Idiomatic Translation Strategies *in Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang Movie* Subtitles

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Abstract

This study is entitled "*Idiomatic Translation Analysis of Nanny McPhee and The Big Bang Movie Subtitle*". The aims of this study are (1) to identify the type of idiomatic expression, and (2) to analyze the translation strategies used in the translation of idiomatic expressions found in *Nanny McPhee and The Big Bang* movie script. This study used a descriptive qualitative methodology in which words and phrases were used to represent the data. Two theories were utilized to examine the data: (1) Adam Makkai's (1994) theory to identify the type of idiomatic expression used in this movie; and (2) Mona Baker's (1992) theory to analyze the translation strategy. The findings of this study indicate two key points: (1) there are several types of idiom, including 20 phrasal compounds idiom, 3 tournure idioms, 3 irreversible binomial idioms, and 1 incorporating verb idiom; the most prevalent form, with 33 data, is the phrasal verb idiom. (2) There are idiomatic translation strategies used in the target language subtitle, 16 using similar meaning and form, 5 using similar meaning but dissimilar form, 2 using the translation by omission, and most frequently, the translation by paraphrasing with 37 data.

Keywords: Idiomatic expression, Movie script, Translation Strategy

A. Introduction

Translation plays a fundamental role in facilitating cross-linguistic communication and enhancing the comprehension of English for non-native speakers. As Larson (1984) asserts, translation involves replacing the meaning of a source text (ST) with an equivalent meaning in the target text (TT), using the appropriate linguistic structures of the target language. While many perceive translation as a straightforward process of transferring meaning between languages, it is a complex linguistic task requiring deep understanding and skillful application of translation techniques. The success of a translation depends on the translator's ability to navigate linguistic, cultural, and contextual differences to ensure accuracy and clarity in the target language.

Translation can be categorized into three main types: (1) textual translation, commonly found in written documents and literary works, (2) interpreting, which

involves real-time oral translation, and (3) audiovisual translation, which is prevalent in electronic media such as foreign news broadcasts, international television shows, and films. Among these, audiovisual translation has gained prominence due to the widespread consumption of foreign movies. However, since these films are produced in different languages, subtitling becomes essential to help audiences comprehend the dialogues and narrative (Gottlieb, 1994). Subtitling is a specialized form of translation that requires balancing linguistic precision with time and space constraints, making it a challenging yet crucial aspect of translation studies.

The effectiveness of subtitle translation largely depends on the skills and expertise of the translator. According to Catford (1965), the primary challenge in translation lies in achieving equivalent meaning in the target language. A proficient translator must not only have mastery of both the source and target languages but also possess cultural awareness and contextual understanding to ensure accurate and natural translations. For example, certain food items such as "salad with peanut sauce" might be translated as "gado-gado," reflecting the cultural equivalence rather than a literal translation. This demonstrates that translation is not merely a linguistic task but also an interpretive process that requires sensitivity to cultural nuances (Newmark, 1988).

Accuracy in translation is paramount, as it can influence societal acceptance and comprehension of the translated material. Literary translation, in particular, presents unique challenges such as structural differences between languages, cultural variations, and lexical ambiguities. To address these challenges, translators often employ various translation shifts, whereby a word in the source language may be translated into a word, phrase, clause, or even a full sentence in the target language to maintain equivalence (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995). These shifts are necessary to ensure that the translation conveys the intended meaning without distorting the essence of the original text.

A proficient translator must also have an extensive vocabulary in both the source and target languages. One effective method for expanding vocabulary is studying idiomatic expressions, which frequently appear in everyday language. According to Chaer and Agustina (2004), language serves to express both true and non-true meanings, often incorporating idiomatic expressions that may be illogical when interpreted literally. For instance, the English idiom "break a leg" does not signify physical injury but rather conveys a wish for good luck. As Longman (1992) explains, idioms are fixed expressions whose meanings differ from the sum of their individual words, making them challenging for non-native speakers to grasp and translate accurately.

Idioms often pose significant challenges in translation, as their meanings cannot always be deduced from the literal definitions of their constituent words (Laval, 2003). Unlike slang, which may be regionally or socially specific, idioms are widely recognized and used in various forms of communication. However, due to their figurative nature, non-native speakers and inexperienced translators may struggle to interpret them correctly. Beekman and Callow (1974) define idiomatic expressions as multi-word units

whose meanings cannot be understood purely through their literal interpretations. Consequently, idiomatic translation requires careful consideration to ensure that the intended meaning is effectively conveyed in the target language.

The topic of idiomatic translation has been the focus of several academic studies. One notable study is Windawati's (2015) research on translation methods and meaning equivalence in phrasal verbs from the movie *X-Men: First Class*. Using Newmark's (1988) translation methods and Nida's (1964) theory of equivalence, she examined the translation of idiomatic phrasal verbs and identified eight translation procedures employed in the film. Among these, faithful translation, semantic translation, idiomatic translation, and communicative translation were the most commonly used. The study found that dynamic equivalence was predominantly applied, emphasizing the importance of conveying meaning in a way that resonates with the target audience.

