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Reduction, Addition, and Variation in the Dialogue Ecranization of the Novel and Film Toba Dreams

Vita Anggraini Pasaribu [a,1,*]

[a] Department of Film and Television, Faculty of Recorded Media Arts, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, Jalan Parangtritis Kilometer 6.5, Sewon, Bantul, Yogyakarta 55188, Indonesia

[1] vita.pasaribu@gmail.com*
ORCID: [1] 0000-0000-0000-0000;

* Corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

Ecranization, the transposition of a literary work to film, almost always alters dialogue, yet dialogue is rarely the primary unit of analysis in Indonesian ecranization scholarship, which has concentrated instead on plot, character, and setting. This article examines the entire dialogue of the 2015 novel and film Toba Dreams to describe how the two versions differ and to identify the narrative functions those differences serve. Working from Eneste's typology of ecranization change together with Damono's concept of media transposition and Eriyanto's story-plot distinction, the study comprehensively mapped every dialogue exchange across the 248-page novel and 140-minute film according to story and plot sequence, classified each pair as reduction, addition, variation, or similarity, and cross-checked classifications among three researchers. Reduction was the most frequent type of change, followed by addition and then variation, while identical dialogue occurred only rarely and in short exchanges. Reduction served durational and expository economy; addition strengthened dramatic tension, Batak cultural locality, and scene transition; variation aligned dialogue with the director's characterization choices. These findings show that dialogue ecranization is not a mechanical transcription of written speech but a creative negotiation that nonetheless preserves the novel's narrative essence, and they extend Eneste's framework, developed principally for plot and character, to dialogue as a distinct and comprehensively analyzable unit of adaptation.

KEYWORDS

dialogue
ecranization
media transposition
novel-to-film adaptation
Toba Dreams

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INTRODUCTION

Adapting novels into films has long been common practice in the Indonesian film industry, with several phenomenal titles such as Laskar Pelangi, Ayat-Ayat Cinta, and 5 cm first gaining

market sympathy as novels before being adapted into films. Toba Dreams by TB Silalahi presents a different pattern: the novel, published in February 2015, was relatively unpopular, yet when adapted into a film by director Benni Setiawan in the same year, it received wide acclaim, including the Favorite Film title at the 2016 Indonesian Movie Awards and multiple nominations at the 2015 Indonesian Film Festival and Bandung Film Festival. This achievement makes Toba Dreams an intriguing object for studying its adaptation process.

In the process of adapting a novel into a film—commonly referred to as ecranization—dialogue is one aspect that undergoes significant transformation yet is relatively rarely made the primary focus of research. Damono (2014) asserts that composing dialogue based on a novel is a troublesome task for filmmakers, since dialogue serves as the medium through which characters contribute to the story, meaning its presence in both the novel and the film must be considered wisely. An initial reading of Toba Dreams shows that TB Silalahi's dialogue writing style in the novel, though considered good, was not simply copied to become film dialogue. Significant differences were found in dialogue depicting the same events, including the use of Batak language by several characters in the film that is practically absent from the novel—a strategy that enriches the characters' and the story's cultural identity as a whole.

