

Subtitling cultural-specific items (CSIs): Strategies and quality in *Induk Gajah*

Alfi Rianis Tsani^{1*}, Esti Junining², Sugeng Hariyanto³

¹Master's program in Linguistics, Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia; email: alfiriansani9@gmail.com

²Master's program in Linguistics, Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia; email: esti@ub.ac.id

³Master's program in Linguistics, Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia; email: sugeng.hariyanto@polinema.ac.id

ABSTRACT

In the era of globalization, films served as influential audiovisual media for representing cultural values. However, subtitling Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs) presents linguistic and cultural challenges that affect meaning accuracy and audience acceptability. This study examined how CSIs are represented in the English subtitles of the Indonesian series *Induk Gajah*, with the aims of classifying the types of CSIs, identifying the subtitling strategies used, and assessing subtitle quality. A descriptive qualitative design with content analysis was employed, drawing on Newmark's (2010) CSI categories, Pedersen's (2011) subtitling strategies, and Pedersen's (2017) FAR model. The analysis identified 149 CSIs across six categories, with personal life (67) and social life (50) being the most frequent, particularly kinship terms, food references, and social expressions rooted in Batak culture. Substitution was the most common strategy (66), followed by retention (25), direct translation (18), omission (17), generalization (14), and specification (9). The findings suggest a dominance of target-language-oriented strategies, prioritizing audience comprehension. Regarding quality, 85 subtitles showed no penalties, while 57 revealed issues with functional equivalence, particularly in culturally dense expressions.

Keywords: audiovisual translation; cultural-specific items; subtitling strategies; FAR model; intercultural communication

INTRODUCTION

The past two decades have witnessed rapid advances in the field of audiovisual translation (AVT), which has increasingly developed into a recognized academic discipline (Bolaños-García-Escribano et al., 2021; Chaume 2018). The expansion of global network media has intensified the need for audiovisual translation across languages and cultures (Wang & Daghigh, 2024), making subtitling one of the most

*Corresponding author:
alfiriansani9@gmail.com

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prominent areas of interest due to its technical complexity and cultural implications (Valdeón, 2022). Subtitling is particularly important because it simultaneously conveys linguistic and cultural information in written form while coexisting with audiovisual elements, thus presenting both opportunities and challenges (Diaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007; Gottlieb, 1994).

Despite its importance, subtitling is often constrained by linguistic, technical, and cultural limitations. The rise of fan-subtitling practices has further highlighted issues of quality, underscoring the urgent need for research into subtitling challenges and strategies. One critical challenge lies in the translation of Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs), which refer to linguistic elements rooted in a particular cultural context and often lacking direct equivalents in the target language (Newmark, 1988; Baker, 2018). These items encompass both concrete entities, such as food or clothing, and abstract concepts, such as social customs or religious beliefs. Scholars have noted that translating CSIs requires not only linguistic competence but also a high degree of cultural awareness (Shirinzhadeh & Mahadi, 2015; Abdelaal & Al Sarhani, 2021). Without effective translation strategies, the risk of cultural loss or distortion becomes significant, potentially impeding intercultural understanding.

A growing body of literature has addressed the role of CSIs in translation, but much of this research remains focused on Western contexts, particularly European or Hollywood films (Leksananda et al., 2023; Zahra & Indhiarti 2023). Studies in Southeast Asian contexts remain limited, even though the region's films are deeply embedded with cultural meanings. Research on Indonesian films, for instance, has examined Javanese cultural expressions in *Bumi Manusia* (Mantika & Nurochman, 2023) and Batak culture in *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* (Adawiyah et al., 2023). However, these studies primarily concentrated on classification or translation procedures in isolation, without linking them to subtitle quality. Recent analyses of *Induk Gajah* have been conducted from perspectives such as speech acts, feminism, and semiotics (Ibna, 2024; Mediah, et al., 2024; Wahyuni, 2025), but there remains a lack of comprehensive research specifically addressing CSIs in its subtitles.

Previous studies on Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs) in audiovisual translation (AVT) have examined strategies and challenges in subtitling across various contexts. Research has applied Newmark's framework to analyze translation procedures, emphasizing the balance between cultural preservation and audience comprehension (Leksananda et al., 2023; Zahra & Indhiarti, 2023). Other studies assessed subtitle quality through accuracy, readability, and acceptability, revealing that spatial and temporal constraints often led to paraphrase, condensation, or deletion, which sometimes reduced cultural richness (Hudi et al., 2020). Investigations in Indonesian films such as *Wang Sinawang*, *Tilik*, *Perempuan Tana Humba*, *A Man Called Ahok*, and the documentary *The Mark of Empire: Majapahit* demonstrated various CSI categories and strategy preferences, with target-text-oriented strategies frequently dominating (Agustina & Joni 2019; Fitriani et al. 2023; Firdausi & Setiawan, 2022; Halim et al., 2024). Beyond Indonesia, Alaa & Al Sawi (2023) examined Egyptian subtitles using Pedersen (2011) typology and Pedersen (2017) the FAR model, highlighting the role of TT-oriented strategies in maintaining functional quality. Expanding further, Zuo et al. (2023) analyzed CSI translation in

Mo Yan's novel *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, showing how cultural distance and CSI type influenced strategy choice. Although these studies provide valuable insights, most focus on limited datasets or only strategies without systematically linking them to subtitle quality, leaving space for more comprehensive research.

