

The Accuracy of Indonesian Cultural Term Translation in the English Subtitle of the Documentary Film *Semesta*

A Thesis

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Abstract

*One of the challenges in the translation process is translating culture-specific terms, which are closely rooted in the culture of the source language and may not have direct equivalents in the target language. The Indonesian documentary film *Semesta* contains numerous Indonesian cultural terms related to ecology, religious beliefs, customs, traditions, social practices, and material culture, which are presented to non-Indonesian-speaking audiences through English subtitles. This study aims to identify and classify the Indonesian cultural terms found in the documentary film *Semesta* and to assess the accuracy of their English subtitle translations. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The data consisted of Indonesian cultural terms found in the dialogue and narration of the documentary and their corresponding English subtitle translations. The findings revealed 65 Indonesian cultural terms in the documentary. The most frequently occurring category was Organizations, Customs, Activities, Procedures, Concepts, with 27 terms (41.54%), followed by Ecology, with 24 terms (36.92%), Social Culture, with 7 terms (10.77%), Material Culture, with 4 terms (6.15%), and Gestures and Habits, with 3 terms (4.62%). Regarding translation accuracy, 49 terms (75.38%) were categorized as accurate, 13 terms (20.00%) as less accurate, and 3 terms (4.62%) as inaccurate. The findings indicate that the majority of the cultural terms were translated accurately, demonstrating that the English subtitles generally succeeded in conveying the meanings of Indonesian cultural terms to the target audience. Nevertheless, some translations were less accurate or inaccurate, particularly when the cultural terms contained specific religious, traditional, or contextual meanings. The study concludes that translating Indonesian cultural terms in audiovisual media requires attention not only to their linguistic meanings but also to their cultural and contextual significance.*

Keywords: translation accuracy, cultural terms, subtitles, documentary film *Semesta*.