In translation studies, different methods and strategies are employed depending on the context and purpose of the translation. Newmark (1988) highlights that the primary challenge in translation lies in choosing between literal and free translation approaches. He identifies eight translation methods that translators can apply to ensure accurate and contextually appropriate translations. To address the specific challenge of translating idioms, Mona Baker (1992) outlines four main strategies: (1) using an idiom with similar meaning and form in the target language, (2) using an idiom with similar meaning but different form, (3) paraphrasing the idiom, and (4) omitting the idiom when necessary. These strategies help translators navigate the complexities of idiomatic expressions and achieve an equivalent meaning in the target language.

Idioms are an integral and dynamic aspect of the English language, frequently used in both spoken and written discourse across formal and informal contexts. According to McCarthy and O'Dell (2010), idioms consist of fixed word combinations whose meanings are often unpredictable from their individual components. Chaer (1990) similarly describes idioms as linguistic units whose meanings cannot be inferred from grammatical rules alone. Cooper (1999) reinforces this notion, stating that idioms express ideas through figurative language, making them challenging to interpret without prior exposure.

This study aims to analyze the translation of idioms in the movie *Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang* by applying the theoretical frameworks of Adam Makkai (1994) and Mona Baker (1992). Makkai classifies idioms into five types: phrasal verb idioms, tournure idioms, phrasal compound idioms, irreversible binomial idioms, and incorporating verb idioms. Meanwhile, Baker's translation strategies provide a comprehensive approach to handling idiomatic expressions in translation. By examining these aspects, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of idiomatic translation and its impact on meaning equivalence in audiovisual media.

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B. Method

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design to examine the translation of idioms in movie subtitles. Since idiomatic expressions require contextual interpretation rather than numerical measurement, a qualitative approach is appropriate. Creswell (2014) emphasizes that qualitative research explores meanings individuals or groups assign to social issues through inductive analysis and flexible reporting structures. The data is obtained from the subtitle script of *Nanny McPhee and The Big Bang*. The selection of this film is based on its extensive use of idiomatic expressions, which pose challenges in translation. The official subtitle script is extracted to ensure accuracy, and idioms with figurative meanings distinct from their literal interpretations are identified for analysis.

The study follows a structured approach in data analysis. First, idiomatic expressions are categorized based on Adam Makkai's (1984) classification, which includes phrasal verb idioms, tournure idioms, phrasal compound idioms, irreversible binomial idioms, and incorporating verb idioms. Next, translation strategies are analyzed using Mona Baker's (1992) framework, which consists of using an idiom of similar meaning and form, using an idiom of similar meaning but different form, translation by paraphrase, and translation by omission. The data is then tabulated, followed by an interpretation of how each strategy affects meaning retention. To ensure validity and reliability, this study employs triangulation by comparing multiple subtitle sources and linguistic theories. Expert reviews from translation scholars and contextual analysis further strengthen the research credibility. This methodology offers a comprehensive approach to understanding idiomatic translation in subtitles.

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C. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study, addressing the research question regarding the translation of idiomatic expressions in the subtitles of *Nanny McPhee and The Big Bang*. The analysis follows two primary steps. First, idioms are categorized based on Makkai's (1984) classification of idiomatic expressions. To enhance clarity, tabulated data is provided to illustrate these findings. Second, the translation strategies used to render these idioms in the target language are analyzed using Baker's (1992) framework, with corresponding tabulated data.

Finding

A total of 60 idiomatic expressions were identified in the subtitle script. These expressions were translated using different strategies, classified according to Baker's (1992) typology. The strategies include translation by paraphrase, translation using an

idiom of similar meaning and form, translation using an idiom of similar meaning but different form, and translation by omission.

Discussion

From the collected data, 15 idioms were selected for detailed analysis, focusing on their categorization and translation strategies. To ensure accuracy, the meanings of idioms were cross-referenced with multiple linguistic sources, including *McGraw-Hill's American Idioms Dictionary* (Spears, 2005), *Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary* (2011), *Longman Dictionary Online*, *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, and *Kamus Inggris-Indonesia* (Echols & Shadily, 1992). The following analysis highlights selected idioms and their translation approaches.

A. Types of Idiomatic Expressions

1. Phrasal Verb Idioms

Example:

- SL: *They're coping, too. Get off the furniture!* (00:01:24)
- TL: *Mereka mengatasi, juga. Turun dari kursi!* (00:01:24)

The phrase *get off* is identified as a phrasal verb idiom, as it consists of a verb (*get*) and a preposition (*off*), forming a meaning distinct from its individual components. According to Spears (2005, p. 102), *get off* means 'to move away from something.' Similarly, *Kamus Inggris-Indonesia* (Echols & Shadily, 1992, p. 116) defines *get off* as *turun atau menjauh*.