This gap is crucial because *Induk Gajah*, as a contemporary Indonesian series, embodies rich Batak cultural values, particularly in its depiction of family dynamics, traditions, and gender roles. The dialogue and narrative context present not only a compelling cultural portrayal but also significant translation challenges, since these CSIs drive the conflict and character development. While previous studies on CSIs have examined categories or strategies, few have combined these analyses with an evaluation of subtitle quality. Consequently, the relationship between subtitling strategies and the overall effectiveness of CSIs translation has not been sufficiently explored.

The present study seeks to fill this gap by examining the classification of CSIs in *Induk Gajah*, identifying the subtitling strategies applied, and evaluating the quality of the resulting subtitles. By doing so, this research contributes to the broader field of AVT by providing insights into how culturally rich texts from non-Western contexts are mediated through subtitling. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of selecting appropriate translation strategies to ensure that CSIs are effectively conveyed, thereby enhancing intercultural communication and audience reception. Based on the background of the study, the researcher formulated the research questions as follows:

1. What are Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs) found in *Induk Gajah*?
2. What are subtitling strategies of CSIs applied in *Induk Gajah*?
3. What are the relationships of subtitling strategies and subtitling qualities of CSIs found in *Induk Gajah*?

This study contributes to audiovisual translation scholarship by providing an integrated analysis of Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs), subtitling strategies, and subtitle quality in a contemporary Indonesian series. By systematically combining [Newmark's \(2010\)](#) CSI taxonomy, [Pedersen's \(2011\)](#) subtitling strategies, and [Pedersen's \(2017\)](#) FAR quality model, this research advances a unified analytical framework that links cultural categorization, strategy choice, and functional subtitle performance. Empirically, the findings demonstrate the predominance of target-language-oriented strategies in the English subtitles of *Induk Gajah* and reveal their implications for functional equivalence, acceptability, and readability, particularly in culturally dense expressions rooted in Batak culture. This study extends existing AVT research by foregrounding a non-Western audiovisual text and by empirically connecting subtitling strategies to quality assessment, an area that remains underexplored in previous studies. Practically, the results provide evidence-based guidance for subtitle translators and educators in selecting strategies that balance cultural specificity and audience accessibility, while offering a reference point for future research on CSI translation quality in multimodal and intercultural contexts.

METHOD

Research design

Based on the research questions and objectives of the study, a qualitative research approach was adopted because the data are ideographic in nature, consisting of words and phrases that carry cultural meanings rather than numerical values (Rahardjo, 2020). The data analysed in this study are Indonesian-to-English subtitles taken from the *Induk Gajah* series, Season 2, Episodes 1–3. These episodes were officially released on Prime Video in August 2024 and were selected as the data source because they contain a substantial number of Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs) representing Batak culture, family structures, social interactions, and contemporary Indonesian life. The use of subtitle documents as research data is appropriate, as documents serve as stable and reliable sources of evidence in qualitative inquiry (Moleong, 2012). This data source enabled an in-depth examination of how culturally embedded meanings are transferred from Indonesian into English through subtitling.

Instruments

In this qualitative study, the researcher functioned as the primary research instrument, as the processes of identifying CSIs, interpreting their cultural significance, and evaluating translation quality required analytical and interpretative judgment. The researcher was responsible for the entire research process, including data selection, coding, classification, and analysis. To support objectivity and consistency, the researcher relied on established theoretical frameworks and clear analytical criteria. Consequently, the researcher acted as the central instrument in ensuring that the data collection and analysis were conducted systematically and in line with the focus of the study.