PREFACE

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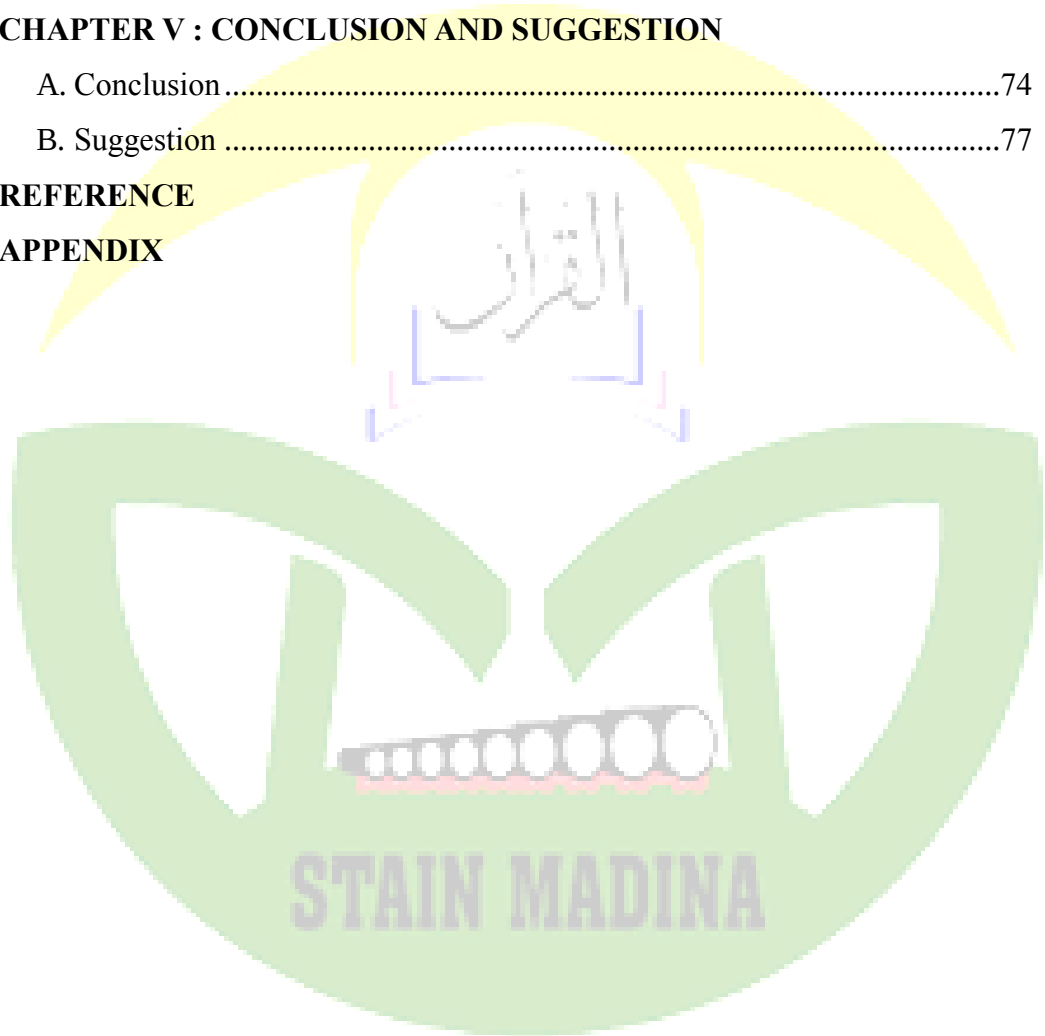
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Translation is the process of transferring meaning from a source language into a target language in such a way that the message is accurately understood by readers or viewers. According to Nababan et al. (2012) Translation is the process of transferring meaning from a source language into a target language so that the message can be understood accurately by the target audience. According to Catford (1965), translation is the replacement of textual material in one language with equivalent textual material in another language. Meanwhile, Nida, E. A., & Taber, (1969) emphasize that translation should produce the closest natural equivalent of the source text, both in terms of meaning and style. These definitions indicate that translation is not only concerned with linguistic forms, but also with conveying meaning appropriately while considering context and cultural aspects. Catford's concept of equivalence highlights the importance of finding appropriate textual correspondences between languages. However, achieving equivalence is often challenging when the source text contains culture-specific expressions that have no direct equivalents in the target language. Similarly, Nida and Taber's notion of the "closest natural equivalent" suggests that translators should not merely transfer words literally but should also ensure that the translated message is understandable and acceptable to the target audience within their cultural context. Therefore, successful translation requires an understanding of both linguistic and cultural elements.

In practice, translation is a complex activity that involves more than simply substituting words from one language into another. It requires translators to interpret meaning, understand context, and reconstruct messages so that they can be accepted and understood by the target audience. This complexity becomes more apparent when the source text contains cultural elements such as customs, traditions, beliefs, social practices, or culture-specific concepts. As a result, translation can be seen as a process that

connects not only languages but also cultures, enabling cultural meanings to be communicated across different linguistic and cultural communities. Cultural aspects play an important role in translation because every language reflects the beliefs, traditions, values, and social practices of its speakers. One of the major challenges in translation arises when translators encounter cultural terms that are closely tied to a particular society and do not have direct equivalents in the target language. According to Newmark (1988), cultural terms are expressions that are specific to a certain culture and may be difficult to translate accurately into another language. He classifies cultural terms into several categories, namely ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts, as well as gestures and habits. This classification is considered relevant to the present study because the documentary film *Semesta* contains many Indonesian cultural expressions related to traditional rituals, local wisdom, environmental practices, and social traditions. Through Newmark's framework, these cultural expressions can be systematically identified and categorized based on their cultural characteristics. As a result, the theory helps the researcher analyze how Indonesian cultural meanings are represented in subtitle translation.

The challenge of translating cultural terms becomes more complex in audiovisual translation, particularly in subtitling. Subtitling refers to the process of transferring spoken dialogue into written text displayed on the screen in synchronization with speech and visual elements. According to Díaz-Cintas, J., & Remael (2022), subtitling is influenced by technical constraints such as limited time and space, which often require translators to condense, simplify, or adapt the original message. As a result, some meanings, especially culturally bound expressions, may not be fully conveyed in the target language. This issue becomes significant because cultural terms frequently contain implicit meanings and local values that are difficult to transfer directly into another language. In subtitle translation, translators must preserve meaning while simultaneously adjusting the translation to audiovisual limitations. Therefore, accuracy becomes an important aspect in

assessing whether cultural meanings are successfully conveyed to the audience.

