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An Analysis of Translation Shifts in Indonesian - English Film Subtitles: A Study of *Comic 8*

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 09 Jan 2026	The purpose of this research is to analyse the translation shifts and language style in the Indonesian – English subtitles of <i>Comic 8</i> movies. The study would focus on figuring out the shifting types and find out the influence of the language style on translation. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method with Catford theory of translation shift as the main research framework. The data include selected subtitle excerpts which exemplify the shifts taking place from the source language (Indonesian) in the target language (English). According to the analysis, it was found that unit shift was the dominant type of translation shift. Most shifts involve changes in rank, especially from clauses or phrases in the source language to sentences in the target language. Structural differences between Indonesian and English as well as the need for achieving clarity, naturalness, and acceptability in the target language. Moreover, unit shifts may happen from higher to lower units too, indicating the flexibility and contextual dependence of the shifts. In a single case, category shift in one case which is structure shift and class shift which work to produced natural and more appropriate expressions in target language. With regards to the language style, it was found that the informal or casual style dominated, reflecting the informal nature of film dialogue. The translator's preference for this style is to safeguard the communicative tone and social meaning of the text. To sum up, unit shifts in translating subtitles play an important role in the success of this translation process. Furthermore, language style also helps make the translated text natural and communicative.
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1. Introduction

Translate plays a main role in the communication through languages, cultures and social contexts. Based on J. C. As C. Catford states in *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*,

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translation can occur between any pair of languages, whether they are related or unrelated. Though there is flexibility, translation is, after all, a one-way process – from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL). According to Baker (2018) and House (2023), this process does not merely transfer linguistic forms but also reconstructs meanings in the system of the target language.

According to Catford (1965), meaning is an attribute of language, which takes shape both formally and contextually. Essentially, translation isn't simply the act of switching out one word for another in the target language; it involves a number of adjustments to attain equivalence (Chesterman, 2020; Baker & Saldanha, 2019). In reality, there are translation shifts as a result of these adjustments due to variation in structures of the languages. One of the most common types is unit shift, which refers to a linguistic unit of the source language translated into different rank unit in target language (Catford, 1965). According to House (2015) and Munday (2016), such shifts in the translated text are associated with naturalness and acceptability.

According to Al Sawi and Allam (2024), Baños and Díaz-Cintas (2021) and Bogucki (2020), the case of translation shifts has become more pronounced in audiovisual translation; especially in the subtitles of films. The subtitles have spatial and temporal constraints and require translators to convey meaning efficiently according to the experts and keep it readable according with (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021; Ali, 2024; Davitti et al., 2024; Nesirli, 2025). Moreover, the informal and casual language patterns of dialogues in films are motivated by the situational context, participants and communicative purpose (Catford, 1965; Wang & Zhang, 2021). Changes are more likely to occur in these cases. Translators have to transform the linguistic forms to fit into the system of the target language and the audiovisual medium (Pérez-González, 2019).

Furthermore, translation strongly ties in with cultural issues. According to Peter Newmark in *A Textbook of Translation*, the way of life of a community finds expression in its language. Cultural expressions may not only not exist in the target language but would also require adjustments by the translator and addition of shifts of translation. Thus, translation shifts are caused not just by linguistic differences but also by cultural and contextual ones.

Beyond these, translational shifts are also strongly influenced by both language style and cultural adaptation (Hagström and Pedersen, 2022; Szarkowska and Gerber-Morón, 2020). Due to the differences in communicative style between Indonesian and English, translators must arrange part of the clause and sometimes sentence structure in translation for the expression to be natural. Profanity is understood similarly in both languages. Indonesian uses terms for sex organs as a curse word whereas the same is true for English. Like Indonesia, the use of profanities is also found to be on the rise. Likewise, culture-bound expressions often require modifications not only in the lexical areas but also in the structural areas of the target text. Consequently, translation shifts refer to strategies dealing with a difference of language style or cultures that render a text clear (Chester, 2020; Yuliasri & Allen, 2020), acceptable and appropriate to the circumstances of its transmission.