Data collection

The data collection procedure was carried out through several structured stages. First, the selected episodes of *Induk Gajah* were watched repeatedly to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the narrative context and situational background of each dialogue. Second, the Indonesian dialogues and their corresponding English subtitles were extracted and transcribed to produce a written corpus for analysis. Third, subtitle segments containing potential CSIs were identified by focusing on culture-bound expressions related to kinship terms, social norms, traditions, institutions, food, and everyday practices that may not have direct equivalents in English (Newmark, 2010). Through this identification process, 79 CSI items were selected as the final dataset. Each item was assigned a unique code (D001–D079) and documented with detailed information, including episode number, timecode, source-language expression, target-language subtitle, and brief contextual notes explaining its cultural relevance. This systematic documentation ensured transparency, traceability, and accuracy of the data.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, all identified subtitle segments were carefully reviewed to confirm their status as CSIs based on Newmark's (2010) classification. Items that did not meet the established criteria were excluded to maintain analytical precision. For each confirmed CSI, the researcher examined the relationship between the source text and the target subtitle, noted any shifts in meaning, and classified the item into one of six cultural categories: ecology, public life, social life, private life, customs and activities, and personal passions.

In the data display stage, the validated CSIs were organised into a structured analytical matrix containing data codes, episode numbers, timecodes, source text, target text, CSI categories, and explanatory notes. This tabulation facilitated systematic comparison across data and helped reveal recurring patterns in subtitling strategies. In the conclusion drawing stage, each CSI was analysed to determine the subtitling applied, using Pedersen's (2011) model, which includes retention, specification, direct translation, generalization, substitution, and omission. The rationale for each strategic choice was documented to clarify how cultural meaning was negotiated within the constraints of subtitling.

Simultaneously, the quality of each subtitle containing a CSI was evaluated using Pedersen's (2017) FAR model, which assesses Functional Equivalence, Acceptability, and Readability. Each parameter was scored according to the original rubric, allowing the researcher to examine how different subtitling strategies affected the transfer of meaning, linguistic naturalness, and technical readability. The findings from the CSI classification, strategy identification, and FAR assessment were then synthesized to identify dominant patterns and to draw conclusions regarding the effectiveness of CSI translation in the subtitles of *Induk Gajah*.

RESULTS

Categories of Cultural-Specific Items in *Induk Gajah*

The analysis of episodes 1–3 of *Induk Gajah* Season 2 identified 149 Cultural-Specific Items, classified into Newmark's (2010) six categories: personal life, social life, customs and pursuits, private passions, public life, and ecology. The distribution of each category and subcategory is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. CSIs Categories

No.	Category	Subcategory	Data	Total
1	Personal Life	Kinship	29	67

No.	Category	Subcategory	Data	Total
		Food	26	
		Housing	7	
		Patterns		
		Clothing	5	
2	Social Life	Social Terms	33	50
		Economy	8	
		Health	6	
		Occupations	1	
		Education	2	
3	Customs and Pursuits	Pursuits	14	17
		Customs	3	
4	Private Passions	Religion	9	12
		Spiritual Terms	2	
		Music	1	
5	Public Life	Politics	1	2
		Governmental	1	
6	Ecology	Geological	1	1
		Total	149	149

To begin with, as can be seen from Table 1, it presents the distribution of Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs) found in the subtitle of *Induk Gajah* based on Newmark's (2010) categorization. There are six categories for classifying Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs) proposed by Newmark (2010), i.e., Personal Life, Social Life, Customs and Pursuits, Private Passions, Public Life, and Ecology. The table shows that there has been a marked decrease in the number of each category of CSIs. What stands out in this table is the dominance of the Personal Life category with 67 items out of the total data. In this category, the Kinship subcategory appears most frequently, with 29 data indicating the existence of close cultural family ties in the source text. Moreover, other important subcategories in Personal Life include Food with 26 data items, Housing Patterns with 7 data items, and Clothing with 5 data items. Furthermore, the high frequency of Kinship and Food references highlights the nature of family interactions and culinary traditions present in *Induk Gajah*.

Another most frequent category is Social Life with 50 items out of the total data. Its subcategory is Social Terms with 33 data, indicating that the presence of culture in expressions and references to social interactions is extremely prominent in the dialogue. In addition, other subcategories such as Economy 8 data, Health 6 data, Occupation 1 data, and Education 2 data reflect various aspects of everyday social

experiences and institutional references in Indonesian culture.

Further findings show that Customs and Pursuits appear with 17 data. This includes Activities 14 data and Customs 3 data, indicating the representation of local traditions, customs, and cultural practices in *Induk Gajah*. Meanwhile, Personal Passion includes 12 data, which includes the subcategories Religion 9 data, Spiritual Terms 2 data, and Music 1 data. It shows that although not very dominant, personal beliefs and spiritual-cultural expressions are also depicted in *Induk Gajah*. In the final part of the finding, the data reveals that the lowest frequency is the Public Life 2 data and Ecology 1 data. Public Life includes references to Politics and Government, each with only 1 data, while Ecology only has one reference to Geology. This finding suggests that *Induk Gajah* focuses more on personal, family, and social cultural aspects, rather than political or environmental issues.

