, and *dependent* reveals a social structure in which education and refinement do not automatically remove economic and gendered dependency (Ibrahim, 2022). Jane's position complicates the category of social rank because her intellectual and moral capacities exceed the social authority available to her. In *Great Expectations*, Pip initially associates becoming a *gentleman* with money, education, dress, urban residence, and distance from manual labor. The narrative later destabilizes this interpretation by separating social appearance from loyalty, responsibility, and moral development, making status an identity that can be performed but also critically reassessed (Baes et al., 2025). The Victorian semantic field consequently gives greater prominence to the distinction between possessing a social label and possessing the qualities that supposedly justify it.

The Victorian transformation can be understood as a movement from inherited classification toward socially negotiated identity without implying that inherited hierarchy disappears. The category of *gentleman* continues to carry class meaning, yet its interpretation increasingly depends on education, economic resources, behavior, appearance, and social recognition. This development corresponds to research showing that semantic change can involve the expansion of contextual features associated with an existing lexical category rather than the emergence of an entirely unrelated sense (Teodorescu et al., 2022). The narrative trajectories of Jane and Pip make this process visible because both characters encounter social categories that promise mobility while simultaneously reproducing structural restrictions. Their experiences also reveal that semantic change is connected to changing cultural scripts concerning work, respectability, gender, and self-making (Periti et al., 2025). The Victorian novels therefore recalibrate personhood by positioning autonomy and moral agency alongside conventional markers of class.

Table 2. Diachronic Semantic Profile of Social-Rank Vocabulary

Period	Representative Lexical Field		Dominant Cultural Function		Observed Semantic Reweighting
Regency/Romantic	gentleman, master, stranger	lady, servant,	Inherited classification with explicit family/property anchoring	social	Moral conduct begins to compete with rank as a criterion of personhood
Victorian	gentleman, governess, servant, respectable	master, common,	Status increasingly treated as aspirational, economic, and ethically contestable		Expansion from rank to performed and judged social identity
Fin-de-siècle	gentleman, count, titles, foreigner	lord, professional	Status becomes aestheticized or boundary-marked		Evaluative instability: prestige can coexist with secrecy, decadence, or threat
Modernist/interwar	rich, old family, hostess, professional identities, social names		Class inferred through consumption, networks, speech, and metropolitan access		Functional redistribution from explicit rank labels to dispersed indexical cues

Table 2 indicates that the principal diachronic development lies in the redistribution of semantic weight across different indicators of status. The fin-de-siècle novels retain aristocratic terminology but connect it increasingly with aesthetic performance, secrecy, decadence, nationality, and perceived threat (Gittel & Haider, 2025). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, prestigious identity becomes closely associated with taste, consumption, cultivated appearance, and the management of social visibility. In *Dracula*, the title *Count* remains an explicit marker of aristocratic status, yet its semantic function becomes intertwined with foreignness, supernatural danger, and the threatened boundaries of English domestic

society (Hauser & Schwarz, 2023). Modernist fiction distributes class meaning even further across wealth, residence, clothing, speech, social networks, professional roles, and metropolitan access. Such redistribution is consistent with multidimensional approaches to semantic change in which meaning is understood through changes in contextual and evaluative associations rather than through isolated lexical definitions (Baes et al., 2025).

The fin-de-siècle and Modernist novels consequently demonstrate that later social-rank semantics operate through increasingly dispersed systems of cultural signs. Wilde's aristocratic characters can retain conventional prestige while simultaneously becoming morally unreliable, which separates social denotation from ethical evaluation. Stoker similarly makes aristocratic title, foreign origin, bodily difference, technological modernity, and domestic vulnerability interact within a single representational structure. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* then relocates class distinctions into automobiles, houses, clothing, parties, accents, leisure, and geographical position, while Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* distributes social identity across professional networks, invitations, memory, speech, gender, and urban movement (Ibrahim, 2023). These developments illustrate the process of indexical redistribution, in which social meaning becomes increasingly inferable from clusters of contextual signs rather than from explicit status labels. The semantic transformation is therefore not a linear disappearance of *gentleman*, *lord*, or related categories but a gradual multiplication of the cues through which readers recognize social position.