Earlier research conducted in the field of translation, specifically, in audiovisual domains have largely centered on translation strategies, cultural adjustment, and subtitling constraints. Despite the merits offered by these studies, it is observed that most emphasised on one or the other aspect. Either, the equivalence of meanings or general translation techniques. One thing which lacks in them, is the specific and detailed study of the translation shifts at the level of linguistics. There is still insufficient research that systematically analyses how unit shifts occur in subtitle translation and how these shifts relate to language structure, style, and communicative function.

This gap reflects a necessity for a more concentrated study of translation shifts, particularly in Indonesian into English subtitle translation. Due to the differences in structure between Indonesian and English, and because speech in films is often informal, it is important to find out how shifts work in real translation. An analysis of the translation process is equally necessary for theoretical development as well as the quality of audiovisual translation.

The study has been deemed important in light of the increase in audiovisual content being consumed and the demand for quality subtitles. When translation does not accurately convey meaning or seems unnatural, it hinders audience understanding. Thus, the analysis of the shifts in translation can give translators real clues to produce subtitles that are more natural.

In terms of novelty, this study is proposed to be more specific, systematic and focused on unit shifts of translated films (film subtitles). This study is different from previous ones that only covered a more general theme of strategies or culture; it mainly focuses on the linguistic level of analysis in translation. For example, how shifts occur across ranks and how these shifts help in the transfer of meaning. Besides, the subtitle translation can be thoroughly understood through linguistic or cultural perspectives, or in a better way, both.

Based on the background above, this study aims to analyze translation shifts in Indonesian–English film subtitles with a particular focus on unit shifts. More specifically, the objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the types of translation shifts that occur in the subtitles, (2) to examine the factors influencing the occurrence of these shifts, including linguistic structure, language style, and cultural context. Through these objectives, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of translation studies, particularly in audiovisual translation.

2. Literature Review

This theory originated from J's theories on translation shifts that was established in 1984. C. Catford in his significant work *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. Equivalence is a central concept in Catford's theory. Catford (1965) states that translation is the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) with equivalent material in another language (TL). While equivalence is typically located at the sentence level, it may also occur at lower or higher ranks, such as morphemes, words, phrases, or clauses. The flexibility of translation implies that equivalence is not a rigid concept. It may, but does

not have to, be complete equivalence. Thus, the translator has the freedom to judge the degree of equivalence required based on the linguistic set up of the target language.

To complement Catford's linguistic approach, this study has also adopted the cultural view of Peter Newmark in *A Textbook of Translation*. According to the definition of Newmark (1988), culture is the system of a particular society, as expressed through it. He makes a distinction between cultural words and universal words; the former are said to belong to a single society, mainly through their absence in other languages.

Newmark (1988) explains that a lot of cultural expressions cannot simply be identified by seeing or touching. The expressions may be part of the everyday language. The literal translation of such expressions distorts meaning, so the translator often works with a descriptive equivalent or a functional equivalent. The original message may be altered or adapted in this process, resulting in translation shifts.

According to Newmark (1988), social practices, institutions, and religious elements that are culture specific often cause translation problems. The meanings of these elements may be both denotative and connotative. When there is no equivalent term for the concept in the target culture, the translator must consider the original term or adapt it. The translation shift takes place when the sentence structure undergoes a change due to cultural adaptation or the nature of the text.

Sholekhah (2019) investigates category shifts in comic book translation into Indonesian. According to her, a translation shift may be essential to help achieve equivalence, but it can also influence meaning causing an increase, a decrease, or a loss in meaning. Four kinds of category shifts were studied as per Catford's theory. Muamaroh and Hanggraningtyas (2022) also specifically discuss translation shifts and equivalence in translation of poems. According to them, the translation shift plays an important role in meaning maintenance in which unit shift is the dominant type while dynamic equivalence is the most used type. The paper deals with translation shifts and translation equivalence in literary texts.