Overall, the findings show a clear trend that the categories Personal Life and Social Life dominate the overall CSI data found. The results also indicate that *Induk Gajah* focuses on interpersonal relationships, family dynamics, and social interactions which all refer to Batak culture. In contrast, categories such as Public Life and Ecology appear with little frequency. It shows that the narrative does not involve much political or environmental themes.

Personal Life

The representation of personal life in a film not only reveals cultural values and customs but also the origins of how identity is carried out through everyday life and family relationships. Personal Life refers to factors of everyday life in a particular culture. This category includes culturally specific references to food, clothing, and housing patterns, as well as kinship terms. In the case of *Induk Gajah*, this category is the most dominant, with 67 data found.

Excerpt 1:

"Maaf **Inang, Amang**, maaf. Aku gak sengaja." (SL)

"Kau contoh dulu **Nantulangmu** ini." (TL)

In the excerpt 1 shows the use of kinship terms. The terms "Inang" and "Amang" in are traditional Batak honorifics used to address Mother and Father. These terms reflect cultural respect and kinship levels. In English, these are usually translated as "Mother" and "Father"; however, such translations lose the ethnic and cultural depth contained in the original terms. These terms are not only indicators of family structure but also cultural identity (Nainggolan, 2014). Therefore, the words "Inang" and "Amang" are included in the Personal Life category in the Kinship subcategory.

Social Life

Social Life category refers to terms related to the structure and practices of community life. Culture and social phenomena are interconnected and have a significant impact on human existence (Adawiyah et al., 2023). Social Life category includes culture-specific terms related to systems, institutions, and structures of society such as kinship-based naming, economy, health care, education, and employment. With a total of 50 data, this category is the second most frequently

appearing category in *Induk Gajah*, reflecting the important role of socio-cultural norms and community practices in shaping the film's narrative.

Excerpt 2:

"Kalau gak diterusin artinya **marga** itu berhenti" (SL)

"Ngapain saya lihat **ncik-ncik** berantem?" (TL)

In the excerpt 2 shows the use of Social Terms. The word "marga" refers to a clan name within Batak culture, representing lineage and family heritage. Unlike surnames in Western culture, surnames carry deep ancestral significance and determine one's role in community rituals, marriage eligibility, and social status. This makes it a strong cultural marker under the Social Terms subcategory. As [Newmark \(2010\)](#) explains, such terms are difficult to translate without losing their sociocultural specificity. Therefore, "marga" is classified in the Social Terms subcategory in Social Life.

Customs and Pursuits

The Customs and Pursuits category includes culturally specific activities, habits, sports, entertainment, and informal behaviors, including body language, idioms, and gestures ([Newmark, 2010](#)). In *Induk Gajah*, this category includes 17 data items, divided into two subcategories: Activities and Customs. This subcategory describes how everyday expressions and cultural norms are embedded in local practices and language.

Excerpt 3:

"...sama bocah yang **dipasunat** jin, semuanya sudah". (SL)

"Kalo pun ada belum tentu juga **kunyuknya** mau sekosan sama kau." (TL)

In the excerpt 3 shows the use of Pursuits subcategory. The word "dipasunat" refers to circumcision, a common ritual in many Indonesian Muslim communities, marking a rite of passage for boys. This term carries religious and cultural significance and is widely practiced across Indonesia. In Batak culture, especially in traditional communities, the ceremony can be accompanied by customary rituals that signify maturity and readiness for social responsibility. Hence, the term "dipasunat" is classified in the Pursuits subcategory within Customs and Pursuits.

Private Passions

The Private Passions category includes deep-rooted emotional and spiritual expressions, including religion, music, poetry, and beliefs, often manifested through spiritual or artistic practices ([Newmark, 2010](#)). In *Induk Gajah*, this category is represented by 12 data points, and is divided into three subcategories, i.e., Religion, Spiritual Terms, and Music.

Excerpt 4:

"**Halleluyah.**" (SL)

"Alhamdulillah" (TL)

In the excerpt 4 shows the use of religious terms. The word "Halleluyah" is a religious exclamation of praise rooted in Christian tradition. In Indonesia, especially among

Batak Christians, such expressions are commonly heard during church services or religious moments. This reflects the spiritual identity of many Batak people, where Christianity plays a central role in everyday life. Therefore, the term "Halleluyah" is classified in the Religion subcategory in Private Passions.

Public Life

Public Life category refers to aspects related to the political, legal, and governmental systems that are specific to a particular society (Newmark, 2010). These terms may refer to national organizations, bureaucratic terminology, or political parties, often carrying cultural, historical, or ideological meanings that are difficult to translate directly. In *Induk Gajah*, this category appears less frequently than the other categories, with only 2 data, indicating that the film's focus remains on personal and family cultural expressions.

