

ANALYSIS OF THE SHIFTING MEANING OF TRANSLATING ENGLISH SUBTITLES TO INDONESIAN IN THE FILM SOUL BY PETE DOCTER

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Abstract: This research aims to analyze the shift in meaning in the English-to-Indonesian subtitle translation of Pete Docter's film "Soul." Shift in meaning is a common phenomenon in the translation process due to differences in language structure, culture, and technical limitations in subtitle writing. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method, with data collection techniques through observation and documentation. The data consisted of dialogue in English and its translation into Indonesian, which was then analyzed to identify the types of shifts that occurred. The results indicate that various types of shift in meaning exist, including syntactic, connotative, semantic, paradigmatic, idiomatic, grammatical, lexical, conceptual, cultural, and temporal shifts. Of these types, lexical and idiomatic shifts are the most prevalent due to the large number of typical English expressions that have no direct equivalents in Indonesian. This shift in meaning is influenced by several factors, such as cultural differences, language structure, situational context, and the limitations of space and time in subtitles. Furthermore, this study also found that shift in meaning is not always negative. In some cases, shifts actually help viewers more easily understand the film's message, adapting it to their cultural context. However, if not done correctly, shifting can detract from the accuracy of the original message and lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, subtitle translators are required to possess strong linguistic skills and cultural understanding to maintain a balance between accuracy and readability

Key Words: Shifting, Subtitle translation, The film Soul, English, Indonesian

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pergeseran makna dalam terjemahan subtitle bahasa Inggris ke bahasa Indonesia untuk film "Soul" karya Pete Docter. Pergeseran makna merupakan fenomena umum dalam proses penerjemahan karena perbedaan struktur bahasa, budaya, dan keterbatasan teknis dalam penulisan subtitle. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi dan dokumentasi. Data terdiri dari dialog dalam bahasa Inggris dan terjemahannya ke bahasa Indonesia, yang kemudian dianalisis untuk mengidentifikasi jenis pergeseran yang terjadi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat berbagai jenis pergeseran makna, termasuk pergeseran sintaksis, konotatif, semantik, paradigmatis, idiomatis, gramatikal, leksikal, konseptual, budaya, dan temporal. Dari jenis-jenis tersebut, pergeseran leksikal dan idiomatis paling dominan karena banyaknya ungkapan khas bahasa Inggris yang tidak memiliki padanan langsung dalam bahasa Indonesia. Pergeseran makna ini dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor, seperti perbedaan budaya, struktur bahasa, konteks situasional, dan keterbatasan ruang

dan waktu dalam subtitle. Lebih lanjut, penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa pergeseran makna tidak selalu negatif. Dalam beberapa kasus, pergeseran justru membantu penonton lebih mudah memahami pesan film, menyesuaikannya dengan konteks budaya mereka. Namun, jika tidak dilakukan dengan benar, pergeseran dapat mengurangi keakuratan pesan asli dan menyebabkan kesalahpahaman. Oleh karena itu, penerjemah subtitle dituntut untuk memiliki kemampuan linguistik dan pemahaman budaya yang kuat untuk menjaga keseimbangan antara keakuratan dan keterbacaan.

Kata Kunci: *Pergeseran, Terjemahan subtitle, Film Soul, Inggris, Indonesia*

I. INTRODUCTION

The research of subtitle translation has continued to develop along with the increasing demand for audiovisual translation in the global entertainment industry. Subtitles do not merely function as a medium for transferring language, but also as a tool for conveying messages, emotions, and cultural values from the source language into the target language. In the process of subtitle translation, meaning shifts frequently occur due to differences in linguistic structures, cultural backgrounds, and communication contexts between English and Indonesian. Kaye (2023) states that subtitle translation plays an important role in helping audiences understand dialogues and narratives in foreign-language films. However, the translation process cannot always maintain the original meaning completely because translators must adapt linguistic elements, cultural aspects, and technical limitations of subtitles.

Pete Docter's film *Soul* is a relevant object of study because it presents philosophical messages about the meaning of life, life purpose, and human identity. The film also contains many idiomatic, metaphorical, and cultural expressions that potentially experience meaning shifts when translated into Indonesian. Alzubi (2023) explains that subtitle translation often undergoes meaning shifts due to differences in language structure, cultural norms, and subtitle space limitations. In the context of *Soul*, these shifts may affect the audience's understanding of the emotional and philosophical messages conveyed in the film. Therefore, analyzing meaning shifts becomes essential to understand how the original message is maintained or transformed in the process of audiovisual translation.