To evaluate translation quality, this study employs the translation accuracy model proposed by Nababan et al. (2012). The model consists of three aspects of translation quality, namely accuracy, acceptability, and readability. Accuracy refers to the degree to which the meaning of the source text is correctly transferred into the target language, while acceptability concerns the naturalness of the translation according to the norms of the target language, and readability relates to how easily the text can be understood by the audience. However, this study focuses specifically on the aspect of accuracy because the primary objective of this research is to examine whether the meanings of Indonesian cultural terms are accurately conveyed in the English subtitles of the documentary film *Semesta*.

The selection of accuracy as the main focus is closely related to the characteristics of subtitle translation. Unlike longer written texts, subtitles are constrained by technical limitations such as restricted screen space and limited display duration. As a result, translators often need to condense, simplify, or adapt the original dialogue in order to fit the subtitle format. These constraints increase the possibility of meaning reduction, especially when translating cultural terms that contain implicit meanings, local values, and culture-specific concepts. Therefore, the most crucial issue in subtitle translation is whether the core meaning of the source language is successfully maintained in the target language despite these limitations.

In addition, the aspects of acceptability and readability are generally more concerned with audience convenience, linguistic naturalness, and ease of comprehension in the target language. These aspects are commonly emphasized in longer written translations where textual flow and reader comfort become major considerations. In contrast, this study primarily investigates semantic equivalence and meaning transfer in culturally bound expressions. Since the research focuses on how Indonesian cultural meanings are represented in English subtitles, accuracy is considered the most relevant aspect for analysis. Nababan et al. (2012) framework is widely used in

Indonesian translation studies, particularly in research concerning cultural translation and audiovisual translation. Compared to broader translation quality theories, Nababan's model provides a more practical and systematic approach for identifying whether meanings are accurately conveyed, partially conveyed, or distorted in translation. Therefore, the use of Nababan's accuracy model is considered highly relevant to this study because it allows the researcher to examine how effectively Indonesian cultural terms are transferred into English subtitle translation under audiovisual constraints. One audiovisual work that contains rich Indonesian cultural expressions is the documentary film *Semesta*. Directed by Chairun Nissa, the film presents stories from seven regions in Indonesia and highlights local wisdom, spiritual beliefs, traditions, and environmental practices that are deeply rooted in Indonesian culture. Unlike fictional films, *Semesta* presents authentic cultural expressions derived from real communities and real social practices. The documentary contains many Indonesian cultural terms related to rituals, ecology, traditions, and community values, many of which do not have direct equivalents in English. Consequently, translating these terms into English subtitles becomes challenging because inaccuracies in translation may lead to misunderstandings or reductions of cultural meaning for international audiences.

The selection of the documentary film *Semesta* as the object of this study is also related to the cultural diversity represented in the film. The documentary presents different communities and regions, each with their own traditions, beliefs, environmental practices, and social values. The cultural terms found in the film therefore represent several aspects of Indonesian culture, including ecological practices, material culture, social relationships, religious concepts, customs, and culturally specific expressions. This diversity makes *Semesta* a relevant source for applying Newmark's cultural-term classification and examining the accuracy of their English subtitle translations using Nababan et al. (2012) framework.

Several previous studies have discussed the translation of cultural terms and subtitle translation in audiovisual media. However, most previous

research has focused on fictional films, whose dialogues are generally scripted and dramatized. In contrast, documentary films present more authentic and informative cultural expressions that are closely related to real-life social and cultural practices. Research focusing on the translation accuracy of cultural terms in documentary subtitles remains limited, particularly in Indonesian documentary films that emphasize local wisdom and environmental values. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the accuracy of translating Indonesian cultural terms in the English subtitles of the documentary film *Semesta* based on Newmark's classification and Nababan's accuracy assessment.