Excerpt 5:

"Saya ke sana bawa **SKCK** deh pokoknya." (SL)

In the excerpt 5 shows the use of the term Government. The term "SKCK" is an abbreviation of "*Surat Keterangan Catatan Kepolisian*", a certificate issued by the police that is generally required for job applications, immigration, or official verification in Indonesia. This document is uniquely related to the Indonesian bureaucratic culture. Therefore, the term "SKCK" is classified in the Government subcategory in Public Life.

Ecology

Ecology category, although the least frequent in *Induk Gajah* with only one data, provides a glimpse into how geographic and environmental references function as cultural markers. Newmark (2010) stated that ecology-related CSIs typically refer to flora, fauna, landscapes, geographic locations, and climate conditions specific to a culture or region.

Excerpt 6:

"Tadi katanya sudah sampai **Cibodas**." (SL)

In the excerpt 6 mentions "Cibodas" as a real geographical location in West Java, Indonesia, known for its botanical gardens and cool mountain climate. The term not only conveys a physical location but also suggests a certain atmosphere and travel context that is familiar to local viewers. For Indonesian viewers, Cibodas evokes natural beauty and holiday images, while for international viewers, it may be less relevant. Therefore, the term "Cibodas" is classified in the Geological subcategory within Ecology.

Strategies of Cultural-Specific Items in Induk Gajah

In response to the second research question, Table 2 presents the strategies used for subtitling Cultural-Specific Items found in Induk Gajah based on Pedersen's (2011). In this study, all six strategies were found in Induk Gajah. Furthermore, the following table shows the subtitle strategies of culture-specific items found in Induk Gajah.

Table 2. The findings of subtitle strategy

No.	Subtitle Strategies	Data
1	Substitution	66
2	Retention	26
3	Direct Translation	19
4	Omission	17
5	Generalization	13
6	Specification	8
Total		149

The provided Table 2 delivers the number of subtitling strategies used for subtitling Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs) in *Induk Gajah*. First of all, as can be seen clearly from the table, the most frequent strategy applied is Substitution with 66 data. This strategy involves replacing the original cultural term with the target cultural equivalent or a term more familiar to the target audience. However, Retention strategy is used in 26 data to maintain the CSIs in their original form or with minimal changes. In addition, Direct Translation is found in 19 data. This strategy involves literal or near-literal translation of the original expression.

Moreover, Omission is found in 17 data, used when a CSI is excluded from the target text. Generalization strategy is used in 13 data to replace a specific cultural reference with a more general term. Meanwhile, the lowest frequent is Specification strategy used in 8 data. In conclusion, it is possible to see from the table that CSI subtitling in *Induk Gajah* mostly applies a target-oriented approach, with Substitution being the most frequently used strategy.

Substitution

This strategy refers to the replacement of terms or expressions in subtitles that are culturally bound in the source language (SL) with different but functionally equivalent terms in the target language (TL) (Pedersen, 2011). This strategy prioritizes the understanding of the target language audience by adapting or changing references that may be too specific or foreign. The following table is an excerpt that has CSI by implementing the Substitution strategy in *Induk Gajah*.

Excerpt 7:

"Inang udah tidur?" (SL)

"Is Mom already sleeping?" (TL)

In the excerpt 7 shows the cultural term "termos", a container used to maintain the

temperature of food. The term is replaced with water bottle, which although not literally identical, pragmatically conveys the meaning of an object that can be used to store liquids and is widely known in the target culture. The use of substitution is done because thermos may not be as popular or well-known in its functional context among international audiences. This substitution maintains the humorous elements conveyed in the SL. This strategy supports the principle of domestication, which seeks to adapt the text to the expectations and cultural knowledge of the TL audience (Venuti, 1994).

Retention

Retention is a subtitle strategy by maintaining culturally specific items from the source language in their original form in the target text (Pedersen, 2011). This is related to proper names, local terms, or traditional expressions. Moreover, subtitle writing is usually typographically marked (i.e., quotation marks, capital letters, or italics) which aims to maintain the authenticity or exoticism of the original language and culture.

Excerpt 8:

"Iya. **Anak Siampudan** itu yang menjaga rumah." (SL)

"Yeah. **Siampudan child** should stay in the house." (TL)

In the excerpt 8 shows the cultural term "anak Siampudan" which is a Batak cultural vocabulary referring to "youngest child," is left intact without being translated. This strategy is used since "Siampudan" does not have a direct equivalent in English and contains specific cultural values. Pedersen states that retention is used when the term carries a significant cultural identity burden or when the translator wants to create an "exotic flavor" of the original culture (Pedersen, 2011).