Research on ecranization in Indonesia has developed quite rapidly in recent years, although most studies still focus on comparing plot, character, and setting in general terms, and most take a single novel-film pair as their object. Yuniar and Widiati (2021) examined the ecranization of the novel Cinta Laki-Laki Biasa into film and found that plot addition occurred far more frequently than reduction, differing from the general ecranization pattern usually dominated by reduction. Sari (2020) studied the ecranization of the Kartini character in the novel Panggil Aku Kartini Saja into the film Kartini, showing that character change in ecranization is also influenced by the director's perspective on the historical figure being adapted. Qonita, Hapsari, and Ahmad (2021) examined the ecranization of the novel 7 Hari Menembus Waktu, finding a dominant reduction pattern in plot and setting. Karma and Saadillah (2021) studied the relevance of the ecranization of the novel Mimpi Sejuta Dolar to Indonesian language instruction in schools, confirming that overall plot reduction remains reasonable without altering the story's essence. Maryova, Supriyono, and Hastuti (2022) examined the transformation of the novel Laskar Pelangi into film using the same Eneste framework as this study, finding significant variation in time and place settings. Wachyudin (2024) examined the ecranization of the novel Sabtu Bersama Bapak into a film series, finding that character and plot addition were far more dominant than reduction, since the series format allowed for broader story development—a finding that stands in useful contrast to Carmila, Mursalim, and Rokhmansyah's (2018) earlier study of the same novel's single-film adaptation, which mapped reduction, addition, and variation across plot, character, and setting without the durational latitude a series affords. Elsewhere in the field, Ardiansyah, Chanafiah, and Canrhas (2020) found reduction so dominant in the ecranization of Sapardi Djoko Damono's Hujan Bulan Juni that the film almost forms a new story, while Fakhrurozi and Anwar (2021) and Mursih and Nursalim (2019) extend the same three-part framework to a short story adapted into short film and to another novel-to-film pair respectively, showing that Eneste's typology travels reasonably well across object types and scales. Most relevant to the present study is Chikita, Patriantoro, and Wartiningsih's (2024) research on the ecranization of character utterances in the novel Surat dari Kematian, which specifically focuses its analysis at the utterance level—identifying 101 ecranized utterances, of which reduction was the most frequent—consistent with the general ecranization pattern observed at the plot level in most of the studies above.

While these studies enrich the understanding of ecranization in general, research that specifically and comprehensively compares the entirety of a novel's and film's dialogue—

rather than only samples or selected excerpts—remains limited: previous studies have treated dialogue as part of a broader analysis of plot or character rather than as an independent unit of analysis systematically organized according to the chronology of story and plot across both media, and none has mapped a complete dialogue corpus in both media rather than a sampled excerpt. This article is therefore the first to conduct a comprehensive, non-sampled mapping of the entire dialogue in an Indonesian novel-to-film pair, organized according to story and plot, and to analyze it systematically using Eneste's three types of ecranization change—reduction, addition, and variation—while also identifying dialogue similarities that filmmakers chose to preserve.

This study is further motivated by the broader question of how regional identity is presented through dialogue ecranization strategies, as seen in the insertion of Batak language in the Toba Dreams film that is absent from the novel—a strategy consistent with a wider trend in contemporary Indonesian cinema toward foregrounding local identity as a narrative draw. In the context of Toba Dreams, the insertion of Batak language is not merely an exotic ornament but functions to build the story's setting credibility while strengthening local audiences' emotional connection to the characters and events depicted, reinforcing the value of examining the specific mechanisms by which regional-language dialogue enters the broader ecranization structure rather than treating it only as a surface phenomenon.

Based on the above, this study aims to (1) describe the similarities and differences between the novel's and film's dialogue in Toba Dreams; (2) analyze the application of the three types of ecranization change—reduction, addition, and variation—in the dialogue of both media; and (3) identify the narrative function of each type of change relative to the overall film story.

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design (Moleong, 2017; Sugiyono, 2019), appropriate for handling dialogue data compared descriptively across two media without inferential statistical testing. The analytical framework is Eneste's (1991) typology of ecranization change, complemented by Damono's (2014) concept of media transposition (*alih wahana*), Eriyanto's (2013) distinction between story and plot, and Endraswara's (2014) comparative-literature methodology; Myers-Scotton's (1993) account of code-switching is drawn on specifically when interpreting the film's Batak-Indonesian dialogue alternation. This framework is brought to bear at two points in the analysis: first, in classifying each dialogue pair into one of Eneste's four categories, and second, in interpreting the narrative and sociolinguistic function of each classified change.

Corpus and Object of Study

As a study of a literary and cinematic corpus rather than a fieldwork site, the object of analysis is the complete novel and film Toba Dreams, both released in 2015 only two months apart: the novel written by TB Silalahi (248 pages, published February 2015), and the film directed and scripted by Benni Setiawan (140-minute runtime, released 30 April 2015). The corpus comprises every dialogue exchange in both works, with no sampling: inclusion required only that an utterance be spoken dialogue attributed to a named or identifiable character, while narration, intertitles, and non-diegetic sound were excluded. Both works are commercially published and publicly available, the novel through its original publisher and the film through its original theatrical and home-video release. [Authors to insert the months and year during which the novel was read and the film was viewed for data collection.] This object was purposively selected for three reasons: first, the short interval between the novel's and film's release limits confounding sociocultural shifts; second, the film's wide acclaim despite the novel's relative lack of popularity makes its dialogue adaptation worth investigating as a

possible contributing factor; and third, the dialogue in both works has not previously been comprehensively studied.