The selection of Newmark's classification and Nababan et al.'s accuracy assessment in this study is based on their relevance and applicability to the research objectives. Several scholars have proposed different approaches to identifying and analyzing cultural elements in translation. Nida (1964), for example, categorizes cultural elements into five groups: ecology, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and linguistic culture. This classification provides a broad understanding of the relationship between language and culture. However, some of Nida's categories are relatively broad and may not sufficiently distinguish between different types of cultural practices, customs, and concepts found in the present data. Aixelá (1996), meanwhile, introduces the concept of Culture-Specific Items (CSIs), which focuses on elements whose function or meaning may create difficulties when transferred from one culture to another. His framework is useful for identifying culture-specific expressions and examining the strategies used to transfer them, but its primary focus is on the treatment of culture-specific items rather than categorizing them according to their cultural domains. Newmark's theory is selected because it specifically addresses cultural words and provides a clear and systematic classification consisting of ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations, customs, activities, procedures and concepts, and gestures and habits. These categories are considered relevant to the cultural terms found in the documentary film *Semesta*, which presents various aspects of Indonesian culture, including local environmental

practices, traditional activities, social relationships, beliefs, and customs. Therefore, Newmark's classification enables the researcher to identify and categorize the cultural terms systematically. Although there are other and more recent approaches to cultural terms, a newer theory is not necessarily more appropriate for every research context. The selection of a theoretical framework should consider its relevance, applicability, and consistency with the objectives of the study. In this case, Newmark's framework provides categories that can be directly applied to the cultural terms identified in the data.

Several translation scholars have proposed different approaches to assessing translation quality. Larson (1998), for example, emphasizes accuracy, clarity, and naturalness as important aspects of translation quality. Her approach is useful for examining whether the meaning of a translation is accurately transferred and whether the target text is clear and natural. However, Larson's framework does not provide the same three-level numerical rating scale used in this study. House (2015), meanwhile, proposes a more comprehensive approach to translation assessment that considers linguistic and contextual relationships between the source and target texts, including equivalence and the cultural context of translation. Although this approach provides a broader perspective on translation quality, it involves a more extensive analysis than is required by the present study. Meanwhile, Nababan et al.'s accuracy assessment is selected because it directly corresponds to the main focus of this study, which is to examine the accuracy of the English translations of Indonesian cultural terms. The framework provides clear criteria for assessing the transfer of meaning from the source language into the target language through three levels of accuracy: accurate, less accurate, and inaccurate. These criteria provide a systematic basis for evaluating whether the cultural meanings expressed in the Indonesian source text are appropriately conveyed in the English subtitles. The framework is also relevant to this study because it has been developed and widely applied in translation quality assessment within the Indonesian translation context. Thus, Newmark's and Nababan et al.'s frameworks serve different but

complementary purposes in this study. Newmark's theory is used to identify and classify the Indonesian cultural terms, while Nababan et al.'s framework is used to assess the accuracy of their English translations. The two frameworks are therefore selected not merely based on their established use or publication dates, but primarily because their concepts and assessment criteria are consistent with the objectives and characteristics of the present study.

Through this research, it is expected that the study can contribute to translation studies, particularly in the field of audiovisual translation and cultural translation, as well as provide a better understanding of how Indonesian cultural meanings are maintained in subtitle translation.

B. Research Questions

The research addresses the following questions:

1. What are the classification of cultural terms presented in the Documentary Film *Semesta*?
2. How the accuracy of Indonesian cultural terms translation in the subtitle of the Documentary Film *Semesta*?

C. Objectives of the Study

Given the research questions above, the objectives of this study are:

1. Identify and classify the cultural terms in the Documentary Film *Semesta*.
2. Assess the accuracy of cultural term translations in the English subtitles of the Documentary Film *Semesta*.

D. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to translation studies, particularly in the field of audiovisual translation and cultural translation.

1. Theoretical Significance
 - a. This study contributes to the development of translation studies, particularly in the fields of cultural translation and

audiovisual translation, by analyzing the translation of Indonesian cultural terms in English subtitles.

- b. This study provides empirical evidence regarding the application of Newmark's classification of cultural terms and Nababan et al.'s translation accuracy framework in assessing the accuracy of cultural term translation.
- c. This study contributes to the understanding of how Indonesian cultural meanings are transferred into English and how cultural identity can be maintained through subtitle translation, thereby enriching discussions on cultural translation and meaning transfer.