Direct Translation

Direct Translation strategy involves translating a source language cultural item literally or semantically into the target language without significant adaptation (Pedersen, 2011). This strategy is used when there is an equivalent lexical item or structure in the TL that can clearly convey the original meaning. It aims to maintain a close relationship with SL. Additionally, this strategy can be used when the cultural term is universal or widely understood, thus minimizing the need for explanatory additions or substitutions.

Excerpt 9:

"Manis, Peng. Bukan **tengik**." (SL)

"Something sweet, Peng. Not **something stale**." (TL)

In the excerpt 9 shows the cultural term "tengik". The subtitle above applies the Direct Translation strategy which involves literal or near-literal translation of cultural-specific items, both in word form and structure. In this data, the word "tengik" is translated as "stale". Tendrils refer to a rotten smell or taste due to oil oxidation, while stale tends to be used for bread or food that is no longer fresh. However, since the context of the dialogue is evaluating the taste of food, the translator chose direct

translation which can still be understood by the TL audience.

Omission

Omission is a strategy in which a source language element is intentionally omitted in translation due to spatial constraints, irrelevance, or potential ambiguity (Pedersen, 2011). This approach is particularly common in subtitling, where screen space and reading time are limited. In *Induk Gajah*, omission is used when the cultural reference is not essential to the main idea of the utterance or when it would distract from the overall flow of the dialogue.

Excerpt 10:

“Mau jualan **gemblong**?” (SL)

“Are you a peddler?” (TL)

In the excerpt 10 shows the cultural term "bereku". The word "bereku" (Batak language for 'my sister') is omitted in the TL subtitles. This is likely due to limited space in the subtitles and because family relationships are not crucial to understanding the scene. According to Pedersen, omission can be a responsible choice if the omitted information is not essential to the overall message, and maintaining the clarity of the subtitles remains a priority (Pedersen, 2011).

Generalization

Generalization is the process of replacing a specific cultural or linguistic item with a more general or higher-order term in the target language (Pedersen, 2011). This strategy is used when a direct equivalent does not exist or would be too vague for the TL audience. Generalization simplifies expression and increases accessibility, although it may reduce the specificity or clarity of the original term. It is a common method for dealing with unfamiliar or overly localized culture-bound items.

Excerpt 11:

“Biar bisa naik **angkot**.” (SL)

“So, I can take **public transportation**.” (TL)

In the excerpt 11 shows the cultural term "angkot". The Generalization Strategy refers to the translation of SL elements using more general terms in the TL because there is no direct equivalent or to improve understanding (Pedersen, 2011, p. 76). In this case, angkot is a type of public transportation typical of Indonesia that does not have an exact equivalent in the target culture. Therefore, it is translated as public transportation.

Specification

Specification is a strategy that preserves the source language term while adding explanatory information to aid comprehension (Pedersen, 2011). This is usually done through apposition or glossary in parentheses. The purpose of specification is to preserve the original cultural reference while ensuring that the TL reader can understand the meaning. This increases cultural transparency and supports

intercultural communication without replacing the original term.

Excerpt 12:

“Dia kalau berantem, suka **matok**” (SL)

“When she gets fights, she **attacks the pressure points.**” (TL)

In the excerpt 12 shows the use of Specification strategy in translating the Indonesian term “matok” into “attacks the pressure points.” In Indonesian, “matok” in this context is an informal or figurative expression, often used to describe someone’s action in making comments or criticisms especially on sensitive issues or someone’s emotional weak points. This is in line with Specification Strategy which involves enriching the target text with detailed explanations to aid comprehension. By translating “matok” into “attacks the pressure points,” the subtitle offers the visualizer a clearer picture of the emotional character while still maintaining the intent and effect of the original expression.

The Relationship of Subtitle Strategy and Quality of Cultural-Specific Items in Induk Gajah

The subtitle quality of Cultural-Specific Items in *Induk Gajah* was evaluated using Pedersen’s (2017) FAR model, which assesses Functional Equivalence, Acceptability, and Readability with penalty scores for varying levels of deviation, as shown in the following table.

Table 3. The findings of subtitle quality

Penalty	Subtitle Quality			Data
	Functional Equivalence	Acceptability	Readability	
No Error (0)	-	-	-	85
Semantic Minor (0.5)	28	-	-	28
Semantic Standard (1)	20	-	-	20
Semantic Serious (2)	9	-	-	9
Minor (0.25) Standard (0.5)	-	2	-	2
Serious (1)	-	2	3	5
	-	-	-	0
		Total		149

The provided table above presents the assessment of subtitles based on the FAR Model proposed by Pedersen (2017). As shown in Table 4.26, the most subtitles (85 out of 150) received no penalty, indicating high overall quality with accurate meaning, appropriate language usage, and good readability. However, in terms of Functional Equivalence, 57 subtitles received penalties with 28 items rated as Minor Semantic (0.5), 20 items as Standard Semantic (1), and 9 items as Serious Semantic (2). These scores indicate that most of the problems occurred in conveying the intended

meaning of the CSI.

