

The Negotiation of Indonesian Cultural Identity in the Arabic Subtitle Translation of *Habibie & Ainun*

Alsadika Ziaul Haq^{1*}, Zainal Arifin Ahmad², Abdul Munip³, Adhi Setiyawan⁴

¹⁻⁴UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta

Abstract

Audiovisual translation constitutes a critical site of intercultural mediation, particularly when films convey culture-specific meanings across linguistically and socially distinct audiences. This study investigates the negotiation of Indonesian cultural identity in the Arabic subtitle translation of *Habibie & Ainun*. Employing a qualitative descriptive design with comparative and interpretative analysis, the study examines Indonesian dialogue units containing culture-specific references and their corresponding Arabic subtitles. The data were collected through audiovisual observation, transcription, coding, and classification based on social, material, and religious cultural domains. The findings demonstrate that cultural identity negotiation is most pronounced in social-cultural expressions, including honorifics, kinship terms, colloquial expressions, idioms, and interpersonal politeness markers. These items were frequently rendered through pragmatic equivalence, cultural substitution, modulation, and domestication to preserve relational meaning and target-language naturalness. Material-cultural references, such as domestic objects, spatial expressions, and technological terms, were more often translated through literal or descriptive equivalence because their referents were relatively accessible within the Arabic cultural framework. Religious expressions showed the lowest degree of cultural resistance due to shared Islamic linguistic and theological roots, although contextual modulation remained necessary in emotionally charged utterances. The study concludes that Arabic subtitling of *Habibie & Ainun* functions not as a mechanical linguistic transfer but as a culturally situated process of meaning negotiation. The findings underscore the role of subtitle translators as intercultural mediators who balance Indonesian cultural visibility with Arabic audience comprehensibility.

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

***Alsadika Ziaul Haq**, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta. Email: alsadika.haq@student.uin-suka.ac.id

Introduction

Audiovisual translation functions as a strategic mode of intercultural mediation across ideological, linguistic, and sociocultural boundaries (Sulistyo & Felayati, 2023; Tyulenev, 2023; Sajarwa et al., 2023). Within the circulation of Indonesian audiovisual content to Arabic-speaking audiences, subtitling is not merely a technical process of rendering spoken dialogue into written target-language text; rather, it is a complex process of negotiating meaning between distinct systems of cultural knowledge, communicative conventions, and ideological expectations (Debbas & Haider, 2020; Mukminin & Sajarwa, 2025; Mukminin et al., 2026). Accordingly, subtitle translators must balance semantic accuracy, audiovisual readability, pragmatic appropriateness, and cultural intelligibility when transferring dialogue across languages. Translators frequently encounter culture-specific items, including honorifics, kinship terms, idioms, religious expressions, social rituals, material objects, and national symbols, whose meanings cannot be transferred through literal equivalence alone (Newmark, 1988; Fatin & Cholsy, 2022; Sukaesih et al., 2025). The translational challenge

becomes particularly acute when a film is strongly embedded in hybrid identities, national narratives, and local social practices, such as “*Habibie & Ainun*,” because the translator must mediate Indonesian cultural meanings without erasing their historical and emotional significance for Arabic-speaking audiences (Arrasyid, 2023; Mukminin & Sajarwa, 2025; Irianti, 2025).

Conceptually, this study understands subtitle translation as a process of cultural identity negotiation. Cultural identity is not treated as a fixed entity that can be transferred intact from a source text to a target text; instead, it is continuously articulated through language, social relations, collective memory, material practices, religious expression, and ideological positioning. In audiovisual translation, identity is further shaped by the interaction between verbal dialogue, visual images, gesture, setting, soundtrack, and narrative context. Therefore, subtitle translation may preserve, reframe, soften, generalize, or selectively omit particular cultural meanings in accordance with the translator’s interpretation of the target audience’s linguistic and sociocultural expectations (Tyulenev, 2023; Sajarwa et al., 2023; Mukminin & Sajarwa, 2025).

This perspective is closely related to the notion of culture-specific items, which refers to words, expressions, references, or practices that are deeply embedded in a particular cultural environment. Such items may include terms of address, kinship systems, culinary references, institutional expressions, religious formulae, traditional customs, and idiomatic utterances. Because these elements often carry meanings that exceed their lexical form, subtitle translators must determine whether they should retain, explain, adapt, generalize, substitute, or omit the cultural reference. These decisions influence not only the intelligibility of the subtitle but also the representation of source-cultural identity in the target text (Newmark, 1988; Debbas & Haider, 2020; Sukaesih et al., 2025).