Several previous studies have discussed the phenomenon of meaning shifts in film subtitles. The study conducted by Farahin Ismail and Ramlah Zainudin (2017) entitled *Translation Shifts in*

Subtitling: A Case Study of Iron Man Movie revealed that meaning shifts frequently appear in subtitle translation because of differences in language style and sentence structure. In addition, Oktavia Nurdin's (2017) study entitled *Lost in Translation: Study of Translation Strategies in Translating English Idiomatic Expressions into Indonesian Subtitles in the Film The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* focused on translation strategies for idiomatic expressions in film subtitles. Although these studies examined subtitle translation, research discussing the types and dominance of meaning shifts in philosophical animated films such as *Soul* remains limited. Therefore, there is still a research gap concerning meaning shifts in animated film subtitles that contain strong cultural and emotional values.

This research is important because subtitle translation directly influences audience experience and understanding. Inaccurate translation may lead to meaning distortion, reduced emotional nuance, and misinterpretation of the film's message. Besides its practical significance for audiovisual translators, this study also has academic importance in the development of translation studies, particularly in the area of meaning shifting in film subtitles. Octavita (2020) states that understanding meaning shifts can contribute to producing higher-quality translations and more

effective learning materials for EFL learners.

Based on the background above, this study aims to analyze the types of meaning shifts and identify the dominant type of meaning shift found in the translation of English subtitles into Indonesian in Pete Docter's film *Soul*. This study is expected to contribute to the development of translation studies, especially in the field of audiovisual translation, and serve as a reference for future researchers and translation practitioners in understanding more accurate, contextual, and communicative subtitle translation strategies.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze meaning shifts in the translation of English subtitles into Indonesian in Pete Docter's film *Soul*. A qualitative design was selected because it allows an in-depth exploration of linguistic and contextual meaning within subtitle translation. According to Adlini et al. (2022), descriptive qualitative research is appropriate for examining differences in meaning between source and target texts systematically and comprehensively. This approach enabled the researcher to identify, classify, and interpret various types of

meaning shifts that occurred in the subtitle translation process.

Data Resource

The data sources consisted of the English subtitles and the Indonesian translated subtitles of the film *Soul*, directed by Pete Docter and released in 2020. The film has a duration of approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes. The subtitle data were obtained from official subtitle sources and supported by related studies and translation references relevant to audiovisual translation. The analysis focused on dialogues containing potential meaning shifts between the source language and the target language.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument in this research was observation. The researcher observed the film and examined the subtitle translations to identify shifts in meaning occurring in words, phrases, and sentences. Adlini et al. (2022) state that observation is effective in identifying linguistic differences and contextual meaning in qualitative research. In addition, the researcher used a list of keywords and key expressions that were potentially susceptible to meaning shifts during the translation process. Observation guidelines were also applied to ensure consistency in recording contextual factors, character

expressions, and situational aspects influencing subtitle interpretation.

Data Collecting Technique

Data were collected through observation and documentation techniques as proposed by Fadli (2021). The observation process involved carefully watching the film while comparing the English subtitles with the Indonesian translations to identify meaning shifts systematically. The researcher focused on linguistic forms that demonstrated differences in meaning, structure, or cultural adaptation. Meanwhile, documentation was conducted by collecting subtitle texts, translation references, previous studies, and related documents supporting the analysis of subtitle translation. These documents provided additional insight into translation strategies and factors influencing meaning shifts in the film.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected dialogues containing meaning shifts and classified the data based on the types of shifts, such as lexical, semantic, grammatical, and idiomatic shifts. The selected data were then presented in the

form of tables and descriptions containing the original subtitles, translated subtitles, types of meaning shifts, and dialogue contexts. The final stage involved drawing conclusions based on the patterns and the most dominant types of meaning shifts found in the film subtitles. Fadli (2021) states that qualitative analysis is important for understanding how subtitle translation adapts linguistic meaning, cultural aspects, and audience comprehension in audiovisual media.

III. RESEARCH RESULT

The results of the research revealed that several types of meaning shifts occurred in the translation of English subtitles into Indonesian in the film *Soul*. These shifts include syntactic, connotative, semantic, paradigmatic, idiomatic, and grammatical shifts. The shifts occurred because the translator needed to adapt the source language into forms that were easier to understand, more natural, and culturally appropriate for Indonesian audiences. These findings indicate that subtitle translation does not merely focus on transferring words, but also involves adjustments to language structure, cultural context, and communicative meaning.

Syntactic shifts were found in many informal dialogues throughout the film. The

translator frequently simplified sentence structures, omitted certain grammatical elements, and adjusted conversational expressions to fit Indonesian language patterns. Expressions such as “wanna,” “gotta,” and “ain’t” were translated into more standard Indonesian forms without maintaining their informal grammatical structures. This finding demonstrates that subtitle translation prioritizes readability and audience comprehension over maintaining the exact syntactic form of the source language. These results support the theory proposed by Catford that structural differences between languages often lead to translation shifts, particularly when the grammatical systems of the source and target languages differ significantly.