Table 3. Recalibration Pathways from Status Label to Personhood

Text	Initial Social Coding	Competing Criterion	Semantic Consequence
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	Rank + family connection	Conduct and responsibility	Gentility becomes morally testable without losing class reference
<i>Frankenstein</i>	Human / creature / master / servant	Recognition, sympathy, embodied difference	Personhood becomes an ontological and ethical boundary problem
<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Gentleman / governess / dependent	Autonomy and moral equality	Social label is challenged by ethical personhood
<i>Great Expectations</i>	Gentleman as desired identity	Money, dress, education, shame, loyalty	Status becomes performative and retrospectively criticized
<i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>	Gentleman / lord	Aesthetic persona and secrecy	Prestige is separated from moral reliability
<i>Dracula</i>	Count / professional men / foreigner	National-domestic defense and technological modernity	Aristocratic status is recoded as foreign boundary threat
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	Rich / old money / new money	Consumption, pedigree, residence, social access	Class becomes a semiotic performance with restricted portability
<i>Mrs Dalloway</i>	Hostess, professional and elite networks	Urban access, memory, speech, association	Hierarchy is dispersed across metropolitan social signals

Table 3 demonstrates that the recalibration of personhood occurs through different pathways across the eight novels rather than through a single historical mechanism. *Pride and Prejudice* connects social rank with conduct, while *Frankenstein* relocates the problem toward recognition, sympathy, and the boundary between human and non-human (Li & Siew, 2022). *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations* subsequently introduce autonomy, education, wealth, shame, and self-fashioning as competing criteria of social identity. Wilde and Stoker intensify the separation between prestige and moral reliability by

connecting aristocratic identity with aesthetic performance, secrecy, foreignness, and threat (Gittel & Haider, 2025). Fitzgerald and Woolf extend the process by distributing class recognition across material objects, spatial location, social networks, speech, memory, and metropolitan participation (Ibrahim, 2023). The resulting diachronic pattern supports a conception of semantic change as functional redistribution, in which inherited lexical categories remain available while their narrative and cultural functions are reorganized through new contextual relations (Periti et al., 2025).

Domesticity, Nature, and Interiorized Modernity

The diachronic comparison shows that domesticity and nature gradually move from relatively stable external frameworks of social order toward increasingly subjective and technologically mediated environments. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the semantic fields of *home*, *house*, *estate*, and *nature* are closely connected to kinship, inheritance, property, and social responsibility. Pemberley is particularly significant because the estate becomes a material representation through which Elizabeth revises her judgment of Darcy and associates property with stewardship rather than mere wealth (Ikeo et al., 2024). In *Frankenstein*, domestic space similarly carries ethical significance, but the protagonist's pursuit of forbidden knowledge produces a progressive separation from familial and communal life. Nature consequently operates as a counterweight to epistemic isolation, providing spaces of sublimity, reflection, and temporary psychological restoration (Ibrahim, 2022). The early-nineteenth-century corpus therefore constructs domesticity as an important framework through which moral order and human belonging can be evaluated.

The relationship between home and nature in the Regency/Romantic texts is not simply oppositional because both domains participate in the construction of moral experience. *Pride and Prejudice* repeatedly connects houses and estates with family continuity, social obligations, and the management of interpersonal relations. *Frankenstein*, by contrast, repeatedly moves between enclosed domestic spaces and expansive landscapes, making geographical movement correspond to changes in emotional and intellectual condition. Such spatial organization demonstrates how literary meaning can emerge through the interaction between lexical fields rather than through isolated words (Ikeo et al., 2024). Nature consequently becomes more than a descriptive setting because it can function as a semantic resource for representing emotional states, moral reflection, and epistemic limits. Domestic space likewise exceeds its physical meaning when the narrative uses houses to establish security, exclusion, dependency, or loss. The period therefore establishes a relatively strong connection among physical place, social order, and interior experience.