The present study is also informed by the tension between domestication and foreignization. Domestication refers to translation choices that make source-cultural expressions more familiar and accessible by aligning them with target-language norms and target-cultural expectations. Conversely, foreignization retains selected source-cultural features in order to preserve cultural difference and maintain the visibility of the source culture. In subtitle translation, these strategies often operate simultaneously. A translator may domesticate an honorific to preserve the interpersonal force of respect, while retaining a religious expression or national symbol to preserve Indonesian cultural specificity. Therefore, domestication and foreignization should not be understood as mutually exclusive procedures but as strategic orientations that must be assessed in relation to communicative purpose, audiovisual context, cultural sensitivity, and ideological implication (Fatin & Cholsy, 2022; Addriadi et al., 2025; Sajarwa et al., 2023).

The urgency of examining this process is closely connected to the expanding circulation of Indonesian cultural products through digital platforms and transnational media networks. How cultural references are negotiated in subtitles may influence the extent to which Indonesian narratives are understood, accepted, or misinterpreted by audiences in the Arab world. Literal translation may preserve lexical form but fail to convey pragmatic intention, cultural resonance, or emotional force; conversely, excessive adaptation may improve accessibility while reducing the visibility of Indonesian cultural identity (Tyulenev, 2023; Debbas & Haider, 2020; El-Farahaty & Alwazna, 2024). For this reason, culturally responsive subtitle translation requires adaptive strategies that enable translators to maintain both source-cultural integrity and target-audience comprehensibility. In this regard, audiovisual translators function as intercultural mediators who

negotiate cultural distance, ideological sensitivity, and communicative acceptability within the limited spatial and temporal constraints of subtitle production (Anik et al., 2025; Tyulenev, 2023; Mukminin et al., 2026).

Existing studies have examined cultural translation from various perspectives, including cultural identity negotiation, translation strategies, translation techniques, ideological orientation, and procedural frameworks. Research on cultural identity negotiation has demonstrated that translated texts often become spaces where cultural values are selectively maintained, resisted, or reconstructed in response to target-language expectations (Arrasyid, 2023; Fatin & Cholsy, 2022; Sajarwa et al., 2023). Studies focusing on translation strategies have highlighted the importance of communicative adaptation, semantic adjustment, and audience-oriented decision-making when translators encounter culturally marked expressions (Riana, 2021; Syamsinar et al., 2023; Kusnadin et al., 2025). In addition, studies of translation techniques have shown that cultural terms may be handled through borrowing, calque, transposition, modulation, explicitation, cultural substitution, and descriptive equivalence, depending on the relationship between the source and target cultures (Dhanar & Kurniawati, 2022; Addriadi et al., 2025; Sukaesih et al., 2025).

International scholarship on Arabic subtitling further confirms that audiovisual translation is inseparable from cultural and ideological mediation. Debbas and Haider (2020) found that Arabic subtitles of English television series often require translators to negotiate taboo language, humor, social norms, and culturally sensitive references. Similarly, recent studies have indicated that subtitle translators must carefully manage gendered expressions, emotionally charged dialogue, and culturally specific social practices because linguistic equivalence alone may not guarantee pragmatic acceptability in the Arabic target text (Abu Tair et al., 2024; Anik et al., 2025; Mukminin et al., 2026). These findings suggest that subtitle translation into Arabic is shaped by a complex interaction between source-text meaning, target-language conventions, religious sensitivity, social hierarchy, and viewer expectations.

Within Indonesian Translation Studies, research has increasingly explored how local culture is represented and negotiated across languages. Sajarwa et al. (2023) demonstrated that the translation of French cultural references into Javanese involved selective cultural adaptation and identity reconstruction. Mukminin and Sajarwa (2025) examined the Arabic translation of the Indonesian novel “Gadis Kretek” and found that Indonesian cultural references required strategic negotiation to remain meaningful for Arabic readers. Likewise, Sukaesih et al. (2025) showed that preserving cultural elements in translated Sundanese short stories demands a balance between source-text authenticity and target-reader accessibility. These studies collectively demonstrate that Indonesian cultural identity cannot be transferred through direct lexical correspondence alone; rather, it requires translators to make interpretative choices concerning cultural visibility, semantic clarity, and pragmatic relevance.

Despite these contributions, the existing literature remains limited in its explanation of how cultural identity is negotiated within Indonesian–Arabic audiovisual translation, particularly in films that combine intimate interpersonal relationships, national history, technological modernity, social hierarchy, and religious expression. Most previous studies have concentrated on literary works, isolated cultural terms, translation techniques, or contemporary youth-oriented audiovisual narratives. Consequently, the Indonesian–Arabic audiovisual pathway remains comparatively underexplored, even though it provides a distinctive context in which cultural proximity and cultural

difference coexist. Indonesia and Arabic-speaking societies share important Islamic references; however, they differ in linguistic structure, forms of politeness, social hierarchy, national symbolism, and everyday communicative practices (Mukminin & Sajarwa, 2025; Sajarwa et al., 2023; Irianti, 2025).