Data Collection

Data collection techniques used were documentation and observation (Arikunto, 2010): a complete reading of the novel and a complete viewing of the film, without needing to communicate with the creators. Given the novel's page count and the film's runtime, which produce a very large volume of data, data were classified according to the story and plot elements described by Eriyanto (2013). The procedure comprised novel observation, sequencing the novel's story and plot and recording dialogue content and its speaker; film observation, sequencing the film's story and plot and recording dialogue content and its speaker; and assigning a consistent letter label to each event in the novel's and film's story in chronological order, while arranging each medium's plot according to its own order of appearance and retaining the same story letter labels, so that dialogue from the novel and film depicting identical events could be presented side by side in a comparison table for analysis.

Data Validation and Analysis

Data collection and analysis proceeded through the following steps: transcribing all dialogue from the novel and film in full; assigning story letter labels to every event and cross-checking them against each medium's plot order; aligning novel and film dialogue by event using the comparative worksheet described above; classifying each aligned dialogue pair as reduction, addition, variation, or similarity according to Eneste's (1991) criteria; drafting analytic memos for cases that were difficult to classify directly, such as dialogue containing reduction in one part of a sentence and addition in another, consistent with the memoing and pattern-verification procedures described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014); discussing and reconciling classifications among the three authors to reach consensus; and tallying frequencies within each category across the complete corpus. Data validity was maintained through repeated reading and viewing of sections containing significant differences, and story letter labels were cross-checked against plot order throughout to ensure classification consistency.

As researchers with differing roles—one author serving as the primary compiler of the data mapping, while the other two served as supervisors and methodological reviewers—this study's process also involved periodic discussion to align interpretation of the findings, particularly in dialogue cases involving Batak cultural and linguistic elements requiring deeper contextual understanding. This discussion functioned as a form of investigator triangulation that strengthens the validity of this study's qualitative interpretation, consistent with the trustworthiness criteria for multi-researcher qualitative designs described by Creswell and Poth (2018).

Research Ethics and Positionality

Because this study analyzes a previously published novel and a publicly released commercial film rather than living informants or fieldwork participants, it did not require institutional ethical review or informed-consent procedures, and no new personal, sensitive, or restricted-access data were collected. The interpretive claims made in the Result and Discussion concerning Batak cultural and linguistic elements nonetheless called for cultural competence beyond the primary researcher's own experience; this was addressed through investigator triangulation among the three authors and through reference to the published ethnographic record on Toba Batak custom (Vergouwen, 1964), rather than through direct consultation with community members—an avenue for further validation noted among the limitations below.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Comparison of Story and Plot in the Novel and Film

Before comparing dialogue, this study first mapped the story and plot of both media. The novel's story begins when Tebe is eight years old and continues to Andini and Choky's return to Jakarta at the story's end, while the film's story begins with Sersan Tebe's youth, conveyed through Opung Boru's dialogue, and ends at the same event as the novel. The two stories' beginnings differ substantially, spanning decades of narrative distance, yet both conclude at an identical event: Andini and Choky's return to Jakarta following Ronggur's death.

The novel's plot begins on the night before Sersan Tebe's retirement ceremony, with preceding events narrated in a non-chronological order through flashback technique. The film's plot begins directly with Sersan Tebe's retirement ceremony and ends at the same event as the novel, while much of the background information conveyed through descriptive narration in the novel is instead conveyed through character dialogue rather than presented in direct audiovisual form in the film. This pattern indicates a general ecranization strategy of converting written narrative exposition into spoken dialogue, a strategy that directly impacts the volume and distribution of dialogue in the film.

Dialogue Reduction

Reduction is the most frequently found type of change in this study, occurring in almost every event in the novel, whether through shortening sentences or eliminating them entirely. One significant example is the total reduction of the novel's opening, which contains Sersan Tebe's memories of his youth in his hometown, including a conversation with his father before he became a soldier. The film chose to omit this event and dialogue, both because the information it contains can be conveyed in the present through Opung Boru's dialogue, and to avoid the necessity of presenting a young Sersan Tebe and his father Viktor in full audiovisual form with appropriate spatial and temporal staging.