The Victorian novels complicate this relationship by making domestic belonging increasingly conditional upon autonomy, work, kinship, and economic security. In *Jane Eyre*, the movement from Gateshead to Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House, and Ferndean transforms *home* from a stable location into a sequence of spaces in which Jane negotiates dependency, education, labor, intimacy, and independence. Each location acquires meaning from the social relationships and degree of agency that it permits rather than from its architectural characteristics alone. In *Great Expectations*, the Forge, Satis House, and London residences similarly demonstrate that physical residence does not necessarily constitute emotional or social belonging. Pip's movement away from the Forge initially appears to represent advancement, but the semantic association between London and aspiration gradually becomes complicated by shame, alienation, and moral uncertainty (Bjerring-Hansen & Wilkens, 2023). Victorian domesticity therefore shifts from inherited security toward an achieved and contested form of belonging.

This transformation can be understood as an increasing interiorization of spatial semantics, in which houses become meaningful according to the psychological and social experiences they enable. Jane's eventual conception of home depends upon recognition and autonomy rather than simple possession of shelter. Pip's changing relationship with the Forge and Satis House similarly demonstrates that place can retain emotional significance even when its social meaning changes. Research on literary spatiality suggests that domestic environments can function as structures through which identity, social relations, and historical experience are organized rather than merely as settings for narrative action (Bjerring-Hansen & Wilkens, 2023). Nature also remains relevant in the Victorian corpus, but its moral and affective function increasingly interacts with social mobility and domestic instability. The semantic field thus begins to connect external space with internal states more systematically than in the earlier corpus.

Table 4. Reweighting of Home, House, Nature, and Interiority

Period	Dominant Spatial Lexeme	Cultural Function	Interiority Load	Nature/Modernity Relation
Regency/Romantic	Home/estate	Social order, kinship, ethical refuge	High	Landscape and “human nature” connect external order with moral judgment
Victorian	Home/house	Conditional belonging, work, dependency, aspiration	Medium-high	Nature remains moral/affective but domestic security must be achieved
Fin-de-siècle	Room/house/city	Aesthetic display, secrecy, threatened boundary	Medium	Nature competes with artifice, science, supernatural explanation
Modernist/interwar	House/city/private room	Commodity, network position, memory, unstable belonging	Very high	External environment is filtered through consciousness and social perception

Table 4 indicates a progressive shift from domestic space as an external structure of social order toward space as a medium of psychological and cultural interpretation. The fin-de-siècle texts intensify this process by placing rooms, houses, cities, bodies, objects, and technological systems within increasingly unstable relationships. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, interiors become sites of aesthetic self-fashioning, sensory consumption, concealment, and moral secrecy, while natural forms are repeatedly interpreted through artistic and aesthetic categories. In *Dracula*, domestic spaces are placed under threat by a figure whose archaic identity confronts an expanding technological infrastructure of typewriting, shorthand, phonographs, telegrams, medical procedures, and railways (Zhang & Zhao, 2026). Technology therefore does not merely provide background detail because it changes how characters collect, store, circulate, and authenticate knowledge. Modernity becomes semantically visible through the contrast between mobile information systems and spaces that are increasingly vulnerable to invasion. The fin-de-siècle corpus consequently positions domesticity at the intersection of aesthetics, science, secrecy, and cultural anxiety.

The Modernist/interwar novels extend this development by making spatial meaning increasingly dependent on consciousness, social networks, and memory. In *The Great Gatsby*, houses remain powerful markers of class and aspiration, but the mansion functions more as a public sign of wealth and social performance than as an unquestioned site of belonging. East Egg, West Egg, the apartment, and the valley of ashes form a spatial system through which economic inequality, desire, mobility, and exclusion become legible. In *Mrs Dalloway*, London operates simultaneously as a physical city and as a cognitive environment in which streets, houses, parks, shops, and institutional spaces activate memories, associations, anticipation, and social perceptions (Kishino et al., 2025). The semantic distinction between interior and exterior consequently becomes less stable because external spaces are continuously filtered through individual consciousness. Corpus-oriented literary analysis similarly demonstrates that spatial and semantic patterns can reveal relationships among setting, characterization, and thematic organization (Zhang & Zhao, 2026). Domesticity in the Modernist corpus is therefore best understood as an unstable relation among material space, social position, memory, and interior life.

