

## SUBTITLING AND DUBBING OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN THE AMERICAN TV SERIES *WANDA VISION*

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### ABSTRACT

*The research aimed to find out the translation strategies applied in the subtitling and the dubbing of idiomatic expressions in the television series WandaVision (2021). Moreover, the research also aimed to reveal whether the subtitling and the dubbing of the idiomatic expressions are source language-oriented or target language-oriented. The descriptive qualitative approach was applied in the research. The data were analyzed using the taxonomy for rendering extralinguistic cultural references in subtitling proposed by Pedersen. The taxonomy was used to analyze the data since it was specifically designed for subtitling and audiovisual translation. The results show that there are various strategies applied in subtitling and dubbing. In subtitling, the translation strategies applied are substitution, direct translation, generalization, and the combination of substitution and omission. The translation strategies applied in the subtitling are related to spatial and temporal constraints. As a comparison, the translation strategies applied in dubbing are substitution, direct translation, generalization, and the combination of substitution and specification. The strategies are applied based on the consideration that spoken language features should be included in the dubbing. Based on the translation strategies applied, it can be concluded that both the subtitling and the dubbing are target language-oriented.*

**Keywords:** *subtitling, dubbing, idiomatic expression, audiovisual translation*

### INTRODUCTION

Subtitling and dubbing are the two most popular options for translating audiovisual content, such as movies, television series, and videos (Forutan & Modarresi, 2018). The decisions to apply these techniques are based on cultural, socio-economic, political, and geographical factors (Perego, Del Missier, & Stragà, 2018). Furthermore, the constraints in subtitling and dubbing can be another reason to consider. Even though both techniques represent spoken language, the translation output is presented in different forms: subtitling in written form while dubbing is spoken (Hammou, 2020). Due to the distinction of linguistic features, subtitling and dubbing pose different challenges for translators (Božović, 2019).

In the subtitling process, there are spatial and

temporal considerations. Subtitles are generally limited to two lines and placed at the bottom of the screen to avoid causing visual disruption for the viewers. The number of characters in the subtitle is also limited to 35 characters (Abdelaal, 2019). Moreover, the translator also needs to take the subtitle display rate into consideration. The duration for the subtitle to show on the screen should match the speaking time of the people appearing in the audiovisual product. Another factor that should be taken into account is the viewer's reading speed (Puspitasari, Tabiati, & Junining, 2020). The subtitle should not disappear too fast because the viewers will not have enough time to read them.

The process of dubbing also possesses its own constraints. There are several priorities that should be considered in typical dubbing, namely synchronization, natural and realistic dialogue, speech tempo, and the voice quality of the dubbers (Miggiani,

2021). Since dubbing is conveyed through the spoken medium, it is necessary for the translator to create a dialogue that sounds credible and natural to the target audience. Another challenge in dubbing is the character synchrony between the voice of the original character and the voice of the dubber (Baños, 2021).

The audiovisual translation process will become even more complicated when the translator has to deal with idiomatic expressions. The translator needs to be aware of idiomatic expressions as they are not always obvious (Brezolin & Medeiros, 2021). The failure to recognize the idiomatic expressions will result in unnatural or awkward translations. Moreover, finding the equivalents of idiomatic expressions is also challenging (Putri & Wijaya, 2021). The translator must apply the right strategies to translate the idiomatic expressions. In the case of subtitling and dubbing, the translator must consider the technical constraints as well.

Several studies have investigated the subtitling of idiomatic expressions. The research conducted by Manipuspika and Winzami (2021) aims to analyze the types of idioms and the translation strategies applied in the subtitle of the movie *Murder on the Orient Express*. The types of idioms are analyzed using the theory proposed by Seidl and McMordie, and the translation strategies are analyzed using Baker's theory. The findings show that phrasal verbs are the most common type of idiomatic expression found in the movie. Moreover, translation by paraphrase is the dominant translation strategy applied to translate the idioms. According to the researchers, the translation by paraphrase strategy is often used since the equivalent of the source language idioms cannot be found in the target language. Therefore, the translators opt for a translation strategy that enables them to convey the meaning of the idioms by paraphrasing.

Another research related to subtitling idiomatic expression is conducted by Tyasrinestu and Ardi (2020). The research focuses on the analysis of the types of idiomatic expressions and the translation strategies used in *The Good Doctor* TV series. The results reveal five types of idiomatic expressions based on Hockett's theory found in the TV series. They are substitutes, proper names, slang words, the figure of speech, and English phrasal compounds. The researchers also find six translation strategies proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet applied in the translation. Equivalence is the most frequently used translation strategy in translating idiomatic expressions. Several idiomatic expressions are omitted in the translation.