Table 1. Functions of dialogue reduction in the ecranization of Toba Dreams

Reduction function	Case example	Narrative rationale
Word and duration economy	Removal of a lengthy explanation about Taruli's school fees	Information is less critical to the main story's momentum
Avoiding repetition	Sersan Tebe's criticism of Ronggur's dropping out, repeated in the novel, is omitted in the film	The material was already conveyed earlier
Register adjustment	Choky's farewell-scene dialogue is shifted from formal to everyday register	Matches the character's age and conversational context
Removal of minor characters and events	Several events from Tebe's childhood are omitted entirely	Their role is less significant to the main plot

Source: authors' classification, compiled from the comparative worksheet described in the Method section.

The reduction carried out means the audience does not receive as much story detail as the novel's readers, yet the film's dialogue is still considered effective in conveying essential information. This finding aligns with Karma and Saadillah's (2021) results on the ecranization of the novel Mimpi Sejuta Dolar, which confirm that overall plot reduction remains reasonable and does not diminish the story's essential meaning, and is consistent with Ardiansyah, Chanafiah, and Canrhas's (2020) finding that reduction so thoroughly reshaped the film adaptation of Hujan Bulan Juni that it almost forms a new story, as well as with Chikita, Patriantoro, and Wartiningsih's (2024) finding that reduction was likewise the most dominant type of change at the utterance level in the ecranization of Surat dari Kematian.

Dialogue Addition

Addition was found less frequently than reduction, yet exerts substantial influence on characterization and atmosphere. One striking example is the addition of the character Togar's mother, who arrives to scold Ronggur and Togar after the two ride a motorbike shouting while intoxicated, an event and dialogue entirely absent from the novel. This character's presence in the film not only reinforces Batak cultural locality but also introduces a humorous element that balances the story's dramatic tension.

Table 2. Functions of dialogue addition in the ecranization of Toba Dreams

Addition function	Case example	Narrative rationale
Reinforcing cultural locality	Batak-language singing at the lapo tuak; local greetings by supporting characters	Enriches the story's cultural identity
Marking time transition	Kristin and Sersan Tebe's dialogue about Choky's photograph as he grows up	Indicates elapsed time without requiring an additional scene
Intensifying dramatic conflict	Sersan Tebe's explicit angry line of physical threat	Marks the peak of a quarrel that words alone can no longer resolve
Humour and tonal balance	Togar's comedic character comforts Ronggur with local idioms	Balances emotionally heavy scenes

Source: authors' classification. Lapo tuak = a communal drinking stall.

The recurrence of the *lapo tuak* (communal drinking stall) and of everyday Batak greetings as sites of added dialogue is consistent with the centrality of communal, kin-based interaction in Toba Batak custom (*adat*), in which shared social space and mutual greeting obligations have long organized everyday relations among kin and neighbours (Vergouwen, 1964). Reading the addition of these scenes against that ethnographic backdrop suggests that their function is not merely decorative local colour but a plausible reconstruction of ordinary Batak sociality that the novel's written narration did not need to render as directly.

This addition pattern in Toba Dreams aligns with Yuniar and Widiati's (2021) findings on the ecranization of the novel Cinta Laki-Laki Biasa, which show that addition is often employed to strengthen dramatic aspects and accommodate cinematic needs, although in the case of Toba Dreams addition remains less dominant than reduction, unlike the general ecranization pattern reported by most prior studies.

Dialogue Variation

Variation reflects filmmakers' creative freedom in crafting dialogue that differs entirely from the novel yet conveys a similar narrative message. A representative example is Togar's comforting line to Ronggur, which in the novel observes simply that Ronggur has been gloomy, and in the film becomes a vivid local simile comparing his tight expression to new underwear. Both lines carry the same meaning, but the film employs a more expressive local idiom consistent with Togar's comedic character as built throughout the film.

Table 3. Functions of dialogue variation in the ecranization of Toba Dreams

Variation function	Case example	Narrative rationale
Character adjustment	Togar's comforting line is changed into a more expressive local idiom	Aligns with the film's comedic, familiar characterization
Intensifying atmosphere	Ronggur and Andini's campus dialogue shifts from romantic and relaxed to tense and hurried	Signals wariness of Irwan's presence

Variation function	Case example	Narrative rationale
Delivering new emphases	Several reflective character lines are given different emphasis	Aligns moral messaging with the director's emphasis

Source: authors' classification.