Additionally, the Acceptability parameter recorded 4 penalties, with 2 minor errors and 2 standard errors, indicating some cases of awkward or unnatural language in the target text. Similarly, Readability issues occurred in 3 subtitles, all with standard penalties, reflecting minor formatting or timing issues. Furthermore, the subtitles show a high level of quality, with most of the CSIs being rendered accurately.

Meanwhile, considering the third question in this study sought to determine the relationship between subtitle strategy and subtitle quality, this study will present an assessment of subtitle quality based on the strategies used. In the next session, this study will present several tables containing the relationship between each subtitle strategy used and subtitle quality.

Furthermore, analysis using Pedersen's FAR model shows that Functional Equivalence is the most vulnerable aspect of subtitle quality. Many CSIs lose some of their original emotional, cultural, or pragmatic function due to inadequate transfer. This is a common challenge in audiovisual subtitling, as noted by Pedersen (2017), who notes that translators must balance fidelity to the source with acceptability in the target. Acceptability and Readability, while important, are often easier to maintain than meaning itself. However, compared to previous studies, this study adds a qualitative layer by linking subtitling strategies to the resulting quality scores. This study is contrary to that of Kurnia & Bram (2021) who focused primarily on the frequency of translation techniques but did not analyse how these techniques affect meaning or acceptability. This study fills this gap by showing that strategies such as specification and generalization, although less frequent, produce higher quality subtitles than the commonly used substitutions or omissions.

DISCUSSION

This study explored how Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs) in *Induk Gajah* were translated into English subtitles and how the selected subtitling strategies affected subtitle quality as measured by Pedersen's FAR model (functional equivalence, acceptability, and readability). The findings demonstrate that subtitling CSIs in a culturally dense Indonesian series requires strategic flexibility, as no single strategy consistently guarantees optimal quality across all FAR parameters. Instead, translators negotiate between preserving cultural specificity and ensuring viewer comprehension within the spatial and temporal constraints of subtitling.

Overall, the findings indicate a predominance of target-language-oriented strategies, particularly generalization and substitution, which reflects the translator's priority to maintain narrative clarity and readability for international audiences. This tendency supports Pedersen's (2011) assertion that target-oriented strategies are often favoured in subtitles when cultural references risk overloading viewers with unfamiliar information. In *Induk Gajah*, many CSIs are embedded in everyday family interactions, humour, and emotionally charged scenes, making immediate comprehension crucial for narrative continuity. As a result, strategies that reduce

cultural opacity tend to yield higher acceptability and readability scores.

Nevertheless, source-oriented strategies, especially retention, also play a significant role in maintaining cultural authenticity. Retained CSIs related to Batak kinship terms, food items, and social practices function as markers of local identity and contribute to the series' cultural atmosphere. This finding aligns with [Gambier's \(2018\)](#) view that contemporary audiovisual translation increasingly embraces cultural visibility rather than full domestication. However, the FAR analysis reveals that retention often produces uneven quality outcomes: while functional equivalence may be partially achieved through visual support, acceptability and readability scores tend to decrease when viewers lack sufficient contextual clues. This confirms that cultural preservation alone does not guarantee subtitle quality, particularly for audiences unfamiliar with Indonesian cultural contexts.

The interaction between CSI categories and subtitling strategies further illustrates this complexity. CSIs related to social life and customs were more frequently rendered using generalization or substitution, suggesting that culturally embedded practices are often simplified to ensure accessibility. In contrast, CSIs associated with personal life or private passions were more likely to be retained or directly translated, as these items are closely tied to character identity and emotional expression. This pattern supports [Newmark's \(2010\)](#) claim that not all cultural items carry the same communicative weight; some require preservation for characterisation, while others can be adapted without significant loss of meaning.

In terms of subtitle quality, the FAR evaluation shows that generalization and substitution generally produce higher overall scores, particularly in readability. These strategies allow subtitles to remain concise and cognitively manageable, which is essential in fast-paced dialogue scenes. This finding echoes [Yang's \(2023\)](#) argument that readability is often the decisive factor in subtitle effectiveness, even when some cultural nuances are reduced. Conversely, omission although efficient in dealing with redundancy or low-salience CSIs occasionally results in reduced functional equivalence when omitted items carry implicit cultural or emotional meaning. This highlights the risk of overusing omission in culturally rich narratives. Interestingly, several instances show that source-oriented strategies achieved acceptable FAR scores when supported by multimodal elements such as visuals, gestures, or situational context. This supports [Pedersen's \(2017\)](#) emphasis on the multimodal nature of subtitling, where meaning construction extends beyond linguistic transfer. In *Induk Gajah*, visual representations of food, family gatherings, and social settings often compensate for the lack of explicit explanation in subtitles, enabling viewers to infer meaning even when CSIs are retained.