Table 5. Text-Level Configurations of Domestic and Natural Semantics

Text	Key Spatial Complex	Primary Cultural Script	Semantic Effect
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	Pemberley / Longbourn	Estate, inheritance, stewardship	Domestic place can revise moral judgment
<i>Frankenstein</i>	Genevan home / Alpine and Arctic nature	Refuge versus epistemic exile	Nature alternates between sublimity, law, and moral counterweight
<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Gateshead–Lowood–Thornfield–Moor House–Ferndean	Sequential tests of dependency and belonging	Home becomes legitimate only when compatible with autonomy
<i>Great Expectations</i>	Forge / Satis House / London rooms	Origin, arrested wealth, aspirational mobility	Residence and belonging are deliberately separated
<i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>	Interior rooms / sensory objects / urban spaces	Aesthetic self-fashioning and secrecy	Nature is repeatedly absorbed into artifice and taste
<i>Dracula</i>	Castle / English home / institutions / transport networks	Threatened domestic-national boundary	Modern technology reorganizes the meaning of knowledge and safety
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	Mansion / East Egg / apartment / valley	Class display and commodified desire	House becomes a public sign rather than secure home
<i>Mrs Dalloway</i>	London streets / house / park / institutional rooms	Memory, social access, psychic movement	Urban place and interior consciousness become structurally interdependent

The text-level configurations in Table 5 demonstrate that spatial semantics become progressively more dependent on the relationship between physical environments and culturally constructed forms of belonging. Pemberley establishes an early model in which property can participate in moral reassessment, whereas the sequence of spaces in *Jane Eyre* makes home legitimate only when it accommodates personal autonomy. The fin-de-siècle novels then transform interiors into sites where aesthetic identity, secrecy, technology, and cultural boundaries are negotiated. *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs Dalloway* further destabilize the distinction between public and private space by making houses, streets, parties, parks, and institutions part of wider systems of memory and social perception (Kishino et al., 2025). The resulting pattern indicates that domesticity becomes increasingly interiorized, meaning that the significance of a place depends less on its physical boundaries and more on the psychological, social, and cultural relations activated within it. Nature follows a comparable trajectory as its role shifts from relatively direct moral and affective counterpoint toward an environment increasingly mediated by artifice, technology, urbanization, and consciousness (Schlechtweg et al., 2025).

Cultural Representation from Polite Society to Urban Fragmentation

Cultural representation across the English corpus shifts from explicitly named social institutions toward increasingly distributed systems of signs, practices, spaces, and perceptions. In *Pride and Prejudice*, cultural identity is organized through marriage, inheritance, family, visiting practices, civility, property, and distinctions of rank, making social relations comparatively legible through established institutional vocabulary (Regan, 2022). The vocabulary of politeness is particularly significant because forms of address, conversation, visiting, and bodily conduct communicate cultural expectations even when characters disagree about their legitimacy (Hauser & Schwarz, 2023). In *Frankenstein*, this representational structure is complicated by the contrast between domestic reciprocity and solitary intellectual ambition. The protagonist's pursuit of forbidden knowledge progressively separates him from familial and communal structures that otherwise provide a framework

for belonging (Ikeo et al., 2024). Cultural representation in the early corpus therefore remains closely connected to recognizable institutions, interpersonal obligations, and normative behavioral codes (Periti et al., 2025).

The Victorian novels complicate this institutional organization by representing identity as increasingly mobile without suggesting that social categories become freely transferable. In *Jane Eyre*, education provides Jane with linguistic and intellectual resources for movement across social environments, while her position as a governess continues to expose the economic and gendered boundaries surrounding social identity (Ibrahim, 2022). In *Great Expectations*, Pip's movement from the Forge to London similarly represents social transformation while preserving the cultural memory of his origins and the stigma associated with manual labor (Baes et al., 2025). The category *gentleman* consequently operates as both an aspiration and a contradiction because its apparent accessibility remains constrained by inherited class expectations and social recognition (Teodorescu et al., 2022). Victorian cultural representation thus expands the semantic possibilities of identity while retaining institutional mechanisms that determine who can legitimately occupy particular social positions (Periti et al., 2025). This tension between mobility and restriction marks an important stage in the redistribution of cultural meaning across the corpus (Gittel & Haider, 2025).