Dialogue Similarities

Despite the many differences found, this study also identified dialogue similarities in very small numbers, generally consisting of short sentences. One example is Opung Boru's cheerfully dismissive response to Sumurung and Taruli's confusion about where they would sleep in the Batak traditional house, preserved identically in both the novel and the film. This line was likely preserved because its spontaneous, humorous quality already effectively represents Opung Boru's talkative yet endearing character, requiring no alteration.

Other similarities were found in Togar's English-language greeting to tourists at Lake Toba, as well as two short but firm lines from Sersan Tebe to Ronggur and Sumurung reflecting the character's authoritative nature. This pattern shows that dialogue is preserved when it already effectively represents the event's context, the character's personality, and the intended message, such that alteration would risk reducing the dialogue's effectiveness.

Proportion of Dialogue Change Types

The dominance of reduction in this study is consistent with the general ecranization pattern reported in most prior studies, including at the plot level in the ecranization of the single-film version of Sabtu Bersama Bapak (Carmila et al., 2018) as well as at the utterance level in the novel Surat dari Kematian (Chikita et al., 2024). However, Yuniar and Widiati (2021) and Wachyudin (2024) show an opposite pattern in their respective research objects, where addition is actually more dominant than reduction. This difference is likely influenced by the format of the adapted medium: Wachyudin studied an adaptation into a film series with a much longer runtime, allowing ample room for adding new material, whereas Toba Dreams was adapted into a 140-minute feature film demanding stricter durational efficiency, making reduction the dominant strategy.

Sample Dialogue Comparison by Event

To illustrate the data mapping and classification technique, Table 5 presents a sample dialogue comparison for ten representative events based on the story letter labels described in the Method section. Complete data from all events in the novel and film served as the basis for the proportion calculations in the preceding section.

Table 4. Sample dialogue comparison from ten representative events

No.	Event label	Novel dialogue (summary)	Film dialogue (summary)	Classification
1	(e)	Young Tebe's conversation with his father before becoming a soldier	Not shown; information conveyed through Opung Boru's dialogue	Reduction
2	(at)–(t)	Lengthy explanation of Taruli's school fees	Explanation shortened, focused on Ronggur's request to enter pastoral school	Reduction
3	(ah)–(ai)	No conversation about Kristin's illness	New conversation about Kristin's illness and Choky's photograph	Addition
4	(cq)–(bd)	No dialogue about the kopiah	Dialogue about giving the kopiah as a farewell symbol	Addition

No.	Event label	Novel dialogue (summary)	Film dialogue (summary)	Classification
5	(at)–(t)	Plain remark that Ronggur has been gloomy	Vivid local simile for Ronggur's tight expression	Variation
6	(ba)–(y)	Polite enquiry about where the passenger is going	Startled, informal exclamation after a near collision	Variation
7	(aq)–(q)	Opung Boru's dismissive remark about where to sleep	Identical line	Similarity
8	(aq)–(q)	Togar's English greeting welcoming tourists to Lake Toba	Identical line	Similarity
9	(at)–(t)	Sersan Tebe's short command for Ronggur to wait	Identical line	Similarity
10	(cn)–(ba)	A brief quarrel without explicit physical threat	Explicit threat added as the conflict's peak	Addition

Source: authors' analysis. Kopiah = a brimless cap. Event labels correspond to the story letter labels described in the Method section.

The sample in Table 4 shows that all four change categories are distributed across various types of events, from character background exposition and time transitions to dramatic conflict peaks. This pattern indicates that dialogue ecranization strategy is not applied uniformly to a single type of event, but is instead tailored to the specific narrative needs of each scene.