A particularly relevant study was conducted by Irianti (2025), who investigated the negotiation of Indonesian cultural identity in the Arabic subtitle translation of “Dear David.” The study revealed that cultural adaptation, pragmatic equivalence, and selective reformulation were used to make Indonesian cultural references more comprehensible for Arabic-speaking audiences. However, “Dear David” primarily represents contemporary youth culture, digital interaction, sexuality, and urban social experience. In contrast, “*Habibie & Ainun*” presents a substantially different cultural and ideological landscape. The film constructs Indonesian identity through family values, interpersonal intimacy, education, professional aspiration, technological development, national service, political memory, and religious expression. Therefore, the cultural negotiation found in “*Habibie & Ainun*” cannot be fully explained through findings derived from youth-oriented narratives or literary translation alone (Irianti, 2025; Mukminin & Sajarwa, 2025; Sajarwa et al., 2023).

The primary research gap, therefore, concerns the lack of an integrated analysis of how Arabic subtitles negotiate Indonesian cultural identity across multiple cultural domains in a historical-biographical film. Previous studies have generally examined social, linguistic, or cultural expressions in isolation. However, limited research has explored how social culture, material culture, and religious expression interact in the subtitle translation of a film that represents both personal and national identity. This gap is significant because the translation of honorifics, idioms, domestic objects, institutional references, and religious formulae may not only affect textual meaning but also reshape the way Indonesian identity is represented for Arabic-speaking viewers (Debbas & Haider, 2020; Mukminin & Sajarwa, 2025; Irianti, 2025).

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated examination of cultural identity negotiation across three interconnected domains: social culture, material culture, and religious expression. Social culture includes honorifics, kinship terms, colloquial expressions, interpersonal address, politeness strategies, and national references. Material culture includes domestic objects, spatial references, transport, food, and other physical artefacts that construct the characters’ everyday environment. Religious expression includes Islamic formulae, divine references, and emotionally charged spiritual utterances that may appear linguistically familiar in Arabic but retain distinctive pragmatic functions in Indonesian discourse. By examining these domains together, this study moves beyond the identification of isolated translation techniques and explains how subtitle choices collectively reconstruct Indonesian cultural identity for Arabic-speaking audiences.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the negotiation of Indonesian cultural identity in the Arabic subtitle translation of “*Habibie & Ainun*.” Specifically, the study seeks to identify culture-specific elements represented in the Indonesian dialogue, classify these elements into social, material, and religious cultural domains, analyse the translation strategies employed in the Arabic subtitles, and interpret the implications of these strategies for the representation of Indonesian cultural identity. Through this analysis, the study investigates the extent to which Indonesian cultural values are preserved, adapted, reformulated, or omitted in order to negotiate Arabic linguistic conventions and sociocultural expectations. The study is expected to contribute theoretically to

audiovisual translation and cultural identity research, while also providing practical insight for translators, subtitle editors, and audiovisual content providers who mediate Indonesian cultural products for Arabic-speaking audiences.

To maintain analytical precision, this study is limited to the textual and cultural negotiation of selected dialogue units in the Indonesian and Arabic subtitles of “*Habibie & Ainun*.” The analysis focuses on cultural entities related to social interaction, material culture, and religious expression that are linguistically represented in the source text and rendered in the Arabic target text. The study does not investigate audience reception, cognitive response, subtitle readability, frame-rate limitations, or technical subtitling constraints. Instead, it concentrates on semantic, pragmatic, and ideological shifts produced through translation choices. These boundaries are deliberately established to enable a focused interpretation of how Indonesian cultural identity is negotiated and reconstructed in Arabic subtitles.

Method

The data in this study boils down to elements of cultural identity embodied in linguistic units basically, specific words and phrases. We pulled our raw material directly from the film's subtitles, looking at both the Indonesian and Arabic versions of the movie directed by Faozan Rizal and distributed by Netflix Indonesia. So why *Habibie & Ainun*? We picked it because it's an epic biopic that really nails the representation of hybrid identity and nationalism. Its sheer popularity proves it has serious pull when it comes to projecting Indonesian identity in modern, digital spaces (Irianti, 2025). The film is packed with rich cultural layers. It captures deep local roots, the inevitable friction with Western norms, and a pure, idealistic dedication to nation-building. But beyond just the complex cultural markers threaded through the dialogue, we chose this film for how the main characters interact socially and imagine their world. All of this throws some unique curveballs at the translator. It is exceptionally tricky to negotiate these sensitive cultural values and local idioms into Arabic in a way that stays accurate but still actually talks to the audience.

