



Resistance of Indonesian cultural identity translation into English in *Imperfect The Series*

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Abstract

In translation practice, translators have the option to not translate or to retain certain terms from the source language. This action is known as a form of resistance in translation, especially when dealing with cultural elements that have no equivalents. This study aims to analyze resistance in the translation of Indonesian cultural identity into English in *Imperfect The Series*. The data consists of speech units from the Indonesian dialogue (source text) and their English subtitle equivalents (target text), taken from all episodes of the first season available on the official WeTV platform. The research employs a qualitative approach using descriptive, comparative, and interpretative methods. Data collection techniques include observation and note-taking. Data analysis uses an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal the presence of translation resistance in various cultural categories, such as material, social, ecological, administrative, and religious. Forms of resistance include retaining original terms, not translating names of places or characters, and not adapting culturally untranslatable expressions. Factors contributing to translation resistance include the absence of cultural equivalents, efforts to preserve local culture, sensitivity to cultural norms, the translator's limited cultural knowledge, the existence of untranslatable elements, and the principle of linguistic economy in subtitle writing. The implication is that translation is not merely a linguistic act, but also an ideological and cultural one in introducing national identity to the world.

Keywords

resistance, cultural identity, translation

Introduction

Translators often encounter terms that have no direct equivalents in the target language, whether due to cultural differences, conceptual gaps, or distinct social contexts. In such situations, translators have the freedom to choose the most appropriate strategy, one of which is to retain the original term without translating it literally (Dabaghi & Bagheri, 2012; Maasoum & Davtalab, 2011). This choice can be made to preserve meaning, cultural nuance, or the uniqueness of the source text that cannot be conveyed through conventional equivalents. This strategy also aligns with the approach of resistance, in which the translator does not enforce absolute readability but intentionally maintains foreignness to make readers aware of cultural differences within the text. In doing so, the translator is not merely transferring language but also safeguarding the cultural integrity of the source text (Hashemi, 2025). Therefore, retaining certain terms becomes an ideological and aesthetic decision in translation practice, one that cannot be separated from its context and communicative purpose.

Venuti (1995, p. 24), in his work *The Translator's Invisibility*, which highlights ideology in translation, explains the concept of resistance as follows:

Such a translation strategy can best be called resistancy, not merely because it avoids fluency, but because it challenges the target-language culture even as it enacts its own ethnocentric violence on the foreign text.

Based on the quoted passage, resistance is not merely about avoiding fluency in the target language, but also about deliberately challenging the cultural norms and comfort of the target audience. In other words, the translation is not made to feel natural or familiar to the reader; instead, it retains elements of foreignness from the source text so that readers become aware of cultural differences. However, at the same time, this strategy also enacts a form of cultural violence (ethnocentric violence) against the foreign text, as those foreign elements are selectively altered and adapted to fit within the cultural system of the target language. In other words, although the strategy of resistance rejects the dominance of the target culture, it is not entirely neutral toward the source culture either. Resistance, in fact, reveals a contradiction in translation: it preserves foreignness while simultaneously imposing an interpretation shaped by the translator's cultural perspective.

Resistance is a relevant strategy in the translation of cultural identity, as culture contains elements that are difficult to translate directly into the target language (Chan, 2018; Sun, 2012). Cultural identity reflects the values, customs, beliefs, and ways of life of a community (Hall, 1993; Martens et al., 2023), which do not always have equivalent counterparts in other cultures. Newmark (1988) classifies cultural identity in translation into several categories, including material, social, ecological, organizational and administrative, gestures and habits, and religious. In this context, translators face the challenge of preserving the original meaning without erasing the cultural nuances of the source. Therefore, resistance is employed as a strategy to maintain the foreignness of the text, by not always adapting cultural terms or expressions into forms that are entirely familiar to the target audience. The goal is to allow readers to still sense the cultural

differences embedded in the source text. Thus, resistance is not merely a technical approach in translation, but also a form of respect for cultural diversity that cannot be arbitrarily homogenized through the process of language transfer.