Comparison with Ecranization in Other Regionally Set Films

To strengthen the interpretation of this study's findings, it is useful to compare the dialogue ecranization pattern in Toba Dreams with research on ecranization in other films that similarly foreground regional identity. The ecranization of the novel Laskar Pelangi into film, for instance, also shows significant addition in setting elements to reinforce the Belitung regional atmosphere, albeit with a different overall proportion than Toba Dreams (Maryova et al., 2022). This comparison should be read cautiously: the two films differ in period, production context, and directorial approach, and a direct claim about relative cinematic style is beyond what a dialogue-level analysis of Toba Dreams alone can support. What the comparison does show, more modestly, is that the purpose of adding local dialogue is similar across both objects, namely building regional setting authenticity, even where its extent and distribution differ.

Summary Comparison with Prior Ecranization Research

To position this study's findings more clearly within the landscape of ecranization research in Indonesia, Table 5 summarizes a comparison of the object, unit of analysis, and dominant findings of this study alongside several relevant prior ecranization studies.

Table 5. Comparison of objects and dominant findings across prior ecranization research

Study	Object and unit of analysis	Dominant finding
Yuniar & Widiati (2021)	Cinta Laki-Laki Biasa novel and film; plot, character, setting	Addition more dominant than reduction
Sari (2020)	Kartini novel and film; characterization	Character change influenced by director's perspective
Qonita et al. (2021)	7 Hari Menembus Waktu novel and film; plot, setting	Reduction dominant in plot and setting

Study	Object and unit of analysis	Dominant finding
Karma & Saadillah (2021)	Mimpi Sejuta Dolar novel and film; plot	Plot reduction reasonable; story essence preserved
Maryova et al. (2022)	Laskar Pelangi novel and film; plot, character, setting	Significant variation in time and place setting
Ardiansyah et al. (2020)	Hujan Bulan Juni novel and film; plot, character, setting	Reduction dominant; near-total restructuring of the story
Carmila et al. (2018)	Sabtu Bersama Bapak novel and single feature film; plot, character, setting	Reduction, addition, and variation all identified
Wachyudin (2024)	Sabtu Bersama Bapak novel and series; character, plot	Addition far more dominant, owing to series format
Chikita et al. (2024)	Surat dari Kematian novel and film; character utterance	Reduction dominant at utterance level (57 of 101 utterances)
This study (2025)	Toba Dreams novel and film; comprehensive dialogue	Reduction dominant; addition second; variation third

Source: compiled by the authors from the studies cited in the Introduction and Result and Discussion.

The comparison in Table 5 confirms two important points. First, the dominance of reduction found in this study is consistent with the majority of ecranization studies on single feature-film objects, particularly those specifically examining the utterance or dialogue level. Second, exceptions to this pattern consistently appear in adaptation objects with a series format (Wachyudin, 2024) or in objects with more generous production duration, reinforcing the interpretation that the adapted medium's format is an important variable influencing the proportion of ecranization change types, a pattern consistently observed both at the plot level in prior studies and at the dialogue level in this study. The contrast between Carmila et al.'s (2018) single-film Sabtu Bersama Bapak and Wachyudin's (2024) series adaptation of the same novel offers a particularly clean illustration of this format effect, since the underlying source material is identical and only the target medium's duration changes.

Implications for the Sociolinguistics of Film

The finding regarding the addition of Batak-language dialogue in the Toba Dreams film is also relevant to the sociolinguistics of film, particularly the phenomenon of code-switching in audiovisual media. Unlike the novel, written entirely in standard Indonesian, the film presents situational code-switching between Indonesian and Batak, appearing primarily in scenes with kinship and communal-familiarity nuances. Consistent with Myers-Scotton's (1993) account of code-switching as a socially motivated negotiation of distance and identity between speakers, this pattern indicates that language choice in film dialogue is not merely an aesthetic decision but also a sociolinguistic strategy for marking social distance and degree of familiarity between characters. The use of Batak by Opung Boru and village neighbours, for instance, affirms their position as representatives of the community of origin, while characters who have long resided in major cities, such as Sersan Tebe and his nuclear family, remain dominated by Indonesian in most conversations.

Dialogue as Creative Freedom and Responsibility

These findings confirm that dialogue ecranization in Toba Dreams is not a mere mechanical translation of written words into spoken words, but a creative process involving careful consideration of duration, character, cultural context, and the film's dramatic needs. Consistent with Damono's (2014) concept of media transposition and with Hutcheon's (2013) broader account of adaptation as repetition with variation, every change found, whether

reduction, addition, or variation, represents both the filmmaker's creative freedom and their responsibility to continue conveying the novel's essential narrative message to the audience, albeit through a different mode of delivery.