Methodologically, we went with a qualitative descriptive design. According to (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), this approach is exactly what you need to unpack meanings buried in texts using non-numeric data (Ulfah et al., 2022). Here, we applied it to track how cultural identity is mapped out across the Indonesian source text (ST) and the Arabic target text (TT). We analyzed this identity through specific linguistic units dialogue, idiomatic expressions, and distinct speech styles that really capture the crossroads of different cultural landscapes. On top of that, we brought in a comparative method to weigh the equivalence and track any cultural shifts between the ST and the TT. As Koster points out (Malmkjær, 2018), using a comparative lens lets you systematically break down both the linguistic and cultural transformations happening in the translation (Aji, 2020).

The data collection kicked off with audiovisual observation. We essentially watched and extracted the cultural entities straight from the source and target dialogues. From there, the data was transliterated into Latin script, coded, and organized into a comparative matrix. Next, we sorted the whole corpus using standard cultural taxonomies (Binta, 2021; Newmark, 1988). By lining the ST up against the TT, the study scrutinizes the translator's strategic playbook whether they chose to retain, adapt, or completely alter cultural references to navigate Arabic linguistic rules and sociocultural sensitivities. The final interpretation pulls all this together to map out the exact cultural negotiation

mechanisms at play. Ultimately, it uncovers what all these translation choices mean for how Indonesian identity is served up to an Arab-speaking crowd.

Result and Discussion

Result

The findings of this study make one thing abundantly clear: translating the subtitles of *Habibie & Ainun* into Arabic acts as a highly dynamic arena for cultural identity negotiation. The way these adaptation strategies roll out is completely multidimensional. What actually drives the translator's choices is heavily dictated by the specific taxonomy of the cultural entities being translated (Debbas & Haider, 2020). When you look closely at the comparative data matrix, there is hard empirical proof that the translator's agency goes way beyond just hunting for basic linguistic equivalence. Instead, they actively step in to recalibrate meaning on both a pragmatic and ideological level. This kind of compromising maneuver isn't just a stylistic choice it's absolutely crucial. It is exactly what ensures the underlying Indonesian narrative actually strikes a chord with the social institutions, expectations, and the broader value ecology of an Arab audience (Ahmadova, 2025).

Tabel 1. Pola Negosiasi dalam Penerjemahan Budaya Sosial

ST	TT
Sekalian besuk keluarga Besari (DD, 6:47)	وزورا آل بساري أيضا (DD, 6:47)
Daa, Maam (DD, 6:54)	إلى اللقاء يا أمي (DD, 6:54)
Berani ngga kamu ngerayu dia (DD, 7:15)	أتحداك أن تتحدث إليها (DD, 7:15)
Kalian marahan (DD, 7:57)	أنتما متشاجران (DD, 7:57)
Ainun, Cantiknyaa . (DD, 10:23)	يا لك من جميلة (DD, 10:23)
Harus, harus kerasan mau bagaimana lagi (DD, 11:57)	هذا أمر لا بدّ منه، لا بدّ أن أشعر أنني في وطني وليس لدي خيار (DD, 11:57)
Rudi dibuat linglung gara-garanya (DD, 13:27)	لقد قلبت رأسا على عقب (DD, 13:27)
Mau ganteng atau funky , tapi kalau tak sfrekuensi percuma to? (DD, 13:38)	الوسامة أو الثراء ليسا مفيدان إن لم يكن بينهما انسجام (DD, 13:38)
Ainun, ayo masuk. Ra elok . (DD, 14:58)	لنذهب إلى الداخل، هذا ليس لانقا (DD, 14:58)
Cempluuk... (DD, 19:01)	عزيزتي (DD, 19:01)
Ibu pertiwi , engkau adalah janji pusaka tersakti (DD, 24:51)	وطني العزيز أنت مرشدي، قسم قديم قوي (DD, 24:51)
Penganten a sumping (DD, 24:51)	وصلت العروس (DD, 24:51)
Gantengmu hilang kalau cemberut begitu (DD, 44:04)	تفقد وسامتك عندما تعبس هكذا (DD, 44:04)