Cultural translation resistance can be found in various forms of audiovisual media, one of which is *Imperfect The Series*. *Imperfect The Series* is an Indonesian web drama-comedy directed by Naya Anindita and produced by Starvision Plus in collaboration with WeTV (Sari & Hakim, 2023). It serves as a spin-off of the 2019 film *Imperfect: Karier, Cinta & Timbangan*. The first season aired from January 27 to March 4, 2021, featuring 12 episodes that follow four boarding house girls, Neti (Kiky Saputri), Maria (Zsa Zsa Utari), Endah (Neneng Wulandari), and Prita (Aci Resti), through their experiences with romance, adjusting to city life, arranged marriage pressures, and family conflicts. Set a year before the film, Dika (Reza Rahadian) is busy with his photography project and has not yet met Rara. The second season, which premiered on November 30, 2022, with 16 episodes, continues the story as Dika quits his job to become a freelance photographer. Maria starts working at a hijab store and finds herself in a love triangle with Bima and Adit, while Neti seeks a new career, Endah becomes increasingly obsessed with K-Pop, and Prita expresses her love for her family in unique ways. This series is perfect for viewers who enjoy light comedy blended with social messages about self-image, friendship, and the dreams of young people living in a big city.

Research on resistance has been widely conducted across various socio-humanities disciplines such as culture (Behera, 2025; Chao, 2023; Jha, 2022; Prateek, 2022; Wu & Young, 2023), politics (Boyd, 2023; Medina, 2023; Murrey, 2023; Silva & Dixit, 2025; Thawngmung & Paw, 2024), and gender (Alamgir et al., 2025; Çağatay et al., 2024; Garcia-Rabines & Bencich, 2021; Glynn & Maimunah, 2024; Rédei, 2024). In the field of translation, studies on resistance have also been carried out by several researchers such as Arrasyid & Sajarwa (2023), Gofur & Sajarwa (2025), Ma'shumah & Sajarwa (2022), and Setyawan et al. (2023), most of whom focused on novels or games as their objects of study. This research offers novelty by examining resistance in the translation of Indonesian cultural identity into English through audiovisual media, namely *Imperfect The Series*. This focus provides a new contribution to translation studies, as audiovisual media presents its own complexities in terms of language, culture, and visual context, areas that have not been widely explored in previous research.

This study aims to analyze patterns of resistance in the translation of Indonesian cultural identity into English and to reveal the factors influencing it in *Imperfect The Series*. The research gap lies in the lack of studies focusing on resistance strategies in audiovisual media, especially those that represent local cultural identities. Previous research on resistance has generally centered on cultural, political, and gender-based approaches, while translation objects have mostly involved novels and games. The novelty of this study lies in both its object and approach, namely, the translation of an Indonesian series rich in cultural elements into a foreign language, by observing the translator's strategy in preserving cultural foreignness. This research contributes to expanding perspectives in cultural translation studies and offers insights into how cultural identity is negotiated in audiovisual translation. Its contribution lies in enriching the theory of resistance and promoting culturally sensitive translation practices.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with descriptive, comparative, and interpretative methods to analyze resistance in the translation of Indonesian cultural identity into English in *Imperfect The Series*. The descriptive method is used to explain the forms of cultural identity that appear in the source text and how these elements are translated into the target language. The comparative method is applied to examine the translations between the source and target languages in order to identify the resistance strategies employed by the translator. Meanwhile, the interpretative method is used to explore the factors influencing the emergence of resistance in translation, including cultural, ideological, and audiovisual communication context aspects.

The data in this study consist of utterance units and their translations that reflect Indonesian cultural identity in *Imperfect The Series* season 1, both in the form of Indonesian-language dialogues (source text) and English subtitles (target text). The data source was obtained from the complete episodes of the first season of the series, available on the official WeTV platform. Data collection was carried out through observation and note-taking by watching the series, recording dialogues containing cultural elements, and comparing them with the English subtitle version. The data analysis technique follows an interactive model, which includes three stages: data reduction to select and filter relevant data, data presentation in the form of data lists and descriptive explanations to compare translation units, and conclusion drawing based on identified resistance patterns and the factors influencing them. The study is theoretically grounded in Venuti's (1995) concept of resistance in translation.

