Subtitling Strategies and Translation Quality in Indonesian Fan Subtitle of Kung Fu Panda 4

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Abstract

This study investigates the balance between naturalness and accuracy in the Indonesian fan-sub of *Kung Fu Panda 4*. It examines the subtitling strategies employed by fan translators, utilizing Gottlieb's (1992) subtitling strategies and Larson's (1984) principles of translation quality. Adopting a descriptive qualitative approach, the research analyzed 139 lines from the movie, focusing on their cultural and linguistic complexity. The findings reveal that paraphrasing was the most frequently applied strategy (63.31%), followed by transfer (15.11%), expansion (9.35%), condensation (7.91%), and imitation (4.32%). These strategies enabled fan translators to adapt the source text while preserving its meaning, ensuring the subtitles were culturally and linguistically suitable for the Indonesian audience. Most subtitles were rated as moderately natural (79.86%) and moderately accurate (50.36%), with a smaller portion achieving high ratings. The study underscores the need to enhance naturalness and accuracy while emphasizing the importance of incorporating subtitling strategies in translation education to address real-world challenges.

Keywords: Accuracy, fan subtitles, naturalness, subtitling strategies, translation quality.

INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly interconnected globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively across linguistic and cultural boundaries has never been more crucial. Translation plays a fundamental role in bridging these gaps, allowing ideas, stories, and cultural values to be exchanged across different societies. Within the broader field of translation studies, audiovisual translation (AVT) has emerged as a specialized discipline due to the rapid growth of digital media, including films, television, and online content. AVT encompasses various methods of translating audiovisual material, such as dubbing, voice-over, and subtitling. Among these, subtitling has gained significant prominence as an accessible and widely used strategy, particularly for facilitating cross-cultural understanding in films and television programs. The translation of animated films presents unique challenges due to the complex interplay between visual, verbal, and cultural elements that must be carefully adapted to suit the target audience.

This study focused on the subtitling of *Kung Fu Panda 4*, an animated film, into Indonesian, specifically analyzing the quality of its fan-subtitled translation with respect to two critical criteria: accuracy and naturalness. These two aspects are essential in determining the effectiveness of a translation, as they directly influence audience comprehension and reception. The rise of fan-subtitled content in the digital age has provided both new opportunities and challenges for translation studies. Fan-subtitling, carried out by amateur translators rather than professionals, often differs in terms of quality, adherence to linguistic norms, and translation strategies. Unlike professional translators who work within strict guidelines and industry standards, fan translators operate with greater flexibility, often prioritize speed and accessibility over formal accuracy. This divergence makes fan-subtitling an intriguing subject of study, particularly when analyzing how fan translators navigate linguistic and cultural adaptation

challenges in entertainment media, especially in animated films that require the careful synchronization of dialogue with visual storytelling.

Despite the increasing prevalence of fan-subtitling, research in this area remains relatively underdeveloped. A substantial body of literature exists on translation quality assessment in professional contexts; however, comparatively little attention has been paid to the quality of fan-subtitles, particularly in animated films. Previous studies, such as those conducted by Latif (2017) and Nuraini (2024), have examined translation techniques in live-action films like *Philomena and Soul*, respectively, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of fan-subtitling in terms of accuracy and cultural adaptation.

Similarly, Adinusa and Asmarani (2018) investigated the subtitling strategies used in Kung Fu Panda 3, emphasizing the importance of balancing linguistic precision with cultural sensitivity. However, research on fan-subtitling in animated films remains fragmented, and there is still a notable lack of comprehensive studies analyzing the specific challenges posed by this genre. Animated films, unlike live-action productions, incorporate a distinct combination of visual cues, exaggerated character expressions, fast-paced dialogue, humor, and culturally embedded references. These factors create additional complexities for translators, who must ensure that subtitles align seamlessly with the visual and auditory components of the film while maintaining coherence and naturalness in the target language.

