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## SEMANTIC AND CROSS-CULTURAL SHIFTS IN TRANSLATING THE INDONESIAN FILM TITLE *ABADI NAN JAYA* INTO THE ELIXIR

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**Abstract.** Film title translation involves not only linguistic transfer but also cultural negotiation shaped by differing communication styles and audience expectations. This study examines the semantic and cross-cultural shifts that occur in the translation of the Indonesian film title *Abadi Nan Jaya* into its English version, *The Elixir*. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research analyzes the lexical components of both titles through dictionary definitions, etymological references, and cross-cultural communication theories, particularly Hall's high- and low-context framework and Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The findings reveal a substantial shift from an abstract, morally embedded expression rooted in Indonesian collectivist and high-context culture to a concrete, object-oriented concept aligned with the explicit communication preferences of low-context, individualist audiences. While *Abadi Nan Jaya* conveys notions of collective resilience, moral continuity, and spiritual triumph, *The Elixir* foregrounds a tangible narrative element that ensures immediate clarity and international accessibility. This transformation demonstrates how translation strategies may simplify or redirect culturally embedded meanings to meet global market expectations. The study highlights that film title translation functions as a process of cultural mediation, balancing the preservation of local identity with the demands of global comprehensibility and marketability.

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**Keywords:** Film Title Translation, Semantic Shift, Cross-Cultural Communication, Cultural Adaptation, Indonesian Cinema.

**Abstrak.** *Penerjemahan judul film tidak hanya melibatkan alih bahasa, tetapi juga negosiasi budaya yang dipengaruhi oleh perbedaan gaya komunikasi dan ekspektasi audiens. Penelitian ini mengkaji pergeseran semantik dan lintas budaya yang terjadi dalam penerjemahan judul film Indonesia Abadi Nan Jaya ke dalam versi bahasa Inggrisnya, The Elixir. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis komponen leksikal dari kedua judul melalui definisi kamus, referensi etimologis, serta teori komunikasi lintas budaya, khususnya kerangka konteks tinggi dan rendah dari Hall serta dimensi budaya Hofstede. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya pergeseran signifikan dari ekspresi abstrak yang sarat makna moral dan berakar pada budaya kolektifis serta berkonteks tinggi di Indonesia, menuju konsep yang lebih konkret dan berorientasi pada objek yang selaras dengan preferensi komunikasi eksplisit dari audiens individualis berkonteks rendah. Sementara Abadi Nan Jaya menyampaikan gagasan tentang ketahanan kolektif, kesinambungan moral, dan kemenangan spiritual, The Elixir menonjolkan elemen naratif yang bersifat nyata sehingga memberikan kejelasan langsung dan aksesibilitas internasional. Transformasi ini menunjukkan bahwa strategi penerjemahan dapat menyederhanakan atau mengarahkan ulang makna yang sarat budaya guna memenuhi ekspektasi pasar global. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa penerjemahan judul film berfungsi sebagai proses mediasi budaya yang menyeimbangkan antara pelestarian identitas lokal dengan tuntutan keterpahaman global dan daya jual di pasar internasional.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Penerjemahan Judul Film, Pergeseran Semantik, Komunikasi Lintas Budaya, Adaptasi Budaya, Sinema Indonesia.*

## INTRODUCTION

Film titles determine the cultural knowledge expected of the audience, as a collective cultural knowledge embedded in the film. Indonesian cinema has a collection of artistic film titles that utilize symbolism in the best way and have deep moral or philosophical meanings in Indonesian culture. The meaning of these film titles is not direct or explicit in any way. Gupta and Sukamoto (2020) highlighted how

communication in Indonesia tend to be metaphorical in a way that fits the abstract meaning of the film title "Abadi Nan Jaya," which symbolizes resilience on a spiritual or moral level along with collective victory. The word "Abadi" symbolizes spiritual victory or resilience on a moral or collective level. This concept is easily understood within the Indonesian cultural background. In local film industries, titles are usually created with the assumption that audiences share similar cultural knowledge and communication styles. This is especially true in cultures that rely on implicit communication and shared meanings. Indonesia is commonly described as a collectivist society with a high-context communication style, where meaning is often conveyed indirectly through symbols, moral values, and cultural references. As a result, Indonesian film titles frequently use abstract expressions, philosophical ideas, or spiritual concepts that resonate deeply with local audiences. These titles may not explicitly explain their meaning, but Indonesian viewers are generally able to interpret them through shared cultural understanding.