Results

Imperfect The Series is an Indonesian television series that was released on the streaming platform WeTV. The first season, which serves as the source of data for this study, consists of 12 episodes with a total duration of approximately 360 minutes. The dialogue in Indonesian functions as the source text (ST), while the English subtitles constitute the target text (TT). The subtitles were produced by WeTV as part of its official release, not by community fansubbers. Thus, the translation analyzed in this research can be considered an official subtitle translation, representing professional translation practices rather than user-generated ones.

Before discussing the findings in more detail, this section first presents the data that have been analyzed based on the categories of cultural identity found in *Imperfect The Series*. The data are classified according to the forms of translation resistance that occur between the source text (Indonesian) and the target text (English subtitles). This data presentation aims to provide a concrete overview of the resistance strategies used by the translator when dealing with uniquely Indonesian cultural elements.

Material Culture

Material culture refers to physical objects that carry cultural meaning, are used, and are recognized in daily life by a community, such as clothing, food, tools, and local products. The following presents data findings that illustrate how elements of material culture in *Imperfect The Series* are translated into English, along with the forms of resistance that emerge in the subtitle translation.

- (1) ST : **Peci** itu namanya, Bodok!
TT : That's called a **peci**, Fool!
- (2) ST : *Pokoknya pakaiannya rapi lah, terus pakai **kopiah***
TT : An officiant looks neat, and wear a **kopiah**
- (3) ST : *Gue kagak doyan **gudeg***
TT : I don't like to eat **gudeg**
- (4) ST : *Itu yang beli **seblak***
TT : The one who buy **seblak**
- (5) ST : *Saya baru punya tiga pabrik **dodol***
TT : I only have three **dodol** factories
- (6) ST : *Buat ngumpetin **rendang***
TT : To smuggle some **rendang**
- (7) ST : *Mau pesen **tumpeng** untuk acara syukuran*
TT : I want to order **tumpeng** for an event
- (8) ST : *Lu kata **radio** apa*
TT : You think it's a **radio** station
- (9) ST : *Semua yang kamu tonton di **TV**, satuin aja semuanya ya*
TT : Everything you watch on **TV**, just combine them all
- (10) ST : *Alhamdulillah, akhirnya saya teh nyobain pakai HT juga*
TT : Praise be to Allah, finally I can try use a HT
- (11) ST : *Bu Ratih **blendernya** rusak*
TT : Ms. Ratih's **blender** is broken

In the context of material culture, the translation in *Imperfect The Series* demonstrates resistance, particularly in preserving original terms from the source language. For cultural objects, the words *peci* and *kopiah* are not translated into common English equivalents such as *cap* or *hat*, but are retained as *peci* and *kopiah*. In the culinary aspect, terms like *gudeg*, *seblak*, *dodol*, *rendang*, and *tumpeng* are also not altered or descriptively explained, but preserved in their original forms. Meanwhile, for modern tools such as radio, TV, HT (handy talkie), and blender, direct translation is used since these terms already have common equivalents and are used internationally.

Social Culture

Social culture reflects the way of life, interactions, values, norms, and customs that prevail within a community or society. In the context of translation, social culture is often manifested through forms of address, place references, character names, social practices, and references to local popular culture. The following presents data findings that show how elements of social culture in *Imperfect The Series* are translated into English, as well as how resistance to the source culture is expressed in the translation.