Bung Rudi Habibi! (DD, 47:21)	سيّد رودي حبيبي (DD, 47:21)
Bapak bisa bersinergi dengan kita (DD, 50:58)	ونأمل حقًا أن تتمكن من تشكيل تحالف معنا (DD, 50:58)
Tentu dengan backing yang sangat kuat (DD, 51:05)	بوجود أناس نافذين يدعمونك (DD, 51:05)
Dari lipstik merah itu (DD, 56:37)	من أثر أحمر الشفافة ذلك (DD, 56:37)
Ahh kamu ada-ada saja (DD,57:00)	أيتها المخادعة (DD,57:00)
Lebih kayak broker proyek bu (DD, 1:00:59)	بل هو أشبه بوسيط مشروعات (DD, 1:00:59)
Calo bu (DD, 1:01:04)	رجل وسيط يا سيدتي (DD, 1:01:04)
Saya menemukan ini di parcel yang baru diterima (DD, 1:02:06)	وجدت هذه داخل الحزمة التي تلقيتها للتو (DD, 1:02:06)
Pak , bangun pak, udah pagi pak (DD, 1:04:23)	سيدي، استيقظ لقد حلّ الصباح (DD, 1:04:23)
Memangnya kamu ke kantor merem ? (DD, 1:05:23)	كنت في المكتب وعينك مغلقتان (DD, 1:05:23)
Kamu tuh umur segini masih gombal (DD, 1:05:46)	انظر إلى حالك، مبتذل جدًا حتى في عمرك هذا (DD, 1:05:46)
Show must go on! (DD, 1:11:54)	لا بد أن يستمر العرض (DD, 1:11:54)
Reformasi tidak akan 100 persen(DD, 1:23:01)	فإن حركة الإصلاح لم تتحقق بشكل كامل (DD, 1:23:01)
Rumah di sana didemo bu. (DD, 1:23:33)	المتظاهرون خارج المنزل (DD, 1:23:33)
Bu Ainun itu sangat perfeksionis	إنها من محبي الكمال (DD, 1:24:07)
Kamu ini benar-benar keras kepala (DD, 1:27:24)	أنت عنيدة جدًا (DD, 1:27:24)
Yowes sakarepmu (DD, 1:27:24)	حسنًا، إذن افعل ما تشاء (DD, 1:27:24)

Looking at the data in Table 1, the friction of negotiating social culture becomes incredibly obvious in how the translator wrestles with honorifics, idioms, and socio-political language. Instead of sticking to a literal translation, they actively lean into pragmatic adaptation to align the text with Arab social hierarchies a classic case of domestication. For instance, local honorifics like *Pak* and *Bung* get swapped out for *Sayyid* (سيّد). This successfully carries over the core sense of formality and respect without clashing with target language greeting conventions. Interestingly, the Westernized *Maam* is reframed as *Ummi* (أمّي). This shift isn't just about finding an equivalent word; it's a piece of ideological negotiation. It pulls the dialogue back into a characteristically Middle Eastern familial intimacy, stripping away the colonial or Western linguistic baggage found in the source text.

The translator also relies heavily on functional equivalence when dealing with affective expressions and highly localized cultural phrases like *cempluk*, *ra elok*, and *yowes sakarepmu*. Take *cempluk*, for example a term of endearment deeply tied to physical traits. It gets negotiated into 'azizati (عزيزتي), choosing to protect the emotional function of the dialogue rather than preserving its original form. We see the exact same logic with socio-political vocabulary and loanwords like *besuk*, *reformasi*, and *calo*. These are transmitted through explicit lexical equivalents like *zara*, *harakat al-ishlah*, and *wasith*. Leaning into this strategy shows a clear effort to strip away any ambiguity. Metaphors or cultural terms that might otherwise trigger a breakdown in meaning are compressed into straightforward, transparent expressions that fit seamlessly into the cognitive framework of an Arab audience.

Tabel 2. Pola Negosiasi dalam Penerjemahan Budaya Material

No.	ST	TT
1.	Ranjangnya mau ditaruh dimana (DD,1:27:14)	أين سنضع المهد (1:27:14)
2.	Penghasilan saya memang belum cukup untuk menyewa flat yang lebih besar (DD, 27:28)	لا أجنبي مالا كافيا لاستئجار شقة أكبر (DD, 27:28)
3.	Masak sop , tapi terlalu matang (DD, 34:38)	حساء، ولكنني طهوته أكثر من اللازم (DD, 34:38)
4.	Kita ini ibarat gerbong , masuk kedalam terowongan panjang dan gelap (DD, 34:55)	نحن أشبه بعربات القطار ندخل نفقا وهو مضلم وطويل (DD, 34:55)
5.	Jangan lupa truk terbangmu (DD, 36:32)	لا تنس شاحنتك الطائرة (DD, 36:32)
6.	Proyeknya banyak & vital (DD, 1:00:45)	لديه الكثير من المشاريع المهمة (DD, 1:00:45)

In Table 2, the breakdown of material culture shows a clear hybrid strategy at play, blending both foreignization and domestication. Material culture represents the physical anchors in the characters' daily ecosystem. Translating these objects requires a delicate touch so you don't end up warping the visual backdrop of the film itself. When dealing with domestic items, the translator leans heavily on cultural substitution. Words like *ranjang* and *flat* are directly mapped onto *mahd* (مهد) and *syaqqah* (شقة). This move clearly shows a deliberate effort to build familiar cognitive associations for Arab viewers, especially when framing intimate, personal spaces.

On the flip side, objects tied to modernity or those with universal referents like *gerbong*, *truk terbang*, and *proyek* are handled through literal equivalence or descriptive translation. The phrase *truk terbang*, used as a quirky metaphor for an airplane, is actually preserved literally as *syahinatuka at-tha'irah* (شاحنتك الطائرة). Keeping it word-for-word like this protects the highly personal banter uniquely shared between Habibie and Ainun. Conceptually, the negotiation patterns in this domain tell us something interesting material elements are far more forgiving when it comes to retaining their original flavor compared to social ones. It essentially proves that the modernization and intellectual milestones embodied by Habibie's work can effortlessly cross language barriers without sparking any real cultural friction.