The research conducted by Kusuma and Rini (2020) also discusses the translation of idiomatic expressions in the subtitle of the movie *Inside Out*. The researchers apply the theoretical framework by Newmark to analyze the translation procedures and to evaluate the translation appropriateness. Based on the findings, the functional equivalent is the most frequently applied translation procedure in translating the idioms found in the movie. The procedure also produces the highest number of appropriate translations. Finally,

the researchers conclude that functional equivalent is the most recommended translation procedure in translating idiomatic expressions since it results in natural, semantically adequate, and pragmatically accurate translations.

The three previous research are relevant to the research since they discuss the translation of idiomatic expressions found in the subtitle. However, the research offers a new perspective as it compares the translation of idiomatic expressions in subtitling and dubbing. The previous research analyzes the translation strategies using the theories proposed by Baker, Vinay & Darbenet, and Newmark. The theoretical frameworks proposed by those prominent scholars have been used frequently in translation research. Therefore, the researcher would like to apply a different theory proposed by Pedersen (2011). The framework is chosen to analyze the translation strategies since it is created primarily for rendering Extralinguistic Cultural References (ECR) in subtitling. However, Pedersen (2011) has pointed out that the theoretical framework could also be used to analyze other translation phenomena.

Pedersen (2011) has proposed a taxonomy of translation strategies specifically designed for audiovisual translation and subtitling. The taxonomy presents seven main strategies with several subcategories. Three strategies are source language-oriented, while the other three are target language-oriented. The official equivalent is not categorized under these two orientations. Figure 1 (see Appendix) illustrates the taxonomy of ECR transfer strategies.

Figure 1 (see Appendix) shows seven main translation strategies: retention, specification, and direct translation are source-oriented, while generalization, substitution, and omission are target-oriented. The official equivalent is considered as an equivalent with a special status. Therefore, it is placed outside of the orientation category. For research purposes, it is necessary to provide a description of the main translation strategies: (1) retention is a translation strategy that retains the source text (ST) in the subtitle unchanged or slightly adapted according to the target language (TL) requirements, (2) specification makes the subtitle more specific than the ST by adding more information, (3) direct translation only changes the language without making semantic alteration, (4) generalization makes the translation less specific than the ST, (5) substitution replaces the ST ECR using another ECR, either from the source culture or the target culture, (6) omission removes the ST ECR in the TL, and it is perhaps used more frequently in subtitling due to spatial constraints, (7) official equivalent means that equivalence of the ST ECR has been established in the TL. Pedersen (2011) has stated that it is possible to combine these translation strategies to solve a problem in translation.

Based on the background, the research aims to determine the strategies used to translate the idiomatic expressions in the subtitle and the dubbed version of the television series *WandaVision*. Furthermore, the

research also aims to investigate whether the subtitle and the dubbed version are source-oriented or target-oriented. The research may serve as a reference for future research in subtitling and dubbing. As pointed out by Bosseaux (2019), the research on dubbing has been conducted dominantly by European scholars. Therefore, more dubbing research from the perspective of non-western countries is required. Hopefully, the research will encourage further studies on dubbing in the Indonesian context. It will also provide some suggestions for subtitling and dubbing practitioners, especially in dealing with idiomatic expressions.

## METHODS

This is a descriptive qualitative research. The research data are idiomatic expressions in the first episode of the television series *WandaVision*. The television mini-series is created by Jac Schaeffer, and it was released in January 2021 by the streaming service Disney+. The story relates to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and it focuses on the life of Wanda Maximoff, one of the characters in *Avengers*. The series has gained positive reception from the viewers. It has won several awards as well. The researcher chose the television series as the data source since it contains several idiomatic expressions and has two translation versions in the form of subtitling and dubbing.

The data are collected in two steps. The first step is watching the first episode of *WandaVision* to identify the idiomatic expressions. The second step is transcribing the idiomatic expressions in the source language, the Indonesian subtitle, and the dubbed version. After that, the researcher analyzes the data using the taxonomy proposed by Pedersen (2011). Based on the analysis of the translation strategies, it can be concluded whether the subtitling and the dubbing are source-oriented or target-oriented.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Subtitling and dubbing have their own challenges and constraints that should be considered in the process of audiovisual translation. The translator has to opt for the most suitable translation strategy to produce subtitling and dubbing with good quality. There are different strategies applied in the subtitling and the dubbing of idiomatic expressions in the television series *WandaVision*. In subtitling, the strategies applied are substitution, direct translation, generalization, and the combination of substitution and omission. While in the dubbed version, substitution, direct translation, generalization, and the combination of substitution and specification strategies are applied. A detailed analysis is presented in Datum 1.