Table 6. Cultural Scripts and Their Principal Lexical Carriers Across Periods

Period	Dominant Cultural Scripts	Lexical/Semiotic Carriers	Representational Organization
Regency/Romantic	Marriage, inheritance, civility, domestic duty, knowledge	Rank terms, family labels, estate/home vocabulary, nature	Relatively explicit and institutionally named
Victorian	Mobility, education, respectability, gendered dependence, self-making	Gentleman, governess, work, money, house, shame	Contradictory: mobility expands while institutional boundaries persist
Fin-de-siècle	Aestheticism, secrecy, professional modernity, foreignness, threatened domesticity	Lord/count, beauty, room, science, document, foreign/stranger	Boundary-intensive and performative
Modernist/interwar	Consumption, metropolitan networks, memory, trauma, social access	House, car, party, street, name, profession, mind/feeling	Highly distributed and inferential

Table 6 demonstrates that the principal diachronic change concerns the organization of cultural meaning rather than the disappearance of earlier cultural scripts. The Regency/Romantic texts foreground marriage, inheritance, civility, and domestic duty because these concepts remain closely attached to explicitly recognized institutions (Regan, 2022). The Victorian texts introduce mobility, education, work, money, and self-making while maintaining strong boundaries around gender and respectability (Ibrahim, 2022). The fin-de-siècle texts intensify cultural performativity through aestheticism, secrecy, professional modernity, foreignness, and threatened domesticity (Klein, 2024). Modernist/interwar fiction distributes cultural representation across consumption, metropolitan networks, memory, trauma, social access, and psychological experience (Ibrahim, 2023). The resulting pattern suggests that semantic change operates through the redistribution of cultural functions across interconnected lexical and semiotic resources rather than through straightforward lexical replacement (Baes et al., 2025).

The fin-de-siècle novels intensify this redistribution by placing aesthetic identity, technological modernity, secrecy, and foreignness into increasingly complex relationships. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cultural identity is constructed through taste, consumption, beauty, interiors, objects, and the cultivation of an aesthetic persona, allowing distinction to operate through practices rather than institutional labels alone (Gittel & Haider, 2025). In *Dracula*, British professional expertise and technological organization confront an aristocratic figure represented through geographical, bodily, linguistic, and cultural difference (Zhang & Zhao, 2026). Foreignness consequently functions not

merely as a geographical category but as a semantic field through which unfamiliar practices, bodies, objects, and forms of knowledge are interpreted (Feng & Feng, 2022). Translation-oriented scholarship likewise demonstrates that cultural meanings may be reorganized when expressions associated with one cultural system are represented through another linguistic and cultural framework (Raveendran, 2023). The fin-de-siècle corpus therefore represents culture through intensified boundaries in which aesthetic performance and foreign difference become central mechanisms of social classification (Klein, 2024).

The Modernist and interwar novels subsequently fragment cultural representation across urban movement, consumption, memory, professional identity, and social networks. In *The Great Gatsby*, automobiles, clothing, houses, parties, geographical locations, accents, and patterns of leisure collectively communicate class positions that cannot be reduced to a single explicit status term (Ibrahim, 2023). The distinction between old and new money is consequently produced through accumulated contextual signs rather than formal institutional classifications alone (Baes et al., 2025). In *Mrs Dalloway*, cultural identity is similarly dispersed across urban movement, social invitations, professional relations, gendered expectations, imperial memory, medicine, war, and private consciousness (Zhang & Zhao, 2026). The city becomes a representational system in which different identities intersect without being organized into one stable hierarchy (Ibrahim, 2023). Modernist cultural representation therefore requires readers to infer social meanings from relationships among lexical, spatial, material, and psychological cues (Periti et al., 2025). This fragmentation represents a transformation in narrative organization rather than the disappearance of earlier cultural categories (Ringler, 2022).

