SUBTITLING OF CULTURAL TERMS IN THE MOVIE *ALI & RATU RATU QUEENS*

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the strategies applied in subtitling cultural terms in the movie *Ali & Ratu Ratu Queens*. Furthermore, this study also aimed to reveal whether the subtitling of the cultural terms is source language-oriented or target language-oriented. The descriptive qualitative approach was used in this study. The data were analyzed using the taxonomy for rendering extralinguistic cultural references proposed by Pedersen (2011). The results show that there were four strategies applied in the subtitling. The subtitling strategies were omission, substitution, specification, and official equivalent. The decision to apply these strategies was based on the spatial and temporal constraints in the subtitling. The most frequently applied subtitling strategy is substitution. The findings of the study indicate that the subtitling of cultural terms tends to be target language-oriented.

Keywords – *subtitling, cultural terms, audiovisual translation*

Introduction

The rapid progress of audiovisual media has enabled people across the globe to access information and entertainment with ease (Chaume, 2018). The exposure to multimedia content with foreign languages is very high nowadays. Subtitles are required to overcome language barriers in understanding foreign content (Malenova, 2015). Due to the multimodal nature of the content, subtitlers have to apply the right strategies to synchronize the subtitle with the audio and visual elements.

Subtitling is a demanding process due to its spatial and temporal constraints. Subtitles are usually placed at the bottom of the screen and consist of no more than two lines. This practice is common in the subtitling industry, considering that subtitles should not disrupt the image on the screen (Díaz-Cintas, 2013). Moreover, the duration of the subtitle shown on the screen also needs to be taken into account. The subtitles should appear in synchrony with the dialogue and the image. Another technical aspect to consider in subtitling is the average reading speed of the audience. The time allocation for the subtitles to appear on the screen should be sufficient so that the viewers have enough time to read them (Díaz-Cintas, 2020).

The subtitling process becomes even more challenging when it involves cultural terms related to a country's culture, society, history, geography, and so on (Abdelaal, 2019). These concepts may be unknown by the majority of the target audience and explanations may be required. Footnotes, glossaries, and other translation strategies can be used in other types of written translation to explain the cultural terms. However, the spatial restrictions in subtitling do not provide extra space for long explanations of the cultural terms (Zojer, 2011).

The topic of strategies in English-Indonesian subtitling has been discussed by several scholars and has led to different results. The study conducted by Simanjuntak & Basari (2016) identified the strategies employed to translate the English utterances in the *Real Steel* movie into Indonesian subtitles. The study adopted the theory proposed by Gottlieb to analyze the

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data. The findings showed that deletion was the strategy applied the most in the subtitling. The deletion strategy was applied to fit the subtitling guidelines. Another research discussing subtitling strategies was written by Febrianto et al. (2019). The researchers applied the theory proposed by Gottlieb to analyze the strategies used in subtitling figurative language in *Now You See Me 2* movie. The study found that the paraphrase strategy was dominantly used in the subtitling. In contrast, the research conducted by Hudi et al. (2020) revealed that literal translation was the most dominant translation technique applied in the subtitling of *The English Teacher* movie. The study employed a different theory proposed by Molina and Albir.

The three previous research are related to this study since they discussed the subtitling strategies in movies. However, this study provides a different perspective since it aims to identify the subtitling strategies to translate Indonesian cultural terms in *Ali & Ratu Ratu Queens* movie into English. Moreover, this study also aims to find out whether the subtitling strategies are source language (SL) oriented or target language (TL) oriented. The current study also adopts a different theory proposed by Pedersen (2011). The theory was chosen to analyze the subtitling strategies since it was primarily created for rendering cultural terms in subtitling. This study may serve as a reference for future research in Indonesian-English subtitling and could help practitioners in dealing with the subtitling of cultural terms.

Methods

The study applied a descriptive qualitative approach. The data of this study are the Indonesian cultural terms and their English subtitles in the movie *Ali & Ratu Ratu Queens* (2021). It was directed by Lucky Kuswandi, written by Gina S. Noer, and starring Iqbaal Ramadhan, Nirina Zubir, Marissa Anita, and Happy Salma. The movie depicts the lives of Indonesian immigrants living in Queens, New York City. The movie was chosen as the data source since there were Indonesian cultural terms found in the dialogue. The researchers are interested to find out how the Indonesian cultural terms were translated into English subtitles. The data were collected in two steps. The first step was watching the movie while reading the subtitles to identify the cultural terms. The second step was transcribing the cultural terms found in the SL utterances and the English subtitles.

The analysis was conducted using the taxonomy for rendering cultural terms in subtitling proposed by Pedersen (2011). The taxonomy consists of seven strategies specifically designed for subtitling cultural terms: (1) Retention is the strategy that retains the cultural terms unchanged or slightly adjusted to the TL form, (2) Specification happens when the TL subtitling is made more specific by adding information, (3) Direct Translation is a word-for-word translation without any alteration in the semantic aspect, (4) Generalization is the strategy that makes the TL subtitle less specific than the SL, (5) Substitution replaces the SL cultural term using another cultural term, (6) Omission occurs when the SL cultural term is omitted and not reproduced in the TL, (7) Official equivalent involves a cultural term of the SL that has an established equivalent in the TL. Six strategies are classified into two categories: SL-oriented and TL-oriented. The strategies classified as SL-oriented are retention, specification, and direct translation, while generalization, substitution, and omission are TL-oriented. Official equivalent does not belong to the orientation category since it occurs through administrative processes or common usage. Therefore, it is regarded as a special status equivalent. Based on the analysis of the subtitling strategies, it can be concluded whether the subtitling of the cultural terms is SL-oriented or TL-oriented.