Additionally, cross-cultural studies on translation strategies provide valuable insight into the complexities of linguistic adaptation. Kimsesiz (2022) examined how Turkish EFL learners translate English proverbs into Turkish, finding that learners performed better when dealing with proverbs that had high interlingual equivalence compared to those with rough or no equivalence. This highlights the broader challenge of preserving meaning across languages, particularly in cases where direct equivalents do not exist. Furthermore, Maulana et al. (2025) explored translanguaging in an Indonesian writing class, demonstrating how bilingual speakers negotiate meaning and adapt linguistic structures to maintain coherence while preserving cultural identity. These findings underscore the relevance of translanguaging and equivalency challenges in fan-subbing, where translators must balance accuracy and naturalness while adapting culturally specific expressions for the target audience.

Similarly, Marpaung (2023) incorporate figurative language, wordplay, and idioms that may lack direct equivalents in the target language. In fan-subbing, these elements must be carefully adapted to preserve both meaning and entertainment value. Onomatopoeia, repetition, and other stylistic devices in *Kung Fu Panda 4* likely influence the film's humor and emotional tone, requiring translators to strategically retain, modify, or replace them. This parallels the broader challenge of translating linguistic creativity across literature and audiovisual media, highlighting the need for careful cross-cultural adaptation.

Given this research gap, the present study seeks to contribute to the field of audiovisual translation by offering a detailed examination of Indonesian fan-subtitles for *Kung Fu Panda 4*. By applying Gottlieb's (1992) framework for subtitling strategies encompassing methods such as expansion, paraphrase, and condensation this study will analyze how fan translators approach translation challenges and make linguistic choices to retain meaning while adapting the content for Indonesian audiences. Furthermore, using Larson's (1984) definitions of accuracy and naturalness, the study will assess the extent to which the fan-subtitles effectively convey the intended message of the original dialogue while ensuring fluency in the target language.

Translation studies have established essential frameworks for analyzing both theoretical and practical aspects of translation. Catford (1965) defines translation as the process of replacing textual material in one language with equivalent material in another, emphasizing meaning equivalence. Nida and Taber (1982) propose a more nuanced perspective, arguing that translation should not only preserve meaning but also reflect the stylistic elements of the source text. Larson (1984) further highlights that the essence of translation lies in accurately conveying the original message, regardless of structural differences between languages. These perspectives underscore the fundamental role of equivalence in translation, a core concept in many translation theories.

In recent years, audiovisual translation, audiovisual translation (AVT) has gained increasing prominence due to the growth of global media content. Diaz-Cintas and Remael (2014) define AVT as a field concerned with the localization of audiovisual content, which includes subtitling, dubbing, and voice-over. Among these, subtitling has become particularly prominent, as it conveys both dialogue and cultural context without altering the original visual experience. Despite the growing importance of subtitling, research of fan-subbing especially in animated films remains sparse, making this study a significant contribution to the field of AVT and translation studies.

This research holds significant academic and practical implications. Firstly, it expands the scope of translation studies by incorporating fan-subtitling, an increasingly relevant yet often overlooked phenomenon in media translation. As fan-generated translations continue to shape how audiences engage with foreign media, it becomes essential to evaluate their quality and impact systematically. Secondly, this study contributes to the growing discourse on AVT by focusing on animated films a genre that presents distinct translation challenges due to its reliance on both visual storytelling and spoken dialogue. Unlike live-action films, which often allow for direct linguistic equivalence, animated films require translators to creatively interpret meaning while preserving the film's stylistic and cultural nuances. Lastly, by investigating the accuracy and naturalness of fan-subtitles, this study offers valuable insights into the evolving role of amateur translators in the digital age, highlighting their influence on media accessibility and cultural exchange.

By addressing these critical aspects, this study aims to bridge the gap between professional and non-professional translation practices, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how fan-subtitling functions within the broader landscape of audiovisual translation. Through a systematic analysis of fan-subtitles in *Kung Fu Panda 4,* this research will shed light on the effectiveness of non-professional translation strategies, ultimately contributing to the ongoing discourse on translation quality, audience reception, and linguistic adaptation in contemporary media.