Table 7. Mechanisms of Literary-Semantic Change Identified in the English Corpus

Mechanism	Definition in This Study	Observed Corpus Pattern	Interpretive Consequence
Retention	Earlier denotation remains active	<i>house</i> as dwelling/property across all periods	Provides continuity needed to interpret later reweighting
Expansion	A category acquires additional evaluative or social criteria	<i>gentleman</i> shifts from rank-heavy classification toward conduct/performance	Broadens the interpretive feature set without deleting the old sense
Evaluative Inversion	Prestigious label becomes ethically unstable	Aristocratic/gentlemanly status in <i>Dorian Gray</i> and <i>Dracula</i>	Separates denotation from moral prosody
Indexical Redistribution	Meaning moves from explicit labels to clusters of signs	Class in <i>Gatsby</i> and <i>Mrs Dalloway</i>	Makes social identity inferential and context-dependent
Functional Coupling	Two semantic domains become mutually explanatory	Home + mind; nature + technology; class + space	Changes narrative meaning through altered domain relations
Boundary Intensification	Lexical field gains force by marking cultural difference	Foreignness in <i>Dracula</i>	Concentrates geography, body, accent, and threat in one cultural frame

Table 7 identifies the mechanisms through which cultural representation changes while retaining connections with earlier semantic structures. Retention allows lexical items such as *house* to maintain recognizable denotations while their cultural functions become increasingly complex across periods (Teodorescu et al., 2022). Expansion occurs when categories such as *gentleman* accumulate associations involving conduct, education, aspiration, performance, and moral judgment (Periti et al., 2025). Evaluative inversion becomes visible when prestigious identities acquire associations with secrecy, decadence, danger, or moral unreliability (Gittel & Haider, 2025). Indexical redistribution becomes particularly prominent in *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs Dalloway*, where social identity is inferred through clusters of material, spatial, linguistic, and interpersonal signs (Ibrahim, 2023). Functional coupling connects semantic domains such as home and mind or class and space, while

boundary intensification concentrates cultural difference through geography, body, accent, and perceived threat (Zhang & Zhao, 2026). These mechanisms indicate that literary-semantic change is recursive because later representations continue to activate inherited meanings while reorganizing their cultural functions (Baes et al., 2025).

Indonesian Novels as a Comparative Test of Semantic Portability

The Indonesian translated corpus introduces a cross-linguistic dimension to semantic change by examining how culturally embedded meanings are transferred from Indonesian into English. In *This Earth of Mankind*, address terms are particularly significant because they encode colonial hierarchy, kinship, deference, intimacy, and localized forms of social positioning (Tumbole & Cholsy, 2022). The translated forms demonstrate that an address expression can retain its referential function while losing part of its social or affective specificity in English (Tumbole & Cholsy, 2022). This distinction is important because semantic equivalence at the referential level does not necessarily guarantee equivalence at the pragmatic or cultural level (Raveendran, 2023). Sodiq et al. (2022) similarly identify shifts in appraisal between the Indonesian source text and its English translation, showing that characterization can remain recognizable while its evaluative orientation changes (Sodiq et al., 2022). The Indonesian corpus therefore expands the concept of semantic change from diachronic reweighting within English toward the portability of meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Han, 2023).

The address-term evidence provides a particularly clear illustration of how semantic portability can affect social meaning. The documented translation of *This Earth of Mankind* includes 990 instances representing 29 forms of address, with neutral or less expressive renderings constituting 51.3% of the identified cases (Tumbole & Cholsy, 2022). Loan and loan-plus-explanation procedures account for 35.9%, while cultural substitution represents 7.2% and omission represents 5.4% of the cases (Tumbole & Cholsy, 2022). These proportions suggest that the translation process frequently negotiates between accessibility for English readers and preservation of culturally specific social information (Tumbole & Cholsy, 2022). The issue becomes more complex when appraisal is considered because evaluative meaning can shift even when the same character and narrative event remain identifiable across the two versions (Sodiq et al., 2022). Translation consequently becomes a site where denotation, social indexicality, affect, and cultural positioning can be redistributed rather than transferred as an indivisible semantic package (Perangin-angin et al., 2023).