Latifah, Baharuddin, and Udin conducted a similar study on translation shifts and translation quality in a novel in 2022. According to them, level shifts and translation shifts contribute to high quality translation in terms of accuracy, acceptability, and readability. This study analysed level shifts and their effect on translation quality. A research by Fitria (2020) looked at translation shifts in the English-Indonesian subtitles of the *Guzaarish* movie using a qualitative approach based on Catford's theory. The analysis reveals the existence of two types of shifts: level shifts and category shifts. The most frequent type of shift is the category shift, especially the structure shift. The study basically focused on categorizing the types as well as the frequencies of shifts present in the subtitles without investigating them anymore.

The translation of the subtitle is considered a not-just linguistic process but in the recent study of 'audiovisual translation' it is also a multimodal activity as stated by Catford. According to the observations of Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2021), due to the visual context, timing, and available space of the subtitles, the subtitler's (translator's) hand is often forced. Since there is a limitation of screen space, translation shift is often

employed as a strategy to facilitate readability and clarity.

Moreover, recent studies also highlight that the shifts in translation in subtitled films is closely related to naturalness and audience understanding. According to Pedersen (2021), subtitle translation needs modification not only on the linguistic level but also on the functional level to understand the message easily. This indicates that shifts, namely unit shifts, allow for rephrasing and simplifying utterances in the audiovisual context. In addition, the translation of humor and informal expressions common in conversations often engenders creative decisions. As noted in Zabalbeascoa (2021), humour translation is more about the effect than the form, leading to shifts in structure, word choice and realisation.

Most of these earlier studies go for analyzing shift in translation in literary texts, student translations or equivalence and translation quality. In the meantime, the focus of this research is professional film subtitles in *Comic 8*. Furthermore, this study does not merely classify the types of translation shift but also concerns a unit shift in the audiovisual translation. Moreover, another notable difference is that in this study, not only the language is considered but also the language styles employed especially in terms of translating humor, slang and cultural expressions expressions from the Indonesian into the English. As a result, this study can be said to be significant because it shows how translation shifts and language style work together in subtitle translation which is more complicated than any other text type.

Through Catford's shift theory on translations and Newmark's cultural context, this study aims to show the composite use of both linguistic and cultural features in translation. This approach is expected to contribute to translation studies, specifically in reconstructing meaning from one language to another within the audiovisual context.

3. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze translation shifts in film subtitles. This approach is chosen because the study focuses on understanding linguistic phenomena in depth rather than measuring them statistically. The aim is to describe and interpret how translation shifts occur in the process of audiovisual translation.

The data source of this research is a short film entitled *Comic 8: Merampok Bank INI*, which was obtained from YouTube. The film uses Indonesian as the source language (SL), which is translated into English as the target language (TL) in the form of subtitles. The data consist of dialogues or utterances that contain translation shifts between the source and target languages.

The data were collected using a documentation technique. First, the researcher watched the short film trailer on YouTube carefully. Then, screenshots were taken from selected scenes that contain subtitles. After that, the data were transcribed into written form, including both the original Indonesian text (SL) and its English translation (TL). From the collected data, only selected and relevant excerpts were chosen as samples for analysis based on their representation of translation shifts.

The instrument of this research is the researcher as a human instrument, who is responsible for identifying, selecting, and analyzing the data. The analysis is based on the theory of translation shifts proposed by J. C. Catford, with a particular focus on unit shifts. The data analysis was conducted through several steps. First, the researcher identified pairs of source language and target language data. Second, the data were classified based on the types of translation shifts. Third, the researcher analyzed the shifts by examining the structural changes from SL to TL. Finally, the findings were interpreted to explain how and why the shifts occur in the translation process.