### Datum 1

SL : Hey! What's got **your feathers all ruffled?**

Subtitle : *Hey! Apa yang sebenarnya **menganggumu?***

Dubbing : *Hei! Apa yang **membuatmu kesal, sobat?***

In Datum 1, the idiomatic expression 'What's got your feathers all ruffled?' is translated into '*Apa yang sebenarnya menganggumu?*' in the subtitle, and '*Apa yang membuatmu kesal, sobat?*' in the dubbed version. According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, the idiom 'ruffle someone's feathers' means 'to upset or offend someone'. Based on the definition, it can be concluded that both the subtitle and the dubbed versions have conveyed the meaning of the idiomatic expression. However, the translation strategies applied are slightly different. The substitution strategy is applied in the subtitle since the idiomatic expression is altered into a non-idiomatic translation. The same strategy is used in the dubbed version, even though the lexical choice is different. The substitution strategy is combined with the specification strategy by adding the word '*sobat*' at the end of the dubbed version. The decision to add more information in the dubbing could be made based on several factors. First, it is conducted to make the utterance sound more natural in the TL. It is necessary to include the spoken language features in the dubbed version. Therefore, the dubber should create a dialogue which sounds like a real-life conversation. Second, the extra word is added to match the Indonesian dubbing with the character's speaking time and lip movement. In other words, there is a consideration of visual and verbal synchrony.

### Datum 2

SL : Have you got a **screw loose?**

Subtitle : *Ada **bautmu yang longgar?***

Dubbing : *Apa ada **masalah?***

The idiom 'have a screw loose' in Datum 2 is defined as 'to be crazy' in Merriam-Webster's dictionary. The translator applies a direct translation strategy in the subtitle since the idiomatic expression 'Have you got a screw loose?' is translated literally into '*Ada bautmu yang longgar?*'. The idiom's meaning is not conveyed well in the subtitle, which may cause confusion to the viewers. In contrast, the dubber renders the idiom into '*Apa ada masalah?*' which is semantically more appropriate than the subtitle. A substitution strategy is applied in the dubbing since the SL idiom was not translated into another idiom in the TL. However, the meaning is transferred well in the dubbed version.

### Datum 3

SL : No **skeletons in your closet**, eh, Vision?

Subtitle : *Tak ada **tengkorak dalam lemari mu, benar, Vision?***

Dubbing : *Tidak ada **kerangka di lemarimu,***

*'kan, Vision?*

According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, the expression 'skeletons in the closet' shown in Datum 3 means 'something bad or embarrassing that is kept secret'. It is translated into '*tengkorak dalam lemari*' in the subtitle and '*kerangka dalam lemari*' in the dubbing. Both versions are translated using a direct translation strategy, which does not convey the meaning well into the TL. The translator might not recognize the idiomatic expression, hence the decision to translate it literally. The suggested translation is '*Kau tidak menyimpan rahasia, 'kan, Vision?*' which can be used in subtitle and dubbed versions.

#### Datum 4

SL : I still get a little **tongue-tied**.  
Subtitle : ***Lidahku masih suka kaku.***  
Dubbing : *Aku masih sedikit malu.*

The idiomatic expression 'tongue-tied' in Datum 4 is defined as 'unable to speak due to nervousness or shyness' in Merriam-Webster's dictionary. The subtitler merely translates the linguistic element of the idiom 'tongue-tied' into '*lidahku kaku.*' However, the semantic element 'due to nervousness or shyness' in the idiom is not transferred into the TL. Thus, it can be concluded that the subtitler applies a direct translation strategy in this context. A different translation is found in dubbing. The dubber translates 'tongue-tied' into '*malu*', which transfers the idiom's meaning. In this case, the dubber applies the substitution strategy since there is an alteration in the linguistic category from an idiomatic expression to a non-idiomatic one.

#### Datum 5

SL : Glad to know we're both **on the same page**.  
Subtitle : *Aku senang kita sepaham.*  
Dubbing : *Senang kita punya pemikiran yang sama.*

In Datum 5, the idiomatic expression 'on the same page' means 'agree about something'. It is translated into '*sepaham*' in the subtitling, and '*punya pemikiran yang sama*' in the dubbing. Even though the lexical choice is different, both the dubber and the subtitler apply a generalization strategy by paraphrasing the idiomatic expression. As a result, the idiom's meaning can be transferred well into the TL. It produces translations that the viewers can easily comprehend. The subtitle is shorter than the dubbed version since the subtitler needs to consider the spatial and temporal constraints in the subtitling. The subtitle has to be concise, so the viewers have enough time to read it.