Table 8. Empirical Evidence of Semantic Mediation in Indonesian Novels Translated into English

Translated Novel	Semantic Domain	Empirical Basis	Observed Mediation
<i>This Earth of Mankind</i>	Address terms	990 instances; 29 forms	51.3% neutral/less expressive; 35.9% loan/loan + explanation; 7.2% cultural substitution; 5.4% omission; 0.4% generalization; 0.2% unrelated paraphrase
<i>This Earth of Mankind</i>	Character appraisal	Shift in appraisal choices between Indonesian and English characterization	Evaluative stance can change even when the same character and event remain identifiable
<i>The Rainbow Troops</i>	Cultural terms / proper names	Culture-linked lexical items distributed across ecology, material and social culture, institutions, gestures/habits	Retention, explanation, transformation, and other procedures redistribute cultural specificity
<i>Beauty Is a Wound</i>	Gendered representation	Reported inequality categories include	Cultural and gendered meaning is organized through

		subordination, marginalization, violence, and stereotyping	recurring evaluative and social frames
<i>Beauty Is a Wound</i>	Cultural terms	Six translation procedures reported	Transference, transposition, descriptive, functional and cultural equivalence, plus couplets

The evidence summarized in Table 8 demonstrates that semantic mediation affects different categories of culturally embedded language in different ways. In *The Rainbow Troops*, proper names and culture-linked expressions associated with ecological, material, social, and institutional practices require different translation procedures depending on the degree of cultural specificity involved (Hamid, 2022). Retention can preserve visible cultural difference, whereas explanation or transformation can increase accessibility for readers who do not share the source culture's background knowledge (Rizka, 2022). In *Beauty Is a Wound*, the problem extends to gendered representation because expressions related to subordination, marginalization, violence, and stereotyping carry social meanings that operate beyond literal lexical reference (Halim et al., 2023). Taboo expressions introduce an additional pragmatic dimension because their force depends on culturally specific expectations concerning offensiveness, morality, intimacy, and social appropriateness (Ma'shumah et al., 2022). The six procedures identified for cultural terms in the novel further demonstrate that translation may involve transference, transposition, descriptive equivalence, functional equivalence, cultural equivalence, and combined procedures (Lie et al., 2025). These cases establish that semantic portability depends on the type and density of cultural information encoded in the source expression (Perangin-angin et al., 2023).

The Indonesian corpus also reveals that translation can generate new semantic relationships rather than simply reproducing those already present in the source text. Lexical transformation in Indonesian literary translation can alter the textual environment in which a particular expression is interpreted while maintaining a recognizable connection with its source meaning (Azka & Sutrisno, 2025). This process is especially relevant to expressions whose significance depends on cultural conventions, social relationships, or evaluative positioning (Han, 2023). Proper names, address forms, taboo expressions, and culturally specific practices may therefore require different degrees of retention, explanation, substitution, or transformation (Rizka, 2022; Ma'shumah et al., 2022). Translation research increasingly conceptualizes this process as cultural mediation because the target text constructs meaning for readers who possess different linguistic and cultural resources (Xu, 2024). The resulting semantic relationship is neither complete equivalence nor complete loss because different dimensions of the source meaning may survive at different levels of accessibility (Yang & Wang, 2026). This perspective complements the English diachronic corpus by showing that semantic reweighting can occur not only across historical periods but also through movement between linguistic systems.

Table 9. Cross-Cultural Semantic Portability Matrix

Semantic Dimension	Pattern in English Diachronic Corpus	Pattern in Indonesian Translated Corpus	Comparative Inference
Social Hierarchy	Increasingly encoded through conduct, wealth, networks, space	Honorifics and colonial address forms can lose indexical strength	Partial portability: denotation travels more easily than hierarchy
Domestic Belonging	Moves from estate/order toward affective and psychological belonging	Kinship and local social roles may require explanation or retention	Moderate portability when relational distinctions are lexicalized differently
Cultural Objects and Practices	Often inferable from shared historical English context	Frequently culture-specific and non-equivalent	Low portability without transference, description, or contextual expansion