The results of the analysis are presented using an informal method, in the form of descriptive explanations rather than statistical data. This method allows the researcher to clearly explain the occurrence of translation shifts and their role in producing natural and acceptable translations in audiovisual contexts. Through this methodology, the study is expected to provide a systematic understanding of translation shifts in film subtitles and their contribution to the effectiveness of translation.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that the subtitles of the movie employ various types of translation shifts. In the process of translating a source text into a target text the message encountered may undergo various changes. According to the analysis the shifts can be systematically classified according to their form and function reveal that the linguistic items in the source and target languages are adjusted to provide equivalence. The results show that this experience does not happen at random. It will happen because of other circumstances which are interrelated with the shifts in grammar. In this regard, the difference in the grammatical structure of the source language and the target language. Other than that, the differences in the style of the two languages. And the shifting also occurs due to the need to makes sense to the cultural aspect. All these things help the translator to make the right decision and all these things depend on the audiovisual translator.

Data 1: 3:35



SL: *Saya Bang?*

TL: Are you talking to me?

According to Catford (1965) translation in which SL-TL equivalences are set up at

whatever rank is appropriate. Usually, but not always, there is sentence-sentence equivalence, but in the course of a text, equivalences may shift up and down the rank-scale, often being established at ranks lower than the sentence. Catford (1965) defines by unit-shift we mean changes of rank—that is, departures from formal correspondence in which the translation equivalent of a unit at one rank in the SL is a unit at a different rank in the TL.

Based on the theory, in data 1 there is a unit shift from SL to TL. Even though it still has the same function (introgative), but there is a change from SL to TL. In SL there is a clause form 'Saya Bang?' then translated into a sentence form in TL 'Are you talking to me?' It has the same meaning/acceptable but in terms of form, there is a change from clause to sentence.

Film language generally uses a casual language style in accordance with the theory of Martin Joos in Catford (1965) which states that for English there are five styles of language: frozen, formal, consultative, casual and intimate. Based on the theory, data 1 shows the occurrence of a unit shift from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Although the function of the utterance remains the same, namely interrogative, there is a change in form from a clause in the SL, “Saya, Bang?” to a sentence in the TL, “Are you talking to me?”. Semantically, the translation remains acceptable; however, structurally, there is a shift from the clause level to the sentence level.

Moreover, the language style used in films is generally informal, in line with the classification of language styles proposed by Martin Joos in J. C. Catford (1965:90), which divides English language styles into five categories: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. Based on this theory, the style used in this data falls into the casual categories. This is because the conversational context in the film occurs in a non-formal situation, where the characters are engaged and meet spontaneously on the street.

In such situations, speakers tend to use casual language style in the form of simple clauses that are easily understood by both parties, without following complete or formally structured sentences. However, in the process of translating into English, a unit shift occurs, namely from a clause in the source language to a sentence in the target language. This shift reflects a structural adjustment to achieve clarity and acceptability in the target language.

Data 2: 3:43



SL: *Yaelah Bang*

TL: Oh, come on

Based on Catford's theory, this data can fall into the category between unit shift and rank shift. The phrase "Yaelah Bang" in the SL (source language) is an elliptical clause that is also an interjection. An elliptical clause is one that does not have a subject verb structure and usually expresses a feeling. In this case, it expresses annoyance or disbelief. It lacks a clear subject-verb structure and is frequently found in colloquial spoken Indonesian. In comparison, the target language (TL) version is "Oh, come on", which is a full sentence in English that has a clearer structural-design and illocutionary force. The shift occurs from lower rank (elliptical clause/interjection) in SL to higher rank (sentence) in TL. This shift also represents a pragmatic adjustment where they (the translator) opt for a natural equivalent expression in English with the same emotional value and communicative effect.

According to the categorization of Martin Joos in Catford (1965) which divides styles of the English language into five kinds: frozen, formal, consultative, casual and intimate. In terms of language style, this utterance belongs to the casual styles. The conversation context is informal where students returning home from school interact on the street. This situation encourages language that is relaxed, spontaneous, and emotionally expressive. The SL used "Yaelah Bang" and the TL used "Oh, come on". Both expressions are casual conversations and they have a simple nature where everyone can relate to them. Furthermore, both statements do not a proper grammatical rule as it is in a real-life spoken language.