- (12) ST : *Itu mah bukan dia, Bu. Itu si **Neti***
 TT : That's not her, that's **Neti**
- (13) ST : ***Prita**, tolong tutup pintunya ya*
 TT : **Prita**, please close the door
- (14) ST : *Yang pakai bajunya indoor alias ketutup, namanya **Endah***
 TT : The girl with covered up outfit, she's **Endah**
- (15) ST : ***Maria**, saya tunjukkan kamarnya*
 TT : **Maria**, let me show you your room
- (16) ST : *Apa bapak undang **ST12** aja kali ya biar rame*
 TT : Should I invite **ST12** to make it merrier?
- (17) ST : *Sekalian aja undang **Wali***
 TT : Why don't you invite **Wali**?
- (18) ST : *Kok kayak kode pos **Tebet***
 TT : Sounds like **Tebet**'s postal code
- (19) ST : *Dia bilang kos-kosan dia ada di **Mampang***
 TT : He said there's one in **Mampang**
- (20) ST : *Tapi setau saya GBK dekat **Cawang***
 TT : But if I'm not mistaken, GBK is near **Cawang**
- (21) ST : *Toko baru hijab saya di daerah **Kalibata***
 TT : A grand opening of my hijab store in **Kalibata**
- (22) ST : *Ada yang namanya SMS **Weton***
 TT : There's this message service called **Weton** Message
- (23) ST : *Heh Chandra, lu kan dulu suka **lenong***
 TT : Chandra, you like to watch **lenong** performance
- (24) ST : *Wa'alaikumsalam, **Neng***
 TT : And upon you as well, **Neng**

In the translation data of *Imperfect The Series*, several categories of social culture reflect resistance in the subtitle translation. First, anthroponyms such as *Neti*, *Prita*, *Endah*, and *Maria* are personal names that are distinctive and rooted in Indonesian culture, both ethnically and socially. In the translated text, these names are retained without modification. Second, in the category of music bands or groups, names like *ST12* and *Wali* are also neither translated nor given additional explanation. Third, toponyms such as *Tebet*, *Mampang*, *Cawang*, and *Kalibata* are preserved in their original forms, as they refer to specific geographic areas in Jakarta. Lastly, other elements of social culture like *Weton*, *lenong*, and *neng* represent belief systems, traditional performing arts, and distinctive forms of address within Indonesian society.

Ecology

Ecology in cultural studies encompasses elements of nature and the environment that are closely tied to a community's way of life, including flora, fauna, geographical conditions, and local natural phenomena. The following presents data findings that illustrate how ecological elements in *Imperfect: The Series* are translated into English.

- (25) ST : *Lu lebih kayak yuyu*
 TT : You look like a “yuyu”
- (26) ST : *Sekali-sekali kek, Sarang Ular*
 TT : Let’s watch “Sarang Ular” for a change
- (27) ST : *Sponsor pertama ada dari Kopi Biawak*
 TT : Our first sponsor is Biawak Coffee

In the translation data above, there are elements of ecological culture that reflect the relationship between Indonesian society and local nature and fauna. First, the word *yuyu*, which refers to a type of freshwater crab native to Indonesia, is used metaphorically to describe someone's appearance. In the translation, this term is retained in its original form without being translated. Second, the phrase *Sarang Ular*, which literally means ‘snake’s nest’, is also kept in its original form as a show title. By not translating it into *Snake’s Nest* or the like, the translator preserves the local nuance as a form of resistance. Third, in the product name *Kopi Biawak (Biawak Coffee)*, the word *biawak*, a type of large lizard commonly found in Indonesia is maintained.

Religious

The religious aspect is an important part of cultural identity that often appears in everyday dialogue, whether in the form of expressions, terms, or references to specific religious practices and symbols. The following presents data findings that show how religious elements in *Imperfect: The Series* are translated into English.

- (28) ST : *Ya Allah!*
 TT : Dear Allah!
- (29) ST : *Pake air apaan, air zamzam?*
 TT : Did you use zamzam water?
- (30) ST : *Ini hijabnya yang bagus yang mana ya?*
 TT : Which hijab is the best?
- (31) ST : *Salam ya buat ustad viral*
 TT : Say hi to the viral ustad
- (32) ST : *Gini-gini gua lulusan Iqra 3, Boy*
 TT : Despite my look, I studied Iqra Level Three, Dude
- (33) ST : *Orang di bungkusannya ada tulisan halal*
 TT : It says halal on the package
- (34) ST : *Nggak ih haram. Gak boleh*
 TT : No, this is haram! It’s forbidden

In the context of religious culture depicted in *Imperfect: The Series*, several terms reflect a distinct Islamic identity within Indonesian society. These seven terms demonstrate cultural resistance in translation, as they are not rendered into English equivalents. First, *Allah* is retained in its original form, indicating the translator’s choice not to replace it with the generic term *God*. Second, *Zamzam*, referring to the sacred water from Mecca, is also preserved in the translation. Third, *Hijab*, as a symbol of clothing and piety in Islam, has become an internationally recognized loanword. Fourth, *Ustad* is kept in its original

form because the term conveys more than just “religious teacher”, it also carries local nuances related to social roles and communication styles. Fifth, *Iqra*, the name of a basic book for learning to read the Qur’an, remains untranslated. Sixth and seventh, the terms *Halal* and *Haram* are already widely adopted in international discourse.