METHODS

The present study concentrated on the translation quality and subtitling strategies in the Indonesian fan subtitles of Kung Fu Panda 4 movie.

Research design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research approach to analyze the naturalness and accuracy of the Indonesian fan-sub of *Kung Fu Panda 4.* According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative research emphasizes an in-depth understanding of interactions among concepts rather than relying on numerical data. A descriptive qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for detailed analysis of translation strategies, linguistic choices, and cultural adaption made by fan translators (Cresswell, 1994).

Research participants and Sampling Procedures

The participants of this research are the Indonesian fan subbed version of *Kung Fu Panda 4*, focusing on subtitles as textual products. The subtitles will be sourced from the streaming platforms Idlix, and the researcher will transcribe them for analysis. A total of 139 subtitles will be selected as the sample from approximately 900 subtitles in the film.

Instrument

This study utilizes two analytical frameworks to evaluate the quality of the Indonesian fansub:

1. Gottlieb's (1992) Subtitling strategies: Identifying translation techniques applied in the fansub.
2. Larson's (1984) Accuracy and Naturalness Scale: Evaluating translation quality using a three-point rating scale:
   a. Accuracy: 3 (High Accuracy), 2 (Moderate Accuracy), 1 (Low Accuracy)
   b. Naturalness: 3 (High Naturalness), 2 (Moderate Naturalness), 1 (Low Naturalness)

Procedures and Data Analysis

Subtitles containing idioms, cultural references, or humor are prioritized. The analysis follows these steps:

1. Transcription and Segmentation: Extracting subtitles line for evaluation.
2. Categorization: Identifying subtitling strategies.
3. Assessment: Rating subtitles for accuracy and naturalness.
4. Expert verification: Cross-checking ratings for readability.

To ensure validity, triangulation is applied through expert evaluation, a standardized rating scale, and detailed justification for each rating. This methodological approach ensure replicability and provides a systematic framework for evaluating the quality fansub translation.

RESULTS

This study examines the naturalness and accuracy of Indonesian fansub translation in *Kung Fu Panda 4*, using Gottlieb's (1992) subtitling strategies and Larson's (1984) principles of accuracy and naturalness. The data consists of 139 subtitle lines, which were analyzed based on the applied translation strategies and their quality in terms of naturalness and accuracy.

Table 1: **Frequency of Subtitling Strategies Used in the Indonesian Fansub**

Subtitling Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Paraphrase	88	63.31%
Transfer	21	15.11%
Expansion	13	9.35%
Condensation	11	7.91%
Imitation	6	4.32%
Total	139	100%

The results indicate that Indonesian fan translators employed ten subtitling strategies as classified by Gottlieb (1992). The most frequently used strategy was **paraphrase (63.31%)**, followed by **transfer (15.11%)**, **expansion (9.35%)**, **condensation (7.91%)**, and **imitation (4.32%)**.

The high frequency of paraphrase suggests that Indonesian fan translators prioritize naturalness and cultural adaptation, particularly when translating humor, idioms, and cultural references from Western contexts. This finding aligns with prior research Diaz Cintas and Remael (2007), who argue that paraphrasing is a dominant strategy in audiovisual translation because it allows translators to preserve meaning while ensuring linguistic fluidity in the target language. Similarly, a study by Hatim and Mason (1997) found that paraphrase is often used in subtitle translations to accommodate space constraints and differences in syntactic structures between languages.

Furthermore, the presence of transfer (15.11%) as the second most used strategy is consistent with the Findings of Saule and Aisulu (2012), who observed that translators frequently employ direct translation in cases where the original sentence is simple, neutral, and does not require cultural adaptation. Meanwhile, expansion (9.35%) was used in instances where additional context was necessary to ensure clarity in Indonesian, aligning with the argument by Gottlieb (1992) that expansion helps avoid ambiguity when translating subtitles with limited textual space.