Data 3: 3:44



SL: *Saya aja sehari jajan cuma 10 ribu*

TL: My allowance is only 10 thousand rupiah per day

This data can be categorized as a category shift, specifically involving structure shift and class shift, based on the theory proposed by J. C. Catford. In the source language (SL), "*Saya aja sehari jajan cuma 10 ribu*" is a clause with an informal and slightly elliptical structure, reflecting natural spoken Indonesian. In the target language (TL), it is translated as "*My allowance is only 10 thousand rupiah per day*", which is also a clause (full sentence) with a clearer and more standardized grammatical structure. Therefore, there is no unit shift in terms of rank, since both SL and TL are at the clause/sentence

level. However, a structure shift occurs due to the reorganization of elements, where the SL emphasizes the speaker (“*Saya aja*”) and activity (“*jajan*”), while the TL restructures the message into a possessive nominal construction (“*My allowance*”).

In addition, there is a class shift, particularly in the translation of “*jajan*” (a verb referring to spending money on snacks) and the implied phrase “*uang jajan*”, which is rendered as “allowance” in the TL. This reflects a shift from a verbal expression (process/activity) in the SL to a noun (thing/concept) in the TL. The translator chooses “*allowance*” as a natural and culturally appropriate equivalent in English, even though it is not a direct lexical translation, in order to convey the intended meaning more effectively.

In terms of language style, this utterance falls under the casual style, according to the classification proposed by Martin Joos in Catford (1965), which includes frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate styles. The context of the conversation is informal, as the speakers are students walking home from school and interacting on the street. This situation encourages the use of relaxed, spontaneous, and everyday language. The SL expression “*Saya aja...*” clearly reflects a casual spoken style, marked by informality and the use of particles like “*aja*”. Although the TL version is more structurally complete, it still maintains a casual tone appropriate for everyday communication, ensuring both clarity and naturalness in the target language.

Data 4 : 4:29



SL: *Noh, noh, noh, sama gajah afrika noh*

TL: There. The big guy over there

This data can be classified as a unit shift (rank shift) based on the theory proposed by J. C. Catford. In the source language (SL), the utterance “*Noh, noh, noh, sama gajah Afrika noh*” is realized as an elliptical clause or phrase, lacking a complete grammatical structure such as a clear subject and predicate. It functions mainly as a spontaneous, informal expression combined with a deictic marker (“*noh*”) used to point something out. However, in the target language (TL), it is translated into “*There. The big guy over there.*”, which takes the form of a complete sentence with a clearer syntactic structure. Therefore, the shift occurs from a lower rank (phrase/elliptical clause) in the SL to a higher rank (sentence) in the TL. This shift also involves a degree of lexical adjustment,

where “*gajah Afrika*” is rendered as “*the big guy*” to achieve a more natural and contextually appropriate expression in English. Overall, the translation reflects both structural and semantic adaptation to ensure clarity and acceptability in the target language.

Catford (1965) stated a theory that refers to the language variety/style that is closely related to data. He stated that a language variety, then, is a sub-set of formal and/or substantial features which correlates with a particular type of socio-situational feature. For a general classification of varieties we confine ourselves to a consideration of situational correlates which are constants in language-situations. These constants are (i) the performer (speaker or writer), (ii) the addressee (hearer or reader), and (iii) the medium (phonology or graphology) in which the text is presented.

According to Catford (1965) by style we mean a variety which correlates with the number and nature of the addressees and the performer's relationship to them. Styles vary along a scale which may be roughly characterized as formal and informal. For English, Martin Joos has suggested five styles: frozen, formal, consultative, casual and intimate. The markers of styles may be lexical, grammatical or phonological.