Finding and Discussion

Subtitling cultural terms is a strenuous task for translators. It is challenging due to the technical constraints of subtitling and the difficulties of finding the equivalent of the cultural terms in the TL. Therefore, the appropriate strategies need to be adopted. In this regard, four out of seven strategies proposed by Pedersen (2011) were applied in subtitling cultural terms found in the movie *Ali & Ratu Ratu Queens*. The strategies were omission, substitution, specification, and official equivalent. The most dominant subtitling strategy was substitution which indicates that the subtitling tends to be TL-oriented. A detailed discussion is presented as follows.

Datum 1

SL: Elo lahirnya **Senin Wage** 'kan?
TL: But your fortune depends on what day you were born.

The omission strategy was applied in subtitling the cultural term *Senin Wage* as shown in datum 1. The term was omitted in the subtitling and an explanation was provided. The cultural term was omitted since the concept is unknown in western culture. In Javanese and Balinese culture, the fortune and the character of a person can be predicted based on the day they were born. The birthday is the combination of the seven days and *pancawara* (Balinese term) or *pasaran* (Javanese term) that consists of five days: *Umanis*, *Paing*, *Pon*, *Wage*, and *Kliwon*. Each day of *pancawara* or *pasaran* has its own characteristics that affect the person born on that day. This concept is too complicated to be explained in the limited space for the subtitle. Therefore, the decision to omit the cultural term and add an explanation is suitable in this context.

Datum 2

SL: Bukannya **Jumat Kliwon**?
TL: Wasn't it on **Friday the 13th**?

In datum 2, substitution strategy was used to translate the cultural term *Jumat Kliwon* into *Friday the 13th*. According to the Javanese five-day system, the term *Jumat Kliwon* refers to a Friday with the *pasaran* Kliwon. The day is considered a scary or a sacred day. The concept of a scary Friday was translated into *Friday the 13th*. The day is considered scary and unlucky because the superstition mentions that the combination of Friday and number 13 brings bad luck. Even though the concepts of *Jumat Kliwon* and *Friday the 13th* are not exactly the same, the TL subtitle can be considered appropriate since it uses a cultural term from the target culture so the viewers can understand it easily.

Datum 3

SL: Bisa nggak pintu di depan itu digeser sedikit **25 cm**?
TL: You must move the door **an inch** to the right.

The substitution strategy was applied to render the measurement unit *25 cm* into *an inch*, as shown in datum 3. The measurement system used in one country can be different from another. The metric system is used as the unit of measurement in Indonesia. It is different from the unit of measurement used in the United States. Since the setting of the movie is in New York City, the measurement unit *25 cm* was converted into *an inch*. However, the subtitler made a mistake in the conversion of the measurement unit. An inch is equal to 2.54 cm, so 25 cm should be translated into 10 inches instead of an inch.

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Datum 4

SL: Saya **tante** Party, itu **tante** Ance, **tante** Chinta, **tante** Biyah.

TL: I'm Party, and that's Ance, Chinta and Biyah.

The address term *tante* was omitted in datum 4. It is another example of the omission strategy used in subtitling. The decision to omit the address term was conducted due to the space limitation in subtitling. The subtitle is appropriate in the target culture since it is considered acceptable to address someone older by their names in western culture. However, to do so is considered unacceptable and impolite in Indonesia. From the subtitle, we can learn cultural differences between countries.

Datum 5

SL: Masak apa?

  Rendang, buat mama.

TL: What are you cooking?

  Beef *rendang*. For my mom.

In datum 5, the strategy of specification was used to translate the name of the Indonesian food *rendang*. The subtitler provided additional information by adding the word *beef* to make the term more specific. The word *rendang* was retained in the TL since it is a food name that is quite well-known abroad. From this example, we can see that subtitles can be used as a medium to introduce our culture to foreign viewers.

Datum 6

SL: Siapa bilang nggak ada **kerupuk**?

TL: Who says there's no **rice crackers** in New York?

The substitution strategy was applied to translate the word *kerupuk* into *rice crackers* in datum 6. The subtitle is not exactly equivalent to the SL term since *kerupuk* is not always made of rice. *Kerupuk* is a type of crispy cracker mostly made of tapioca flour and flavored with fish, shrimp, onion, or other ingredients. The word *kerupuk* was translated into *rice crackers* since it is more familiar to the target audience.

Datum 7

SL: Dan juga kita semua bisa pension di **Jawa**.

TL: Then we all can retire in **Java**.

The application of official equivalent is shown in datum 7. *Jawa* is the name of a major island in Indonesia. Due to the administrative process, the word has an official equivalent *Java* in the English language. Since an official equivalent exits in the TL, it does not pose any problems in the subtitling process. Official equivalent is placed outside the orientation category and not classified as SL-oriented or TL-oriented strategy.

Conclusions

There were four strategies applied in the subtitling of the cultural terms in the movie *Ali & Ratu Ratu Queens*. The identified strategies were omission, substitution, specification, and official equivalent. The most frequently applied subtitling strategy was substitution, followed by omission. The substitution strategy was applied by replacing the SL cultural term using another

cultural term that is more familiar to the target viewers. The strategy of omission was adopted due to spatial constraints in the subtitling. The findings of the study indicate that the subtitling of cultural terms tends to be TL-oriented.

Subtitling is a medium for learning about other cultures and introducing our culture to foreign audiences. Therefore, it deserves more attention from Translation researchers and practitioners in Indonesia. The findings of this study could serve as a reference for future research in subtitling, especially Indonesian-English subtitling. However, this study is limited to the subtitling of cultural terms. Further studies related to the subtitling of other specialized terms are suggested.

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