Example of Subtitling Strategies
1. **Paraphrase**
   English: "Are you nuts?" (Line 38)
   Indonesian Fansub: "Kau gila?"
   Explanation: This idiomatic expression is translated idiomatically rather than literally to maintain naturalness.
2. **Transfer**
   English: "Who design a tavern on a cliff?" (Line 60)
   Indonesian Fansub: "Siapa yang mendesain kedai di atas tebing?"
   Explanation: A direct translation that retains the original structure and meaning.

Table 2: **Naturalness Assessment**

Naturalness Level	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Natural (3)	24	17.27%
Moderately Natural (2)	111	79.86%
Low Naturalness (1)	4	2.88%
Total	139	100%

The evaluation of naturalness was conducted using Larson's (1984) principles, which classify translation into three levels: **highly natural (3), moderately natural (2), and low naturalness (1).**
The results indicate that most translation were **moderately natural (79.86%)**, meaning they were understandable but not always fluent. This finding is in line with research conducted by Baker (2011), which suggests that non-professional subtitle translations often struggle with achieving full naturalness due to differences in linguistic structures, idiomatic expressions, and stylistic preferences between the source and target languages.

The presence of **highly natural translations (17.27%)** demonstrates that some subtitles successfully maintain fluency and idiomatic accuracy, which supports the claim by Venuti (1995) that effective translation strategies can enhance readability while preserving cultural and linguistic authenticity. Meanwhile, **2.88% of the subtitles were deemed unnatural**, mainly due to literal translations of idioms and culturally specific references, which is a challenge also noted by Newmark (1988).

Table 3: **Accuracy Assessment**

Accuracy Level	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Accurate (3)	65	46.76%
Moderately Accurate (2)	70	50.36%
Low Accuracy (1)	4	2.88%
Total	139	100%

Similarly, accuracy was assessed using a three-level rating: **highly accurate (3), moderately accurate (2), and low accuracy (1).**

These findings suggest that while nearly half of the translations **(46.76%)** were **highly accurate,** a slightly larger proportion **(50.36%)** fell into the category of **moderate accuracy**, indicating that they conveyed the general meaning but lacked precision. This aligns with research by Munday (2016), who found that translation accuracy in subtitling is often compromised by spatial constraints, cultural differences, and informal translation methods used by fansubbers.

DISCUSSION

Implications of Subtitling Strategies

The high prevalence of paraphrase in the fansub suggests that Indonesian fan translators prioritize cultural adaptation over direct translation. This finding supports research by Chiaro (2008), which highlights that paraphrase is commonly used in entertainment translation to ensure idiomatic and culturally appropriate dialogue. However, excessive use of paraphrasing can sometimes distort the original meaning, reducing the accuracy of the translation.
For example:
English: "Better to rot in the gutter than under your thumb." (Line 128)
Indonesian Fansub: "Lebih baik membusuk di selokan daripada bersamamu."
Explanation: The phrase **"under your thumb"** refers to **control or dominance, b**ut the translation **"bersamamu"** (with you) alters the meaning, reducing accuracy. This aligns with findings by Gambier (2008), who notes that translating figurative expressions is a major challenge in subtitling because word-for-word translations often fail to capture the intended meaning.
Meanwhile, transfer (15.11%) was used when a direct translation was sufficient. This strategy was mostly applied to neutral sentences without cultural or idiomatic complexities. Expansion (9.35%) was used to enhance clarity, particularly when the original English line was too confused. This aligns with the study by Nedergaard-Larsen (1993), which found that direct translation is preferable for non-idiomatic and culturally neutral phrases.