Administrative

The administrative aspect includes terms related to governance, bureaucracy, and administrative systems that frequently appear in everyday life, such as population documents and government programs. The following presents data findings related to administrative elements in *Imperfect: The Series* and how these elements are transferred into English.

- (35) ST : *Bagus dah. Mana sini, bawa **KK** gak lu?*
 TT : Great. Show me your “**KK**”
- (36) ST : *Eh, lu tau gak **KB**?*
 TT : Hey, do you even know what **KB** is?

In the translation data above, two terms related to government administration and population programs in Indonesia appear: *KK* (*Kartu Keluarga*) and *KB* (*Keluarga Berencana*). Both are part of Indonesia’s bureaucratic system and unique social programs, and in the English translation, a form of resistance is evident. The term *KK* is not translated into *Family Card* or *Family Register*, even though a literal translation is possible. Similarly, *KB* is retained as an acronym without being explained as *family planning* or *birth control program*, which would be more commonly understood in international contexts.

Discussion

The first factor contributing to resistance is the absence of cultural equivalents in the target language. Many Indonesian cultural elements do not have direct counterparts in English because such concepts are either unfamiliar or non-existent in Western culture. As a result, translators often choose to retain the original terms (*form-based resistance*) in order to preserve the meaning and cultural uniqueness. A prominent example is the term *Weton*, a Javanese calendrical system related to birth days and fortune (Akhiroh, 2024; Dinso et al., 2025; Fauziyah et al., 2024), as well as *Lenong*, a traditional Betawi theatrical performance (Hanan, 2021; Reza et al., 2024). These terms are difficult to translate accurately because there is no corresponding cultural concept in Western contexts. If translated literally, the meaning may become vague or even lost. Therefore, the translator opts to preserve the source terms to maintain their cultural integrity.

The second factor contributing to resistance is the effort to preserve local culture. In this case, the translator retains culturally specific Indonesian terms or expressions as a means of protecting and promoting national identity amid the forces of globalization. By

avoiding literal translations or substituting them with foreign equivalents, the translator plays a role in introducing the richness of Indonesian culture to an international audience. A clear example can be seen in culinary terms such as *Gudeg*, *Seblak*, *Dodol*, *Rendang*, and *Tumpeng*. These foods not only have unique flavors but are also rich in social and cultural meaning. If translated descriptively or replaced with Western dishes, the embedded cultural value would be diminished. Therefore, retaining the original terms becomes a crucial strategy in preserving local cultural existence while expanding global understanding of Indonesia's cultural diversity.

The third factor behind resistance is the adherence to local norms and cultural sensitivity. In this context, translators face significant challenges when dealing with terms that hold sacred or profound meaning within the source community, particularly in the religious domain (Akhtar, 2025; Hassanein & Moustafa, 2024). Excessive alteration or adaptation of such terms risks offending beliefs or distorting their original meaning. Therefore, translators often choose to retain the original terms to preserve their sanctity and authenticity. Frequently preserved examples include *Allah*, *Zamzam*, *Iqra*, *Halal*, and *Haram*. These terms not only represent religious concepts but also reflect cultural practices that do not always have precise equivalents in English. As a result, resistance emerges as a form of caution, an effort to uphold the integrity of cultural and religious values in translation.