Tabel 3. Pola Negosiasi dalam Penerjemahan Istilah-Istilah Keagamaan

No.	ST	TT
1.	Ya Allah cuci lukamu (DD,33:45)	يا إلهي، اغسل جرحك

		(DD,33:45)
2.	Alhamdulillah (DD,55:59)	الحمد لله (DD,55:59)
3.	Demi Allah saya bersumpah (DD,1:17:48)	أقسم بالله أن أفي بالتزاماتي (DD,1:17:48)
4.	Dengan ucapan Bismillahirrahmanirrahim (DD,1:57:42)	قَاتِلَا بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ (DD,1:57:42)

Table 3 pulls back the curtain on theological negotiation, highlighting a massive cultural overlap between Indonesia and the Arab world. Since most Indonesian religious expressions are lifted directly from Islamic-Arabic traditions, the translator actually gets a massive head start. There is practically zero ideological resistance to fight through. Everyday terms like *Alhamdulillah* and *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* are kept completely intact through pure retention. Linguistically and pragmatically, they already occupy the exact same semantic real estate in both languages.

That being said, negotiation still very much happens on an affective level. Take the phrase *Ya Allah*. In highly emotional dialogue, it actually gets modulated into *Ya Ilahi* (يا إلهي). Shifting from the absolute divine name to a possessive pronoun (My God) is a textbook example of narrative framing. Within Arabic linguistic orthodoxy, *Ya Ilahi* carries a very specific weight. It is the go-to expression in cinematic contexts for channeling deep despair or an intimately personal plea. This proves something pretty fascinating. Even when you share the exact same religious bedrock, the translator still has to run some fine tuned micro-linguistic recalibrations. It's the only way to ensure Indonesia's brand of moderate Islamic religiosity sounds entirely natural and hits the right contextual notes within Arabic drama conventions.

Synthesizing all these findings, the cultural identity negotiation in the Arabic subtitles of *Habibie & Ainun* plays out massively across three main arenas: socio-cultural institutions, material culture, and religious expression. On the social front, the sheer gap in communication styles between the two nations demands some heavy pragmatic recalibration. Specific vocabulary like *besuk*, *merem*, *ganteng*, and *ibu pertiwi* tend to get pushed through using a purely literal approach. But uniquely Indonesian affective and idiomatic expressions like *cempluk* or *ada-ada aja kamu* expose a sharp linguistic contrast. Source metaphors and euphemisms basically have to be stripped down into much more explicit, straightforward utterances to match Arabic rhetorical conventions. Honorifics like *mam*, *bung*, and *pak* are adapted straight into their socio-cultural equivalents, like *ummi* and *sayyid*. Executing this kind of pragmatic equivalence maneuver does exactly what it needs to: it keeps the social hierarchy and level of intimacy completely intact while bowing to the target audience's axiology of politeness.

In the realm of material culture, negotiation takes shape as a tight hybrid between preserving authenticity and cognitive adaptation. Physical and spatial entities loaded with cultural memory get tweaked using cultural substitution. You see this clearly when *ranjang* is represented as *mahd*, and *flat* as *syaqqah*. On the flip side, words with universal referential equivalents like *gerbong*, *truk terbang*, and *proyek* along with specific culinary terms like *sop*, are kept strictly literal through descriptive equivalence. This strategy of compromise makes it entirely possible to transplant the Indonesian material landscape right into the cognitive framework of Arab viewers without degrading its local flavor. Theological negotiation also plays a massive role here. Divine references like *Allah* are

frequently recontextualized into lexicons like *Rabb* or *al-Ilah*, depending entirely on the philosophical weight of the dialogue. This religious framing move really reflects the translator's caution. They are actively modulating spiritual expressions so they blend seamlessly with Arab socio-religious orthodoxy, all without blurring the actual substance of the characters' faith.