The data shows the style of language used in the film, namely the casual style. In the data, the utterances in SL are not translated word for word in TL. The utterances ‘noh’, are supported by the actor's body language, namely 'pointing at something' is an utterance that means 'showing something that is far from the object' and it is also a style of Indonesian casual language. So in TL, the expression 'noh' cannot be translated literally. Therefore, in TL the utterance is translated into 'there', which is a demonstrative word that refers to distance. The second utterance contained in the subtitle is the term 'gajah afrika' in SL which cannot be translated literally in TL because there is a meaning behind that utterance. The term is used by actors humorously as they understand it to refer to someone who has a large body. So, in TL it translates to 'the big guy'.

Data 5 : 5:19



SL: *Ini uang buatan manusia?*

TL: Is this real money?

This data can be classified as a unit shift (rank shift) based on Catford's theory. In the source language (SL), the utterance “*Ini uang buatan manusia?*” is realized as a

phrase-level construction, particularly in the expression “*uang buatan manusia*”, which is a noun phrase consisting of a head (*uang*) and a modifier (*buatan manusia*).

However, in the target language (TL), it is translated into “*Is this real money?*”, where the equivalent meaning is expressed through a different unit realization, particularly the use of the adjective “*real*” to represent the longer phrase “*buatan manusia*.” This indicates a shift from a higher unit (phrase) in the SL to a lower unit (word) in the TL.

In this way, the shift takes place at the rank level, from phrase to word, which is classified as a unit shift (rank shift). By changing this, the translation has become shorter and closer to Natural English while retaining the meaning.

The way in which an individual communicates shows us various aspects of their character. The speakers are good friends. This can be seen from the situational context in which they interact after spending time together at a night life entertainment venue. The conversation is casual and straight to the point, not following any formal grammatical structure. In addition, their relationship is built on high trust as they discuss their big plan to rob a bank. Only people with strong personal connections and mutual trust would share such a plan. Consequently, the informal and familiar nature of SL and TL is reflected in the direct and simple expression which makes the speakers speak comfortably and freely.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzed translation shifts and language styles in the Indonesian–English subtitles of *Comic 8* using Catford’s translation shift theory. The findings reveal that unit shift is the most dominant type of shift identified in the data. Most shifts involve changes in rank, particularly from clauses or phrases in the source language (SL) into sentences in the target language (TL). In addition, unit shifts are also found to occur from higher to lower units, indicating that shifts are flexible and depend on the communicative needs of the translation.

Only one case of category shift occurs and that involves structure shift and class shift. Less frequent as it may be, this shift serves an important function in the production of a more natural and acceptable expression in the target language. Analysis reveals the predominant of casual form of language which indicates the use of informal style in the film. In one instance, there is a combination of casual style and intimate style. This suggests that style is influenced by relationship and context of interaction.

Through the results of this research, it can be concluded that translation shifts, particularly unit shifts, are a means to achieve clarity, naturalness and acceptability in the subtitle translations. Adequate language style usage serves role of preserving communicative meaning and social nuance in the original dialogue of plays. The present research will, hopefully, enrich the translation studies with a more focused study on translation shifts in audio-visual context, namely in Indonesian–English subtitle translation.

Nonetheless, the study has some limitations. The data covers selected segments from just one movie; therefore, it does not cover all forms of translation shifts found in

audiovisual translation. Consequently, a future study is encouraged to utilize a broader data-set or other kinds of text like a formal, literary, or technical one. Further research may investigate other kinds of shifts or mix different theories for a better understanding of what happens in translation.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this research.

Authors' Contribution

The author made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. The author took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the results. The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

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Statement of AI Usage

The authors would like to state that this manuscript's grammar, readability, and general clarity were only enhanced by the usage of generative AI techniques. The writers thoroughly examined and validated every output produced with the use of AI. This study's research data is all original and hasn't been altered or produced by artificial intelligence.

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