2. Irreversible Binomial Idioms

Example:

- SL: *You touch it, and I'll mash you.* (00:15:43)
- TL: *Kamu menyentuhnya, dan aku akan menghajarmu.* (00:15:43)

This phrase is classified as an irreversible binomial idiom because it consists of two elements (*touch* and *mash*) joined by a conjunction, following the fixed pattern of irreversible binomials (Makkai, 1984). The Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary (2011, p. 470) defines *touch* as 'placing hands or fingers onto something,' while *mash* refers to 'crushing into a soft mass' (p. 271). In Indonesian, *touch* is translated as *sentuhan* and *mash* as *melenyehkan* (Echols & Shadily, 1992, pp. 597, 374).

3. Incorporating Verb Idioms

Example:

- SL: *You can call me whatever you like, sweetheart.* (00:07:24)
- TL: *Kamu bisa panggil aku semaumu, sayang.* (00:07:24)

This idiom follows the incorporating verb structure, where *sweetheart* is used as an affectionate term. The Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary (2011, p. 449) defines *sweetheart* as 'a term used to address someone affectionately.' In Indonesian, it translates as *kesayangan* or *kekasih* (Echols & Shadily, 1992, p. 573).

B. Translation Strategies

1. Translation by Paraphrase

Example:

- SL: *They're coping, too. Get off the furniture!* (00:01:24)
- TL: *Mereka mengatasi, juga. Turun dari kursi!* (00:01:24)

The idiom *get off* has no direct equivalent in Indonesian. The translator opted for paraphrasing, a strategy recommended by Baker (1992) when a direct equivalent does not exist. This approach ensures the phrase remains comprehensible in the target language while preserving its intended meaning.

2. Translation Using an Idiom of Similar Meaning and Form

Example:

- SL: *Now, I've got to run.* (00:02:46)
- TL: *Sekarang, saya harus pergi.* (00:02:46)

In this case, the translator used an idiom with a similar meaning and form, as *got to run* closely aligns with *harus pergi* in Indonesian. This strategy helps maintain both the idiomatic structure and contextual accuracy (Baker, 1992).

3. Translation by Omission

Example:

- SL: *What on earth made you think of that, then?* (00:08:43)
- TL: *Apa yang membuatmu berpikiran seperti itu?* (00:08:43)

The phrase *on earth* is omitted in the translation, as it has no direct equivalent in Indonesian and does not significantly alter the sentence's meaning. Baker (1992) states

that omission is a viable strategy when an idiom cannot be naturally rendered in the target language without compromising clarity.

The study reveals that idiomatic expressions in *Nanny McPhee and The Big Bang* were translated using paraphrasing, idioms of similar meaning and form, idioms of similar meaning but different form, and omission (Baker, 1992). Paraphrasing emerged as the most frequently used strategy due to the linguistic and cultural differences between English and Indonesian.

For future research, scholars may explore idiom translation in different genres, such as historical films or comedies, where cultural context plays a more significant role. Additionally, further studies could analyze audience reception to determine the effectiveness of different translation strategies.

D. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study and the theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter, the idiomatic expressions in *Nanny McPhee and The Big Bang* movie subtitles were categorized using Adam Makkai's (1984) classification. A total **of** 60 idiomatic expressions were identified**,** categorized into five types: phrasal verbs (33 instances), tournure idioms (3 instances), phrasal compounds (20 instances), irreversible binomials (3 instances), and incorporating verbs (1 instance). Among these categories, phrasal verbs emerged as the most frequently used idiomatic expression, accounting for 33 instances. This dominance can be attributed to the widespread presence of phrasal verbs in both formal and informal English, particularly in native speakers' daily conversations, which aligns with the dialogue style of the movie. Conversely, incorporating verbs were the least frequently found, with only one instance identified. This rarity is due to the limited use of incorporating verbs in both spoken and written English, making them less common in daily conversations and, consequently, in the movie's dialogues.

The analysis of the translation strategies applied to the identified idiomatic expressions was conducted using Mona Baker's (1992) framework. The study found that four translation strategies were used in the Indonesian subtitles of Nanny McPhee and The Big Bang. The frequency of each strategy is as follows: translation by paraphrase (37 instances), translation using an idiom of similar meaning and form (16 instances), translation using an idiom of similar meaning but different form (5 instances), and translation by omission (2 instances).

The most frequently used strategy was translation by paraphrase, appearing 37 times in the movie script. This suggests that paraphrasing is the most effective approach when a direct equivalent of the source idiom does not exist in the target language. It allows translators to maintain the original meaning while adapting to the linguistic and cultural constraints of Indonesian. On the other hand, translation by omission was the least

employed strategy, occurring only twice in the script. This indicates that translators generally preferred to retain idiomatic expressions rather than omitting them, except in cases where the idiom's meaning could not be effectively conveyed in the target language.

This study highlights the prevalence of phrasal verb idioms in English-language movies and the dominance of paraphrasing as a translation strategy for idiomatic expressions. The findings contribute to the understanding of idiom translation in audiovisual media and emphasize the need for context-sensitive translation strategies to preserve meaning and fluency in subtitle translation. Future research could explore idiom translation strategies across different genres, languages, or subtitle formats to further expand the field of translation studies.

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