2. Practical Significance

- a. For translators and subtitlers, this study is expected to provide insights into translating Indonesian cultural terms accurately while preserving their cultural meanings.
- b. For students, this study can serve as a reference for learning and understanding cultural translation, audiovisual translation, and translation accuracy assessment.
- c. For future researchers, this study is expected to provide references and empirical findings for further studies related to cultural term translation, subtitle translation, and translation quality assessment.

E. Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this research focuses on the degree of accuracy in translating cultural terms found in the English subtitles of the documentary film *Semesta*. The data are derived from the Indonesian documentary film *Semesta*, directed by Chairun Nissa and produced by Kalyana Shira Foundation. The film features both narration and dialogue that reflect Indonesian local wisdom, traditions, and environmentally oriented values. The data consist of Indonesian cultural terms and their corresponding English subtitle translations. In this study, cultural terms are categorized based on the

framework proposed by Newmark (1988), which includes ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts, gestures, and habits. The analytical focus of this research is to examine translation accuracy using the Translation Quality Assessment model developed by Nababan et al. (2012). In this context, accuracy is considered a key dimension of translation quality, referring to the extent to which the meaning of the Source Language (SL) text is correctly and completely conveyed in the Target Language (TL) text.

From the total duration of the film, the researcher estimates that approximately 65 cultural terms may be identified and analyzed. However, the final number of data will depend on the results of the identification and classification process based on Newmark's cultural categories. Only cultural expressions appearing in Indonesian dialogues and their English subtitle translations are included in the analysis.

Although the film contains several dialogues in local or regional languages, these are excluded from the analysis to ensure consistency with the Indonesian-English translation focus of this study. Furthermore, this study exclusively employs the accuracy dimension from Nababan's three-aspect assessment model, which includes accuracy, acceptability, and readability. The aspects of acceptability and readability are excluded from the analysis, as they are associated with different evaluative perspectives namely cultural naturalness and textual comprehensibility which fall outside the primary focus of this research.

F. Definition of Key Terms

To avoid ambiguity and to ensure a clear understanding of the concepts employed in this research, several key terms are defined as follows:

1. Translation

Translation refers to the process of transferring meaning from the Source Language (SL) into the Target Language (TL) while preserving the original message and intent. According to Nida and Taber (1969), translation emphasizes conveying the closest natural equivalent in the

target language, with priority given to meaning, followed by style. In this study, translation refers to the transfer of Indonesian spoken dialogue and narration in the documentary film *semesta* into English subtitles.

2. Subtitling

Subtitling is a form of audiovisual translation in which spoken dialogue is rendered into written text that appears on the screen in synchronization with audio and visual elements. Gottlieb (1990) explains that subtitling typically involves condensation due to spatial and temporal constraints. In this study, subtitling refers to the English on-screen text in the documentary film *semesta*, which assists non-Indonesian audiences in understanding the film.

3. Cultural Terms

Cultural terms refer to words or expressions that represent concepts, practices, and objects specific to a particular culture. According to Newmark (1988), such terms are often difficult to translate directly because they are closely tied to their cultural context. In this study, cultural terms are classified based on Newmark's five categories: ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts, as well as gestures and habits.

d. Translation Accuracy

Accuracy is one of the primary aspects in assessing translation quality. According to Nababan et al., (2012), accuracy concerns the degree of equivalence of meaning between the source and target texts. In this study, accuracy refers to the extent to which the meaning of the source text is conveyed correctly and completely in the target language without omission, addition, or distortion. The assessment of accuracy is conducted using Nababan's three-point scale: 3 (accurate), 2 (less accurate), and 1 (inaccurate).

4. Documentary Film *Semesta*

Semesta is an Indonesian documentary film released in 2019, directed by Chairun Nissa and produced by Kalyana Shira Foundation. Narrated by Nicholas Saputra, the film presents seven stories from different

regions of Indonesia, highlighting local wisdom and environmental values. The film is selected as the data source because it contains numerous cultural terms that represent the diversity of Indonesian traditions and environmental perspectives.