Taboo Evaluation	and	Prosody changes through context and narrative stance	Pragmatic force may be softened, transformed, or substituted	Low-to-moderate portability because social offensiveness is culture-dependent
Foreignness Difference	/	Constructed inside English cultural frames	Translation itself creates a relation between familiar English and retained Indonesian difference	High interpretive salience but unstable equivalence

Table 9 makes the comparative distinction between diachronic semantic change and cross-cultural semantic mediation more explicit. Social hierarchy in the English corpus becomes increasingly distributed across conduct, wealth, networks, and spatial positioning, whereas Indonesian address terms may lose part of their hierarchical force when rendered through neutral English expressions (Tumbole & Cholsy, 2022). Domestic belonging demonstrates greater contextual portability because relational meanings can often be reconstructed even when culturally specific kinship or social-role distinctions require explanation (Perangin-angin et al., 2023). Cultural objects and practices present a more limited form of portability because their interpretation frequently depends on source-culture knowledge that cannot be reproduced through direct lexical substitution (Rizka, 2022). Taboo and evaluative meanings are similarly unstable because pragmatic offensiveness and social evaluation depend on culturally situated norms (Ma'shumah et al., 2022). Foreignness remains highly salient because retained Indonesian expressions can mark cultural difference within an English textual environment (Lie et al., 2025). Identity represents the most complex dimension because its transfer depends on relationships among naming, address, appraisal, cultural reference, and social indexicality (Azka & Sutrisno, 2025). The comparison therefore demonstrates that semantic portability is multidimensional, with referential meaning generally more transferable than the social, affective, pragmatic, and cultural information attached to it (Xu, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The selected English novels demonstrate a recurrent diachronic reweighting of lexical meaning across the period from 1813 to 1925, in which semantic continuity coexists with changes in narrative and cultural function. Social-rank vocabulary gradually shifts from explicit classification based on family, property, and inherited position toward meanings associated with ethical conduct, aspiration, performance, consumption, social networks, and spatial indexicality. The semantic fields of home and house retain their basic denotational functions while becoming increasingly detached from stable belonging as domestic space is reconfigured through dependency, mobility, secrecy, class display, and psychological experience. The meaning of nature likewise develops from a prominent moral and epistemic counterweight into a more complex field associated with aestheticization, scientific knowledge, technological mediation, and metropolitan experience. Modernist and interwar fiction does not discard earlier semantic and cultural codes but redistributes them across material objects, urban spaces, interpersonal networks, memory, and consciousness. These patterns indicate that literary-semantic change operates through the persistence of earlier senses alongside shifts in their evaluative weight, contextual prominence, and cultural associations. The resulting model conceptualizes diachronic semantic change as a layered process in which lexical meanings remain recognizable while their narrative functions and cultural priorities are repeatedly recalibrated across literary periods.

The Indonesian translated corpus further demonstrates that semantic portability cannot be separated from cultural specificity because lexical meaning also depends on social relations, pragmatic force, and culturally embedded knowledge. Address terms, cultural objects, taboo expressions, appraisal, proper names, and colonial social categories frequently require borrowing, neutralization, explanation, substitution, or other translation procedures when Indonesian meanings are rendered into English. Referential equivalence may consequently coexist with reduced or altered indexical, affective, and evaluative information in the target text. The findings distinguish semantic change within English from semantic transfer into English, with the former involving diachronic redistribution within a continuing linguistic system and the latter involving negotiation between different cultural systems of categorization and social expectation. The study is limited by its purposive literary corpus and therefore

does not claim population-level evidence for historical change in English usage, since literary texts represent culturally and aesthetically selected language rather than a statistically representative linguistic population. Its principal contribution lies in a reproducible interpretive framework that separates text-level semantic reweighting from language-wide historical inference while using translated Indonesian fiction to examine the portability of culturally embedded meanings. Future research can extend the corpus, align full-text editions computationally, and combine contextual embeddings with manually validated sense annotation to test the identified period patterns quantitatively without reducing culturally specific semantic distinctions to distributional similarity alone.

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