Challenges in Achieving Naturalness

The high percentage of moderately natural translations (79.86%) suggests that while the subtitles were understandable, they did not always reflect fluent, idiomatic Indonesian. This issue is commonly noted in subtitling research, as translators often struggle with recreating idiomatic expressions in a natural yet concise manner (Pedersen, 2011).
For instance:
English: "Of course, we could always opt for the four-finger discount." (Line 52)
Indonesian Fansub: "Tentu saja, kita selalu bisa memilih diskon empat jari."
Discussion: The phrase **"four-finger discount"** refers to stealing in English slang, but it**s** literal translation is meaningless in Indonesian. A more natural alternative would be "kita bisa memilih cara curang yang cerdik" (a clever trick). This aligns with research by Gottlieb (1992), which states that slang and idiomatic expressions often require adaptation rather than direct translation to maintain naturalness.

Factors Affecting Accuracy

While 46.76% of the translations were highly accurate, the 50.36% of moderately accurate cases suggests that fan translators faced challenges in maintaining full precision. Studies by Karamitroglou (2000) and Diaz Cintas (2004) emphasize that fan translators often lack professional training, which may lead to inconsistent accuracy levels in translating complex expressions and cultural references. The main factors affecting accuracy included:

1. **Misinterpretation of figurative language**
   Example:
   English: "Be the pit, Po. Be the pit." (Line 19)
   Indonesian Fansub: "Jadilah bijinya, Po."
   Issue: The word **"pit"** metaphorically means **"core" or "essence",** but the translation interprets it literally, leading to loss of meaning.
2. **Cultural differences**
   Example:
   English: "Me, of course. I was the wise goose." (Line 51)
   Indonesian Fansub: "Aku, tentu saja. Aku si angsa bijaksana."
   Discussion: This translation is accurate but lacks cultural adaptation. In Indonesian, owls, not geese, are associated with wisdom. The phrase could be adapted to "Aku, tentu saja. Aku si burung bijaksana." This example supports Chiaro's (2010) claim that cultural adaptation is essential to achieving accuracy in subtitle translation.

Recommendations for Fan Translators Improvements

Based on the findings, the following recommendations can improve the quality of Indonesian fansubs:

1. Enhancing Idiomatic Translation: Fan translators should focus on translating idioms and cultural differences idiomatically, rather than literally.
2. Balancing Accuracy and Naturalness: Paraphrasing should be used carefully to preserve meaning while improving fluency.
3. Standardized Quality Control: Implementing a peer review process among fan translators can help ensure higher accuracy and naturalness.

CONCLUSION

The study provides valuable insight into the strategies used in the Indonesian fansub of *Kung Fu Panda 4* to achieve a balance between naturalness and accuracy. The findings indicate that paraphrasing was the most frequently employed strategy, allowing complex ideas, idiomatic expressions, and culturally specific references to be conveyed in a way that feels more natural to Indonesian audiences. Other strategies, including transfer, expansion, condensation, and imitation, were also utilized to varying degrees, each serving a distinct function in the translation process. Transfer was applied when a direct translation was feasible without altering the intended meaning, while expansion provided additional context to clarify cultural references. Condensation helped streamline subtitles to meet time and space constraints without significant loss of meaning, whereas imitation was used sparingly to maintain authenticity by preserving names, brands, and stylistic elements. The analysis of naturalness and accuracy ratings further reinforces the effectiveness of these strategies, demonstrating that while the fansub generally succeeded in adapting the dialogue for Indonesian viewers, certain aspects of fluency and precision could still be improved.

This study addresses a critical gap in research on Indonesian fan-subbing, particularly in the translation of animated films, which often incorporate culturally embedded expressions, humor, and wordplay that pose unique challenges. Unlike prior studies that predominantly

examine professional subtitling, this research highlights the role of non-professional translators and their influence on audience perception. By systematically evaluating both naturalness and accuracy, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how fan translators navigate linguistic and cultural complexities. The findings suggest that fan-subbing plays a significant role in providing accessibility to foreign media, despite certain limitations in translation quality. Future research could explore audience reception of fan-subbed content in greater detail, comparing viewer preferences for fan-subbed versus professionally subtitled films. Additionally, further investigation into the collaborative nature of fan-subbing communities and their evolving translation strategies would provide valuable insights into the broader implications of audiovisual translation in Indonesia.

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