Compared with prior studies that tend to analyze ecranization at the level of plot, character, or setting in general (Sari, 2020; Qonita et al., 2021; Maryova et al., 2022), this study contributes by focusing its analysis specifically and comprehensively on dialogue as an independent unit of analysis. This approach matters because dialogue possesses characteristics distinct from other narrative elements: it must simultaneously convey story information, build character, and sound natural as spoken utterance, three demands that do not always align with the written dialogue style found in novels, a tension Bluestone (1957) identified as intrinsic to the difference between a medium built for interior consciousness and one built for observed, audible reality.

Methodological Reflection and Limitations

The comprehensive mapping approach applied in this study, covering the entire dialogue of the novel and film rather than only selected scene samples, offers stronger data representativeness than ecranization studies that analyze only chosen dialogue excerpts. By assigning consistent letter labels to each story event, this study enables direct traceability from the reported change-type proportions back to the raw data, making the resulting interpretation more transparent and verifiable. The proportions reported here are nonetheless descriptive rather than inferential, based on a comprehensive mapping without statistical testing, and should be read as characterizing dialogue ecranization in this specific research object.

Four limitations qualify these findings. First, the analysis is limited to verbal dialogue content without including nonverbal language such as intonation, gesture, or facial expression, which in practice also influence the meaning and effectiveness of film dialogue. Second, the study focuses on a single novel-film pair, so generalizing the dominance of reduction as the primary dialogue ecranization strategy for duration-constrained films requires further testing against other adaptation objects. Third, interpreting the narrative function of each identified change involves the researchers' qualitative judgment regarding the Batak cultural and literary context underlying the story, which would ideally be enriched through triangulation with native speakers or Batak cultural experts. Fourth, although three-author investigator triangulation strengthens interpretive consistency, this study did not compute a quantitative inter-rater agreement measure to verify classification consistency, a step that more rigorous qualitative designs recommend for confirming coding reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2014); this is a limitation of the present study, not only a direction reserved for future work.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to describe how dialogue changes between the Toba Dreams novel and film, to classify those changes using a three-part typology of ecranization, and to identify the narrative function each type of change serves. The comparison shows that reduction is the most frequent type of change, functioning to achieve word and durational economy, avoid repeating meaning, and adjust dialogue to characterization; addition, though fewer in number, exerts substantial influence on the film by strengthening dramatic aspects, cultural locality, and narrative transitions; variation aligns dialogue with characterization and builds a more vivid atmosphere; and dialogue similarities occur in very small numbers, generally in short sentences that already effectively represent the event's context and characterization. Ecranization in this novel-film pair is accordingly not a mechanical transcription of written speech into spoken lines, but a creative negotiation that nonetheless preserves the essence of the novel's narrative message.

The study's principal contribution is to show that dialogue behaves as a distinct and comprehensively analyzable unit of ecranization, with transformation characteristics that differ from those already documented at the level of plot, character, and setting, and that a complete, non-sampled mapping of dialogue can trace those characteristics with a transparency that scene-sampling approaches cannot match. For screenwriters and filmmakers adapting literary works with strong regional settings, the findings suggest that fidelity to a source novel is better judged by how consistently a story's message, characterization, and atmosphere are conveyed than by how much dialogue is preserved verbatim, and that added local-language dialogue can do meaningful narrative and cultural work rather than serving merely as ornament.

These conclusions should be read within the limits of a single novel-film pair examined through the qualitative judgment of three researchers without a quantitative reliability check, and without access to native Batak-speaking consultants for the cultural and linguistic interpretations offered. Further research should extend the comprehensive dialogue-mapping approach developed here to other Indonesian novel-to-film adaptations, particularly those released within a similarly short interval between publication and premiere, to test whether the reduction-dominant pattern observed here generalizes across feature-length regional dramas or is instead contingent on factors specific to this novel-film pair, such as the source author's prose style or the director's individual approach to scriptwriting. Such work would also benefit from incorporating a quantitative inter-rater reliability measure alongside the qualitative interpretive depth retained in the present approach.

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Data availability. The comparative worksheet and dialogue mapping underlying this study are held by the first author and may be made available for scholarly verification on request.

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