#### Datum 6

SL : I think **I've got it covered** from here.

Subtitle : *Aku bisa tangani sisanya.*  
Dubbing : *Aku rasa aku bisa sendiri.*

The idiom 'have got it covered' in Datum 6 means 'to take control of the situation'. In the subtitle, the idiom is translated into '*bisa tangani sisanya*', and in the dubbing, it is translated into '*bisa sendiri.*' The difference in lexical choice is affected by the characteristics of written and spoken language. The dubbed version sounds more natural in spoken language. Regarding the translation strategy, the subtitler uses a direct translation strategy to translate the idiom, while the dubber applies a generalization strategy by paraphrasing. Despite the differences, both translation versions can be well-comprehended.

#### Datum 7

SL : I know you're **in a pinch**.  
Subtitle : *Kau dalam keadaan darurat.*  
Dubbing : *Aku tahu kau sedang kesulitan.*

In Datum 7, the idiomatic expression 'in a pinch' means 'in a bad situation when help is needed' according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary. The subtitler translates the idiom into '*dalam keadaan darurat*', which is different from the dubbed version '*sedang kesulitan*'. Another case of well-conveyed meaning with different lexical choices is shown in Datum 7. Both the dubber and the subtitler apply the substitution strategy by replacing the idiomatic expression using a non-idiomatic translation. However, there is an omission in the subtitle as the SL clause 'I know' is not transferred into the TL. The omission strategy is applied to create a brief subtitle. It is necessary to be conducted due to the space limitation.

#### Datum 8

SL : This menu can be done **in a snap**.  
Subtitle : *Menunya mudah disiapkan.*  
Dubbing : *Menu ini bisa dilakukan dalam sekejap.*

The idiom 'in a snap', as shown in datum 8, has the meaning of 'very quickly' or 'almost immediately'. The idiom is translated into '*mudah disiapkan*' in the subtitle, which does not transfer the semantic element 'quick' or 'immediate' of the idiom. However, the subtitle can still be considered acceptable since the translation implies that a menu that is easy to cook usually takes little time to prepare. In this context, the subtitler makes an alteration in the semantic element by applying a substitution strategy. This decision could be made based on the consideration of the character limit in subtitling. The dubbed version is translated in accordance with the grammatical structure and the semantic element of the SL idiom. The SL noun phrase 'this menu' is dubbed into an Indonesian noun phrase '*menu ini*'. Then, the passive form 'can be done' is translated into '*bisa dilakukan*', which is also a passive

form in the Indonesian language. Finally, the idiom ‘in a snap’, which can be classified as a prepositional phrase, is translated into an Indonesian prepositional phrase ‘*dalam sekejap*’. The meaning of the idiom is also conveyed in the dubbed version. The analysis of the dubbing leads to the conclusion that the translator applies a direct translation strategy.

#### Datum 9

- SL : I think tonight’s **going swimmingly**.  
 Subtitle : *Malam ini berjalan lancar*.  
 Dubbing : *Kupikir malam ini akan menyenangkan*.

Based on the definition in Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, the idiom ‘going swimmingly’ means ‘going very well’. In the dubbed version, the idiom is translated into ‘*akan menyenangkan*’, which is not suitable with the SL tense. The word ‘*akan*’ refers to the future, while the SL tense ‘is going’ means that the action or the situation is still ongoing, which can be seen in the scene as well. Therefore, it is more appropriate to omit the word ‘*akan*’ in the dubbing. In this case, the strategy applied is substitution since the translator alters the tense in the TL. In the subtitle, the idiom is translated into ‘*berjalan lancar*’, which transfers the meaning well into the TL. The translation strategy applied in the subtitle is substitution since there is a change in the form of expression in the TL. Another important thing to notice is the length of the subtitle and the dubbed version. The subtitle is shorter than the dubbed version since the SL clause ‘I think’ is omitted in the subtitling. The subtitle has to limit the number of characters due to the constraints of the medium. Thus, the combination of substitution and omission is applied to translate the idiom in Datum 9.