However, challenges arise when films cross national and cultural boundaries. In the context of globalization, films are no longer consumed only by local audiences. Instead, they are distributed internationally through cinemas, streaming platforms, and digital media. When a film enters the global market, its title often needs to be translated or adapted to suit audiences from different cultural backgrounds. This process is not merely linguistic, as cultural meanings embedded in the original title may not be easily understood by international viewers. Differences in communication styles, cultural values, and audience expectations can lead to significant changes in how a title is presented. When the film is prepared for international distribution, the title has to be translated to be understandable for global audiences who do not share the same cultural background. The semantic and cultural adjustment entailed in the use of the concrete, object-based idea of *The Elixir* as an English title represents a key semantic and cultural adjustment from the abstract moral concept expressed in the original title. This is in line with expectations set by low-context cultures. According to Broeder (2021), it is in low-context cultures that effective communication is based on explicit, direct, and clearly articulated verbal messages. Here, meaning is not assumed to be shared or understood; speakers have to express information clearly and unambiguously so the listener will comprehend without any prior contextual or cultural understanding. Such a change leads

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to semantic simplification that changes the philosophical depth present in the original title into a more recognizable narrative device.

One of the most common challenges in film title translation is the difference between high-context and low-context cultures. Cross-cultural communication theories reveal how meaning is packaged and decoded differently by different cultures. According to Hall's (1976) theory of cross-cultural communication, high-context cultures rely heavily on shared experiences, cultural background, and implicit meaning. In contrast, low-context cultures prefer direct, explicit, and clear communication, where meaning is stated openly rather than implied (Levitt, 2022). Many Western societies, particularly English-speaking ones, are categorized as low-context cultures. Audiences from these cultures often expect titles to be straightforward, descriptive, and easy to understand without requiring additional cultural knowledge. This directly impacts how film titles need to be translated to reach a global audience. Translators also need to decide to what extent meaning can be imported from their own culture to ensure clarity and marketability.

As stated by Noble et al. (2021), semantic shifts are also influenced by various factors related to community size, stability, and grouping, in addition to variables at the word level, including frequency and semantic change. This phenomenon may indeed be related to cultural factors that contribute to why films from countries with collectivist cultural patterns, such as Indonesia, have titles that focus on shared core values and moral unity, as described in Hofstede's (1984) framework of cultural variables. This can be in stark contrast to film titles from countries with individualistic cultural patterns. As stated by Vishkin et al. (2022), individuals living in countries with individualistic cultures exhibit more uniform patterns in terms of expressing their emotions, as they are encouraged to follow more explicit and direct norms. This contrast shows that movie titles need to be adjusted in certain ways when crossing cultural boundaries in order to meet the expectations of global audiences. Consider a movie title like "Abadi Nan Jaya" its true meaning becomes complex for people in Western cultures, who favor individualism and are not given as much context as in Indonesia, and are more inclined towards straightforward explanations like another movie title called "The Elixir."

This research proposes to analyze semantic and cross-cultural shifts that happen in the translation of *Abadi Nan Jaya* to *The Elixir*. It also investigates how meaning is

shifted and how semantic shifts happen in translating *Abadi Nan Jaya* to *The Elixir*. This is significant in terms of enhancing translation practices to ensure representation in global media platforms.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to examine how the translation of *Abadi Nan Jaya* into *The Elixir* differs in semantic meaning, cultural associations, and communicative effects. A qualitative method is appropriate because the analysis focuses on meaning in language, cultural interpretation, and cross-cultural communication rather than numerical data. The study is based on close textual analysis of the film titles and their lexical components, supported by theories of translation, culture, and communication. By combining linguistic analysis with cultural context, this approach allows the study to explain how meaning shifts when a culturally specific Indonesian title is adapted for a global audience.

The primary data consisted of the Indonesian film *Abadi Nan Jaya* and its English translation *The Elixir*. Secondary sources include dictionaries, scholarly articles, and theoretical books related to semantic, translation studies, and cross-cultural communication. These data sources were taken from published academic books, peer-reviewed articles, and official language references such as the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI)*.