The fourth factor contributing to resistance is the translator's insufficient cultural knowledge. In some cases, resistance does not arise from a conscious decision, but rather from the translator's limited understanding of the cultural meanings embedded in certain terms. This lack of awareness prevents the translator from making appropriate adaptations, even when suitable equivalents exist in the target language. For example, *KK* (*Kartu Keluarga*) can be translated as *family register*, and *KB* (*Keluarga Berencana*) as *birth control*. However, due to a lack of understanding of Indonesia's social and administrative context, as well as unfamiliarity with corresponding terms in Western culture, translators often choose to retain the original forms. This indicates that resistance does not always reflect an effort to preserve culture, but may instead result from the translator's inadequate cultural literacy.

The fifth factor contributing to resistance is the presence of untranslatable elements, particularly in the form of toponyms (place names) and anthroponyms (personal names). In translation practice, elements such as *Tebet*, *Mampang*, *Cawang*, or *Kalibata* do not have meaningful equivalents in the target language, as they are specific geographic names closely tied to local identity. Similarly, personal names like *Neti*, *Prita*, *Endah*, or *Maria* cannot be translated because they are fixed forms linked to individual identity. Attempting to translate these names would lead to confusion and result in the loss of both personal and cultural meaning (Gibka, 2024; Ren, 2024; Zabir & Haroon, 2018). Therefore, resistance is employed by retaining the original forms as the only appropriate choice. This demonstrates that, in certain cases, resistance is not a strategy but a linguistic and cultural necessity to maintain the accuracy and authenticity of references within the translated text.

The final factor contributing to resistance is the principle of linguistic economy in subtitles. Subtitles are subject to technical constraints, such as a maximum character count over two lines and very limited display duration (Zahedi & Khoshsaligheh, 2021). In this context, translators are required to convey meaning as efficiently as possible without compromising readability. Complex cultural concepts or terms often cannot be explained at length, as doing so would exceed the available space. Therefore, retaining the original form, despite its potential unfamiliarity to viewers, is seen as the most practical solution. This approach not only saves space but also preserves local nuance and avoids disrupting the flow of the viewing experience. Thus, resistance to translating cultural elements in subtitles is not solely driven by ideological or cultural reasons, but also by technical limitations that demand high efficiency in audiovisual message delivery.

Conclusion

Based on the data findings from *Imperfect: The Series*, it can be concluded that resistance in translating Indonesian cultural identity into English is carried out through the preservation of original terms across various cultural categories. In material culture, original forms are retained without adaptation, reflecting formal resistance to the assimilation of the target culture. In social culture, personal names (anthroponyms), place names (toponyms), and local traditions are not translated, reinforcing local identity. Ecological elements and religious terms are preserved due to their rich meanings and cultural sensitivity. Meanwhile, administrative terms are left unexplained, often due to limited understanding or spatial constraints. Overall, this resistance illustrates that translation is not merely a linguistic process but also an ideological and cultural act aimed at preserving the authenticity of Indonesian cultural identity on a global stage.

There are six main factors that drive translators to resist or retain original terms. First, the absence of cultural equivalents in English makes it difficult to translate cultural terms without losing their meaning. Second, the preservation of local culture encourages translators to retain cultural terms as a way to introduce the richness of Indonesian culture. Third, cultural sensitivity and local norms, especially in religious contexts, trigger resistance to the translation of cultural expressions. Fourth, limited cultural knowledge on the part of the translator leads to improper adaptation of such terms. Fifth, untranslatable elements such as place names and personal names are preserved to maintain identity and clarity. Lastly, the principle of linguistic economy in subtitles demands efficiency, making the original form the most practical choice for conveying cultural messages in a concise yet meaningful manner.

This study has several limitations. First, the data analyzed is limited to a single series, *Imperfect: The Series*, and therefore does not fully represent the broader depiction of Indonesian cultural identity in audiovisual media. Second, the research primarily focuses on forms of resistance, without thoroughly exploring audience perceptions of the translation. Third, this study does not include interviews with translators or production teams, which limits insight into the rationale behind specific translation decisions. Therefore, future research is encouraged to expand the scope of analysis to other films or different genres in order to observe broader patterns of resistance. Additionally,

further studies could explore audience perceptions of retained terms and examine their impact on cultural understanding. A more interactive approach, such as interviews or surveys, is also recommended to gain a more comprehensive perspective.

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