Taking a step back, this entire constellation of findings cements the true nature of the subtitle translator. They are far more than just agents of linguistic equivalence; they are essentially civilizational mediators. All the strategic discretion they deploy ranging from pragmatic equivalence and cultural substitution to narrative framing is completely dictated by the glaring asymmetry in syntactic structures, socio-religious norms, and overall worldviews between Indonesian and Arab entities. Through the lens of *Habibie & Ainun*, the resulting negotiation of meaning proves that audiovisual translation acts as an absolutely essential diplomatic tool. It is an active space where cultural identity is constantly deconstructed, negotiated, and rebuilt from the ground up to hit that sweet spot of inclusive global acceptability.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that the Arabic subtitle translation of *Habibie & Ainun* is not a neutral transfer of Indonesian dialogue into another linguistic code; rather, it is a process of culturally situated negotiation. In accordance with the research objective, the findings indicate that Indonesian cultural identity is negotiated differently across three domains: social culture, material culture, and religious expressions. Social-cultural items, particularly honorifics, kinship expressions, idioms, and informal interpersonal language, required the greatest degree of adaptation. Expressions such as *Pak*, *Bung*, *Maam*, *cempluk*, *ra elok*, and *yowes sakarepmu* were not transferred literally because their meanings depend heavily on Indonesian social hierarchy, intimacy, and regional speech conventions. Instead, the translator employed pragmatic equivalence, cultural substitution, and modulation to preserve interpersonal meaning and communicative function. In contrast, material-cultural references were more frequently retained through literal or descriptive renderings because many objects, spaces, and modern technological references could be understood through relatively comparable Arabic lexical forms. Religious expressions displayed the lowest level of cultural resistance because Indonesian Islamic expressions such as *Alhamdulillah* and *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* share Arabic linguistic and theological roots. Nevertheless, the modulation of *Ya Allah* into *Ya Ilahi* shows that even shared religious vocabulary requires contextual adjustment to achieve naturalness in Arabic dramatic discourse.

These findings are consistent with international scholarship showing that Arabic audiovisual translation is often shaped by cultural sensitivity, ideological acceptability, and audience-oriented comprehensibility. Debbas and Haider (2020), for example, found that Arabic subtitling of *Family Guy* required extensive negotiation when translating culturally sensitive references associated with religion, sexuality, politics, and humor. Similarly, Obeidat (2023) reported that cultural expressions in Arabic-English television subtitling were frequently rendered through paraphrase, imitation, deletion, and expansion, although inconsistent strategy selection could produce semantic loss. The present study supports these findings by demonstrating that literal equivalence is often insufficient for culture-bound expressions. However, it also differs from these studies because the Indonesian-Arabic subtitle transfer does not primarily involve taboo or highly controversial material. Instead, the most significant challenge concerns the translation of Indonesian social relations, local emotional

expressions, and national-cultural symbolism into an Arabic framework that has different politeness conventions and address systems.

The findings also resonate with Abu-Rayyash and Haider's (2023) analysis of English–Arabic Netflix subtitles, which showed that literal subtitling remained common when the source text contained elements that could be retained without threatening target-language intelligibility. Likewise, the present study found that universal or visually supported material references, such as transportation, housing, food, and professional activities, could often be translated more directly. Nevertheless, the present findings suggest that literal translation is not inherently equivalent to cultural preservation. In the case of expressions embedded in emotional intimacy or Indonesian social hierarchy, literal rendering may weaken the relational meaning carried by the source dialogue. Thus, the appropriate strategy depends not only on the lexical category of the item but also on its pragmatic function within the cinematic interaction. This result reinforces the argument that subtitle translators must interpret the social meaning of an utterance before selecting a linguistic equivalent.

Within the Indonesian context, the findings strongly align with Mukminin and Sajarwa's (2025a) study of the Arabic translation of *Gadis Kretek*, which conceptualized cultural translation as a negotiation between source-culture fidelity and target-culture acceptability. Both studies show that Indonesian cultural identity is not simply preserved or erased; rather, it is selectively reformulated depending on the degree of cultural distance between Indonesian and Arabic communicative norms. More specifically, Mukminin and Sajarwa (2025b) identified borrowing, omission, contextual paraphrasing, alternative paraphrasing, and cultural substitution as important strategies for translating Javanese address terms into Arabic. This pattern is particularly relevant to the present study because honorifics such as *Pak*, *Bung*, and *Maam* also function as social markers of hierarchy, affection, distance, and respect. The present study extends this local evidence by showing that similar negotiation patterns operate not only in literary translation but also in audiovisual translation, where linguistic decisions must interact with visual context, dialogue pace, and cinematic characterization.

Furthermore, the results correspond with Indonesian translation studies that frame cultural transfer as an identity-sensitive practice. Sajarwa et al. (2023) demonstrated that cultural identity negotiation emerges through the interaction between “self” and “other” in translation, particularly when the target language must accommodate unfamiliar cultural references. Likewise, Fatin and Cholsy (2022) showed that translating Japanese cultural identity into Indonesian involves selective preservation and adaptation of culturally marked expressions. The present study differs from these works because Indonesian and Arabic audiences share certain Islamic references while remaining distinct in national history, social hierarchy, kinship practices, and everyday interpersonal expressions. This partial cultural proximity explains why religious terminology was generally retained, whereas social expressions required stronger adaptation. Therefore, cultural distance should not be treated as a uniform condition; it varies across cultural domains and communicative situations.