The study used document-based instruments, such as *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI)* for definitions and semantic grounding of Indonesian terms, and English etymological dictionaries for tracing the meaning of “elixir”. In addition, theoretical frameworks such as Halls’ (1976) and Hofstede (1984) also used to examine the high-low- context models and interpret cultural differences in meaning reception. Lastly, scholarly books and peer-reviewed articles on Indonesian culture, translation studies, and collective memory were also examined to support cultural interpretation and to strengthen the analytical validity of the study.

The procedures for this study followed several steps. First, each film title was separated into its main lexical components (“*abadi*”, “*jaya*”, and “*elixir*”). Their dictionary meanings and basic etymology information were identified to establish core semantic meanings of each term. This step provided a neutral linguistic foundation before

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cultural interpretation was applied. Next, the lexical meanings were examined within broader cultural frameworks that describe Indonesian collectivist values, shared memory, and moral symbolism. The English title was then analyzed using low-context cultural assumptions to explore how Western audiences may interpret “elixir” as a concrete object, narrative device, or symbolic element with immediate meaning.

Afterward, the interpretations from both titles were compared to identify semantic shifts and changes in cultural emphasis resulting from translation. These findings were then aligned with Halls’ (1976) high- and low-context communication model and Hofstede’s (1984) cultural dimensions to explain how different audiences may interpret the same narrative title differently. Finally, results from the three analytical layers, which are semantic, cultural, and communicative were combined into a final interpretation of how each title functions within its cultural system. This final step allowed the study to explain how each title functions within its own cultural system and how translation reshapes meaning when moving from a local Indonesian context to a global English-speaking audience.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify patterns of meaning within the film titles. First, the lexical items were examined and coded into semantic categories such as permanence, victory, symbolism, material object, and narrative function. These categories were developed based on repeated meanings found in the titles and supported by dictionary definitions and previous studies in translation and cultural analysis. After the initial coding, each category was interpreted using cultural references from Indonesian and Western contexts to understand how meaning is shaped by social values, shared knowledge, and cultural assumptions. This step allowed the analysis to distinguish between culturally embedded meanings and more direct or literal interpretations.

The coded data were then compared using Hall’s (1976) high- and low-context communication framework and Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions. Through this comparison, the study examined how cultural context influences audience expectations and interpretation of film titles. Finally, the results of the semantic and cultural analyses were synthesized to identify shifts in meaning and potential cultural gaps that emerge when Indonesian film titles are translated for global audiences. This analytical process

enabled the study to explain how translation choices may simplify, transform, or redirect meaning to suit different cultural communication styles.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Cross-Cultural Semantic Shifts in Translation**

Cross-cultural translation of film titles often leads to changes in meaning because translators must balance the original meaning with the need to make the title understandable and work for a different audience. Film titles are often adjusted to match the narrative patterns and genre expectations that are familiar to viewers in the target culture (Nida, 1964). Indonesia is often described as a high-context culture, where meaning is shaped by shared background knowledge, symbolic language, and cultural familiarity (Hall, 1976). Because of this, Indonesian film titles contain metaphorical or symbolic wording that reflects local cultural understanding, but when translated into English, these expressions become more direct to ensure immediate recognition.

For example, *Penyalin Cahaya* is translated into *Photocopier* by removing the symbolic use of “light” associated with truth and exposure and replacing it with a concrete object that English-speaking audiences can connect to a digital investigation story. Similarly, *Tinggal Meninggal* becomes *Better Off Dead*, which uses an English idiom to maintain the comedic tone but shifts away from the original’s wordplay. There is also *Laskar Pelangi* to *The Rainbow Troops*, where the poetic “*laskar*” rooted in cultural imagery becomes a simple and accessible term for global audiences.

These changes are closely related to differences between high-context and low-context communication styles. English-speaking audiences are often described as belonging to low-context cultures, where meaning is expected to be expressed clearly and directly in the text itself (Hall, 1976). As a result, translated titles tend to emphasize concrete objects, clear narrative cues, or familiar genre signals. The same pattern appears in the shift of translation from *Abadi Nan Jaya* to *The Elixir*. In its Indonesian context, the original title suggests lasting moral victory and shared cultural values, which align with a high-context setting where audiences can understand layered meanings without detailed explanation through cultural familiarity. When adapted for a global audience, the title is changed into a single object, *The Elixir*, which gives immediate narrative clarity and fits with the expectations of a low-context audience. This shift shows how translation

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reshaped meaning not only across languages but also cross cultural systems of interpretation (Katan, 2014)

### **The Semantic and Cultural Meaning of *Abadi Nan Jaya***

The lexeme “*abadi*” in Indonesian denotes permanence or lasting existence, as the official descriptive entry defines it as “*tidak berakhir, tetap ada*” (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia [KBBI], 2016). Semantically, “*abadi*” in common cultural use often carries more than temporal continuity. It is invested with moral and spiritual overtones. Ethnographic descriptions of Javanese and broader Indonesian cultural life show that expressions related to lasting existence are commonly tied to shared moral remembrance and communal values (Geertz, 1960). In other words, when an Indonesian audience encounters “*abadi*,” the meaning often extends beyond duration to include ideas of moral continuity and shared social memory.