#### Datum 10

- SL : Oh, just **leave the poor kids alone**.  
 Subtitle : *Jangan ganggu mereka*.  
 Dubbing : *Oh, abaikan saja anak-anak malang ini*

The idiomatic expression ‘leave someone alone’ shown in Datum 10 means ‘not to disturb someone’. The subtitle version has conveyed the meaning well by the translation ‘*jangan ganggu mereka*’. In this case, the substitution strategy is applied in the subtitling by changing the form in the TL. However, the interjection ‘oh’ is not reproduced in the subtitle. It is considered unnecessary to include the interjection in the subtitle since it is a feature of spoken language. However, the dubbed version retains the interjection to create a natural and credible dubbing that sounds like a daily conversation. The idiomatic expression is dubbed into ‘*abaikan saja anak-anak malang ini*’, which means ‘to ignore the poor kids’. In this case, the translator applied a substitution strategy since the meaning is slightly altered.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis, there are differences in the strategies applied and the lexical choice between the subtitling and the dubbed version. The differences are due to different considerations in subtitling and dubbing. Due to the spatial and temporal constraints in subtitling, including only the important message from the source dialogue is necessary. In subtitling, the strategies of substitution, direct translation, and generalization are applied. In addition, the combination of substitution and omission is frequently used in the subtitle. Based on the strategies applied, it can be inferred that the subtitling is more target-oriented.

In comparison, the strategies applied in the dubbed version are substitution, direct translation, generalization, and the combination of substitution and specification. The strategies applied and the lexical choice in the dubbing are chosen based on the consideration that the dubbing should feature the characteristics of spoken language. Based on the translation strategies used, it can be concluded that dubbing is also target-oriented.

The results of the research may serve as a reference for future research in the field of audiovisual translation, specifically dubbing and subtitling. It may also provide guidance for subtitlers and dubbers in dealing with idiomatic expressions. However, this research is limited to the subtitling and dubbing of idiomatic expressions in a television series. Further studies related to the subtitling and dubbing of specialized terms, such as medical terms or legal terms, are suggested.

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## APPENDIX

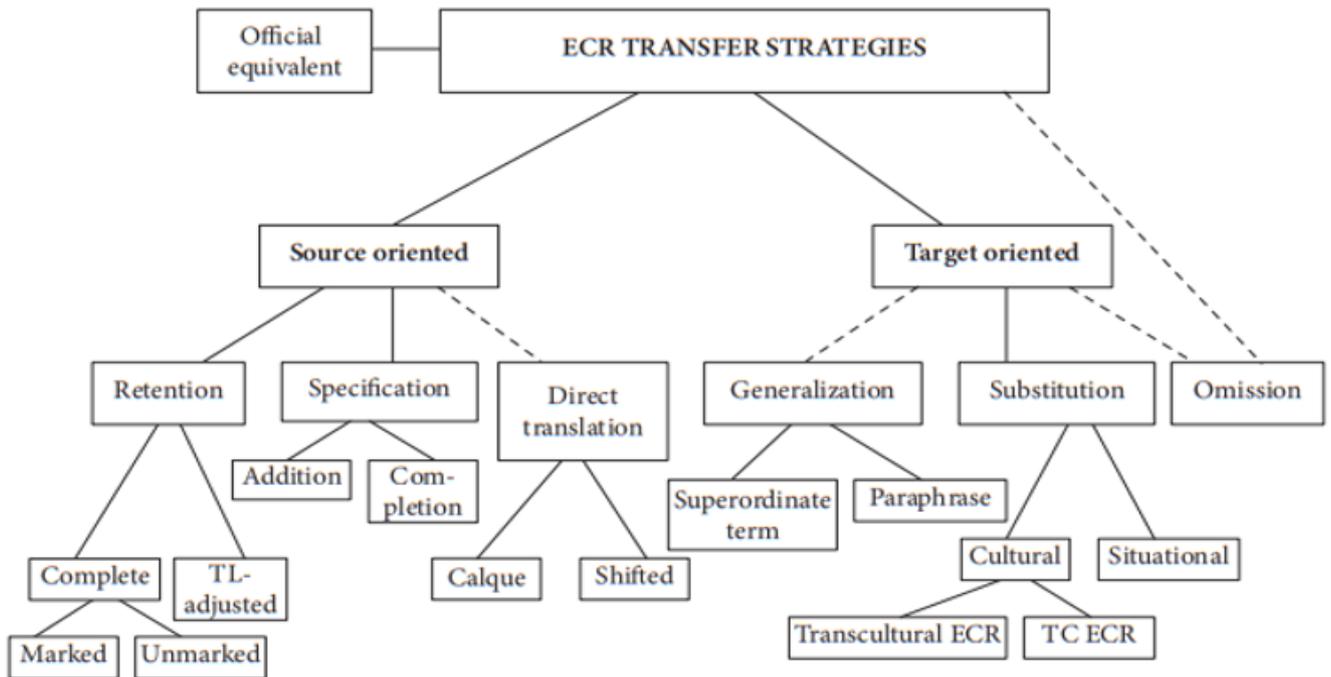


Figure 1 Taxonomy of ECR Transfer Strategies