Theoretical, Pedagogical, and Policy Implications

Theoretically, the findings reinforce the view of translation as meaning negotiation rather than mechanical linguistic substitution. As proposed by Tyulenev (2023), translation operates as an active mediating practice through which unfamiliar meanings are reconstructed for new audiences. The present study develops this perspective by showing that negotiation is domain-sensitive. Social culture required the strongest domestication because honorifics and local idioms carry relational

meanings that cannot be transferred directly. Material culture allowed more literal or descriptive translation because visual information and shared modern references reduced cultural ambiguity. Religious expressions, meanwhile, exhibited a pattern of selective retention because Arabic and Indonesian Muslim communities share certain theological lexicons. Accordingly, the findings refine the domestication–foreignization framework by suggesting that subtitle translators operate along a flexible continuum rather than applying one ideological strategy consistently across an entire film.

Pedagogically, audiovisual translation courses should train students to identify the cultural function of an expression before choosing a translation strategy. Translation learners should practice comparing source and target subtitles, classifying cultural references, justifying the use of retention or adaptation, and evaluating whether subtitle choices preserve interpersonal relations, ideological meaning, and emotional tone. Such activities may strengthen intercultural competence and critical media literacy, particularly when students engage with films distributed through global streaming platforms. However, this study does not directly measure student engagement, emotional well-being, online behavior, or identity formation; therefore, these implications should be interpreted as recommendations for translation education rather than empirical claims about learners. At the policy level, streaming platforms and subtitle providers should establish clearer quality-control procedures for culturally sensitive subtitles, including human review, intercultural consultation, and transparent correction mechanisms. This recommendation is increasingly important in AI-assisted translation environments because human translators remain more reliable than automated systems in achieving cultural sensitivity and contextual fluency (Abdelaal, 2025).

The novelty of this study lies in its focused examination of Indonesian cultural identity negotiation in Arabic subtitles of a nationally significant biographical film. Unlike studies that primarily list translation techniques, this research compares how negotiation operates across social, material, and religious cultural domains. It also contributes to the relatively limited literature on Indonesian-to-Arabic audiovisual translation by demonstrating that cultural proximity does not eliminate translation difficulties. Instead, cultural proximity may reduce resistance in religious vocabulary while intensifying attention to social hierarchy, local idioms, and affective expressions. Methodologically, the use of comparative subtitle data enables the study to connect individual linguistic choices with broader questions of identity representation, cultural diplomacy, and intercultural communication.

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to one Indonesian film and one Arabic subtitle version; consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to all Indonesian–Arabic audiovisual translations. Second, the study focuses on textual and linguistic comparison and does not examine the translator’s decision-making process, subtitle production constraints, audience reception, or the influence of visual and acoustic semiotic resources. Third, the interpretation of negotiation patterns may be influenced by the researchers’ cultural and linguistic perspectives. Future research should examine a larger corpus of Indonesian films across genres, compare subtitles produced by different platforms or translators, conduct interviews with professional subtitlers, and investigate how Arabic-speaking viewers interpret Indonesian cultural references. Reception-based research involving audience questionnaires, focus groups, or eye-tracking methods would be particularly valuable for assessing whether subtitle strategies preserve not only semantic clarity but also the emotional and cultural force of Indonesian cinematic narratives.

Conclusion

This study concludes that translating the subtitles of *Habibie & Ainun* into Arabic goes way beyond a simple linguistic swap. It transforms into a deeply complex process of cultural negotiation. Indonesian cultural identity spanning everything from social dynamics and material entities to theological terminology gets adapted through a strategic playbook of compromises like cultural substitution, modulation, and transposition. This tactical approach works beautifully to close the cultural distance between the source text and the target audience without watering down the clarity of the message. For instance, mapping local honorifics onto Arab social hierarchies and fine-tuning religious expressions offer clear proof of how carefully the translator managed cultural sensitivities to head off any potential resistance. Ultimately, these findings don't just cement the translator's crucial role as a civilizational mediator balancing local roots with target norms. They also successfully fill a glaring gap in the literature regarding the sparse research on audiovisual translation moving specifically from Indonesia into the Middle Eastern landscape.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the thesis that audiovisual translation operates as strategic mediation driven by cultural agents, rather than a mechanical substitution of words. Practically, it offers valuable insights into how Indonesian cultural wisdom can be projected and embraced within an Arab cultural ecology by keeping semantic coherence tight. That said, we have to acknowledge the boundaries of this study. It fixates strictly on a single cinematic work and one specific language pair, meaning the findings can't be broadly generalized just yet. It is also purely text-based, leaving audience reception out of the equation. Because of this, future research should definitely widen the corpus to include a broader mix of audiovisual genres and integrate audience reception studies to measure exactly how Arab viewers decode these cultural negotiations in real time. In our increasingly interconnected world, looking into how digital streaming platform policies and tech advancements steer the evolution of cultural adaptation in translation is an exceptionally relevant next step.

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