The phrase “*nan jaya*” is a poetic construction, with “*nan*” functions as an archaic or literary equivalent of “*yang*” (that/which), while “*jaya*” is a lexical item of Old Malay/Sanskrit origin that means victorious or glorious. Combined, *Abadi Nan Jaya* reads as “that which is ever- victorious” or “the eternally glorious,” a phrase that foregrounds triumph as moral and collective achievement rather than individual conquest. Historical and anthropological studies of Indonesian social life indicate that concepts of triumph (“*jaya*”) are frequently linked to social harmony, communal honor, and spiritual legitimacy (Koentjaraningrat, 1985). Thus, the phrase implies a form of victory that is preserved in communal memory and moral discourse.

Together, the title *Abadi Nan Jaya* points to a set of cultural meanings, which are lasting value linked to moral worth, victory tied to social dignity, and endurance as something the community remembers and keeps alive. These readings align with cross-cultural ideas that people in collectivist, high-context societies often hide social and moral meaning inside words and expect listeners to fill in the rest (Hall, 1976). Seen this way, *Abadi Nan Jaya* works as a short cultural sign that hints at themes of communal strength, moral continuity, and shared memory that an Indonesian audience will readily understand (Geertz, 1960).

### **The Semantic and Cultural Meaning of *The Elixir***

“*Elixir*” literally means a potent liquid with medicinal or magical properties to heal, revive, or prolong life. It has always been defined by major dictionaries in England as “a potion or substance possessing transformative, healing, or life-extending properties” (Oxford Dictionary). This literal meaning points out that “*elixir*” is something concrete and object-oriented, very common in Western mythical stories. It contrasts greatly to the abstract or value-oriented expression in its original Indonesian title.

The title “*The Elixir*” provides clear and explicit language about the film's narrative focus, in terms of semantics. Unlike *Abadi Nan Jaya*, which expresses philosophical and moral concepts, the English title directs attention to a concrete object that is likely to be the center of the story. Its meaning does not depend on cultural symbolism or shared collective knowledge. Instead, this title provides a direct reference that is easily understood by viewers regardless of their cultural background. This reflects communication preferences in low-context and individualistic cultures, which expect clarity, assertiveness, and minimal ambiguity.

From Hofstede's (1984) perspective, *The Elixir* reflects the characteristics of an individualist culture, where narratives often highlight personal goals, autonomy, and the actions of individual characters rather than collective moral values. By centering the title on a concrete object, the translation aligns with individualist storytelling traditions that emphasize clear motivations and personal transformation. In Hall's high-context and low-context communication framework, *The Elixir* fits firmly within a low-context communication style, as its meaning is delivered explicitly through a recognizable and tangible term rather than through implicit cultural symbolism. This explicitness is necessary for audiences who rely on direct verbal cues instead of shared cultural knowledge to interpret meaning. The title is therefore culturally strategic, ensuring that international viewers particularly those from Western, low-context societies can easily grasp the film's thematic focus. While this adaptation increases accessibility, it simultaneously reduces the layered cultural significance present in the original Indonesian title, demonstrating how translation often shifts meaning to fit the communicative expectations of the target culture.

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## Implications

The findings of this study show that translating a film title is more than simply replacing words from one language with words from another. Instead, translation involves understanding how people in different cultures think, communicate, and interpret meaning. The shift from *Abadi Nan Jaya* to *The Elixir* shows that Indonesian audiences, who come from a more collectivist and high-context culture, easily understand titles that contain symbolic, philosophical, or moral values. However, international audiences, especially those from low-context, individualist cultures prefer titles that are clear, direct, and focused on concrete objects. This means that translation must adapt to match the expectations of the target culture. The implication is that film distributors and translators must carefully balance cultural accuracy with accessibility so that the original meaning is not completely lost. At the same time, this study reminds us that global media circulation can lead to simplification or reduction of cultural depth, raising questions about how cultural identity is represented in international film markets.