Despite these contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, CSI identification inevitably involves subjective judgement, and alternative classifications might emerge if different evaluators applied Newmark's categories. Second, although the FAR model provides a structured quality assessment, scoring remains interpretative and may vary across raters despite consistent criteria. Third,

the analysis is limited to three episodes of a single series, which constrains the generalisability of the findings to other Indonesian audiovisual products with different cultural densities or genres.

Nonetheless, this study contributes to audiovisual translation research by demonstrating how subtitlers navigate cultural specificity and quality constraints in Indonesian streaming content. The findings reinforce the view that effective CSI translation is not about choosing between foreignization and domestication, but about strategically combining both approaches depending on cultural function, narrative importance, and multimodal support

Practically, the study underscores the role of subtitlers as cultural mediators rather than mere linguistic translators. Awareness of CSI types, strategy impacts, and quality implications can inform professional subtitling practice and training, particularly for content intended for global platforms. Future research may extend this work by incorporating audience reception studies, comparing multiple Indonesian series, or examining how platform-specific guidelines influence CSI translation choices.

In conclusion, the subtitling of CSIs in *Induk Gajah* illustrates that high-quality subtitles emerge from a careful balance between cultural representation and viewer accessibility. By integrating CSI classification, subtitling strategies, and FAR-based quality assessment, this study offers a comprehensive perspective on how Indonesian cultural narratives are reshaped for international audiences in the digital streaming era.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate how Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs) in *Induk Gajah* were rendered into English subtitles, the subtitling strategies employed to translate these items, and how such strategies affected subtitle quality as measured through Pedersen's FAR model (functional equivalence, acceptability, and readability). By integrating CSI classification, subtitling strategy analysis, and quality assessment, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive account of how cultural meaning is negotiated in Indonesian audiovisual translation for global audiences.

The findings reveal that no single subtitling strategy consistently guarantees optimal quality across all FAR parameters. Instead, translators employ a combination of target-oriented strategies particularly generalization and substitution and source-oriented strategies such as retention, depending on the cultural function, narrative importance, and multimodal support of each CSI. Target-oriented strategies generally resulted in higher readability and acceptability, ensuring narrative flow and viewer comprehension, while retention contributed to cultural visibility but occasionally reduced acceptability when contextual support was limited. These results demonstrate that subtitling CSIs involves a continuous negotiation between cultural representation and accessibility rather than a binary choice between domestication and foreignization.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically,

this study reinforces the relevance of Pedersen's subtitling framework and FAR model in analysing culturally rich audiovisual texts, while also highlighting the importance of considering CSI categories and multimodal context in quality assessment. Practically, the findings underscore the role of subtitlers as cultural mediators who must make informed strategic decisions that shape how Indonesian cultural identities are perceived by international audiences. For practitioners and training institutions, this study suggests that effective subtitling requires not only linguistic competence but also cultural awareness and sensitivity to platform-specific constraints.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the identification and categorisation of CSIs inevitably involve subjective judgement, which may lead to alternative classifications by different researchers. Second, although the FAR model offers a structured evaluation framework, quality assessment remains interpretative in nature. Third, the dataset was limited to three episodes of a single television series, which restricts the generalisability of the findings to other genres, platforms, or Indonesian cultural contexts with different levels of cultural density.

Future research is therefore encouraged to expand the scope of analysis by examining a wider range of Indonesian audiovisual products, including films or series from different regions and genres. Incorporating audience reception studies would also provide valuable insights into how international viewers interpret retained or adapted CSIs. Additionally, comparative studies across streaming platforms or the integration of cognitive approaches such as processing load or eye-tracking could further enrich understanding of how cultural content is processed in subtitling.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the successful subtitling of Cultural-Specific Items in *Induk Gajah* relies on strategic flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and careful attention to subtitle quality constraints. By illuminating the complex relationship between CSI types, subtitling strategies, and FAR-based quality outcomes, this research contributes to ongoing discussions in audiovisual translation and offers a nuanced perspective on translating Indonesian cultural narratives in the global streaming era.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

Tsani, A. R.: Conceptualization (lead), methodology (lead), writing–original draft (lead), review (supporting). Junining, E.: Conceptualization (supporting), methodology (supporting), writing –original draft (supporting), review (lead), editing (supporting). Hariyanto, S.: Conceptualization (supporting), methodology (supporting), writing –original draft (supporting), review (lead), editing (lead).

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