Connotative shifts also appeared in dialogues containing emotional and philosophical expressions. Several expressions with strong emotional nuance in English were translated into more neutral Indonesian expressions. For example, the term “spark” in the film carries philosophical and emotional meanings related to passion and life purpose, yet the Indonesian translation simplifies the expression into a more literal meaning. This indicates that emotional intensity and implied meaning may be reduced during translation to achieve clarity for the target audience. The findings are consistent with Alzubi (2023), who states that subtitle

translation frequently experiences meaning shifts because translators must balance emotional nuance with cultural accessibility and subtitle limitations.

Semantic shifts were identified in dialogues containing metaphorical and abstract concepts. Terms such as “The Great Before,” “The Zone,” and “lost souls” demonstrate how complex philosophical concepts in English underwent modifications when translated into Indonesian. In several cases, the translated subtitles narrowed or simplified the original meanings to make the concepts easier for viewers to understand. This finding suggests that semantic adaptation is necessary in audiovisual translation, especially when abstract concepts from the source language do not have direct equivalents in the target language. The result supports previous studies by Farahin Ismail and Ramlah Zainudin (2017), which found that subtitle translation often involves semantic adjustments to maintain communicative effectiveness.

Among all identified categories, idiomatic shifts were the most dominant type of meaning shift found in the film. Many English idiomatic expressions could not be translated literally into Indonesian because literal translations would create confusion or unnatural expressions. Idioms such as “I got my shot,” “zip it,” and “running out of time” were translated into

equivalent Indonesian expressions that preserved the intended meaning rather than the original wording. This finding indicates that translators tend to prioritize functional equivalence and audience understanding over literal translation. The dominance of idiomatic shifts confirms Oktavia Nurdin’s (2017) argument that idiomatic expressions present major challenges in subtitle translation due to cultural and linguistic differences between languages.

Grammatical and paradigmatic shifts further demonstrate the translator’s effort to maintain natural communication within subtitle constraints. Several dialogues contained incomplete sentence structures, contractions, or informal spoken expressions that were adjusted into grammatically acceptable Indonesian forms. In addition, paradigmatic shifts showed how translators selected alternative lexical choices with similar meanings but different nuances depending on the emotional context of the scene. These shifts reflect the translator’s interpretative role in constructing meaning rather than simply transferring language structures. The findings suggest that subtitle translation involves negotiation between linguistic accuracy, contextual appropriateness, and audience reception.

Overall, the findings indicate that meaning shifts in subtitle translation are strongly influenced by cultural adaptation,

linguistic differences, and technical limitations in audiovisual media. The translator consistently prioritized communicative clarity and audience comprehension, even when some philosophical nuances or emotional intensities from the original dialogue were reduced. Academically, this study contributes to translation studies by providing evidence that meaning shifts are unavoidable in subtitle translation, particularly in films containing philosophical, emotional, and culture-bound expressions. The study also highlights the importance of contextual interpretation in audiovisual translation, where translators must balance fidelity to the source text with accessibility for the target audience.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis in this research, it can be concluded that translating the subtitles for the film "Soul" from English to Indonesian involves various types of meaning shifts, such as syntactic, connotative, semantic, paradigmatic, idiomatic, grammatical, lexical, conceptual, cultural, and temporal shifts. Of these, idiomatic and grammatical shifts are the most dominant because many

expressions in English cannot be translated literally without losing their meaning.

These meaning shifts occur due to differences in language structure, cultural background, and technical limitations in subtitle display, such as space and time. While some shifts can alter the original meaning, these changes are generally made to ensure the message remains easily understood by the audience. Thus, meaning shifts in subtitles are unavoidable but can be controlled through the selection of appropriate strategies. Therefore, translators need to thoroughly understand the language and cultural context to ensure the film's message and nuances are effectively conveyed to the audience.

Suggestion

Finally, the researcher will provide some suggestions to readers as follows:

1. For English Teachers/Lecturers

It is suggested for English teachers or lecturers are advised to utilize the results of this research as additional material in translation or applied linguistics learning to improve understanding of cultural and linguistic contexts in the translation learning process. This research is also expected to be a reflection material in the audiovisual context. Therefore, teachers or lecturers can integrate the study of film subtitles such as "Soul"

in the learning process to introduce students to real challenges in audiovisual translation.

2. For Further Researchers

It is suggested for further researchers who conduct research on the same topic to expand the theoretical study

and also the scope of research objects considering the limited data in previous research or can be used as reference material for research in the fields of audiovisual, cross-cultural and cross-language studies.

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