## Limitation of the Study

This study has a few limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, the analysis focuses on a single film title, *Abadi Nan Jaya*, which limits the scope of the conclusions. Because film title translation practices vary across genres, production contexts, and target markets, the findings cannot be generalized to all Indonesian films or to cross-cultural translation more broadly. Future studies that include a wider range of film titles and language pairs would provide a more comprehensive understanding of semantic and cultural shifts in translation.

Second, the study relies solely on textual and theoretical analysis and does not incorporate responses from actual audiences. As a result, the interpretations presented here reflect analytical inference rather than empirical evidence of audience reception. Although Hall's (1976) high- and low-context communication model and Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions are widely used in cross-cultural research, these frameworks may oversimplify cultural realities. Contemporary societies are increasingly shaped by globalization, media exposure, and multicultural interaction, which means that individual viewers may not fully align with the cultural patterns described in these models. Therefore, cultural interpretations based on these theories should be viewed as general

tendencies rather than fixed categories. The analysis is limited to the film titles and does not examine the full narrative, visual elements, or thematic development of the films themselves. Since film titles often interact with plot, character development, and genre conventions, excluding the full content may restrict the depth of interpretation. Future research that combines title analysis with film content analysis could offer richer insights into how meaning is constructed and transformed across cultures.

### **Significance of Findings**

The findings of this study are important because they show how cultural differences strongly influence the way film titles are translated for global audiences. By comparing *Abadi Nan Jaya* and *The Elixir*, the study demonstrates that meaning is not only changed through language, but also through cultural expectations about how messages should be communicated. This helps explain why titles from collectivist, high-context cultures tend to use symbolic or moral expressions, while titles translated for individualist, low-context cultures must be more direct and concrete. The results highlight that translators and film distributors play a key role in shaping how cultural values are represented and understood internationally. These findings also encourage greater awareness about how much cultural depth can be lost when titles are simplified for marketability. Overall, the study contributes to a better understanding of how translation acts as a bridge between cultures while also revealing the challenges of keeping cultural meaning intact in global media.

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

This study shows that translating the film title *Abadi Nan Jaya* into *The Elixir* creates important changes in both meaning and culture. The original Indonesian title carries deep values about spiritual strength, unity, and moral victory. Meanings that make sense in a high-context and collectivist culture like Indonesia. However, the English title *The Elixir* is more direct, simple, and object-focused, which fits the expectations of Western audiences, low context audiences who prefer clear and easy to understand messages. This difference shows that translation is not only about changing language, but also about adjusting to what different cultures expect.

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The choice of *The Elixir* thus represents a culturally adaptive shift designed to meet the expectations of global audiences. By using a universally recognizable term grounded in Western narrative traditions, the translated title becomes more accessible to viewers who may not share the cultural context of the original Indonesian expression. While this shift enhances marketability, it also involves a degree of cultural simplification. The abstract and culturally embedded meaning of *Abadi Nan Jaya* is transformed into a more literal and commercially familiar expression, illustrating how semantic meaning changes when titles move across cultural boundaries.

The study also finds that when films are prepared for global audiences, some cultural richness from the original title may be reduced to make the title more marketable and easier to understand. As a result, international viewers may not fully grasp the cultural depth of the original Indonesian meaning. Overall, these findings show that film title translation is a cultural negotiation that tries to balance keeping the original identity while making the title accessible and appealing for global audiences.

Future research can explore a wider range of film titles from different cultures and genres to better understand whether the patterns found in this study also appear in other translation contexts. Examining more examples will help researchers identify common strategies and challenges in translating culturally rich titles for international audiences. It would also be useful for future studies to collect responses from viewers through surveys, interviews, or focus groups. Audience feedback can give deeper insight into how people interpret translated titles and how those titles influence their interest or expectations before watching a film.

In addition, researchers may consider interviewing translators, subtitlers, or film marketing teams to learn more about the practical and commercial factors that influence title translation decisions. Their professional perspectives can help explain why certain titles are simplified, changed, or adapted for global markets. Finally, future research could focus on younger or multicultural audiences who are more exposed to global media. Understanding how these audiences interpret high-context and low-context titles may reveal how globalization is shaping new communication habits and cultural understanding.

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