

Idiomatic Translation in The Movie “Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse”

Kadek Gilang Ramawan¹, Ni Luh Putu Krisnawati², I Made Netra³

¹English Department, Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia, gilangram.gr@gmail.com

²English Department, Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia, putu_krisnawati@unud.ac.id

³English Department, Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia, imadenetra@unud.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The study will determine the idioms employed in the movie and the means applied in order to translate them to the target language. The qualitative descriptive approach was used, which was supported by the use of the content analysis to interpret the meaning and role of idioms in the dialogues in the film. Data collection was made through the purposive approach which entailed identifying English conversations having idiomatic expressions and their respective Indonesian subtitles such that only applicable and contextually rich ones were selected and analyzed. This work follows the structure of Fernando (1996), who divides idioms into pure, semi-, and literal idioms in terms of their figurativeness and Baker (2018), who describes four major strategies of translating idioms which are using idioms of similar meaning and the same form, using idioms of similar meaning and different form, paraphrasing, and omission. The results indicate that pure idioms were the most frequent then literal and semi-idioms. Paraphrasing was the translation strategy that prevailed the most and this shows that translators would focus more on meaning and naturalness than literal structure. This is an indication that effective translation of idiomatic language necessitates the ability to be sensitive to both language and culture to maintain the intended tonality and emotional impact in audiovisual media.

Keywords: idioms, translation, strategies, movie, subtitle.

1. Introduction

Language is also a tool of communication and at the same time, it represents a social, emotional and cultural setting of the people who use it. Idioms as symbols that are deep rooted in both culture and language often cannot be interpreted mainly by a literal interpretation. The idioms are a special challenge to be translated because their meaning is figurative. A translation should not only be accurate but cultural sensitive and contextual because to maintain meaning and intent of the message and style used in the translation.

According to Baker (2018), idioms refer to fixed expressions whose meaning cannot be derived based on the separate words and the interpretation of which is largely dependent on the cultural knowledge. Baker suggests four approaches to translation of idioms to solve these

challenges, namely an idiom of similar meaning and form, an idiom of similar meaning and dissimilar form, paraphrasing and omission. These strategies underline the need of the translator to be accurate, natural and culturally adapted. Fernando (1996) on the other hand identifies three types of idioms i.e., pure idioms, semi-idioms and literal idioms according to the level of figurativeness and transparency. The typology is a helpful tool in the study of the meaning that various idiomatic structures are used to convey in different languages.

There are other difficulties related to the translation of the idioms in the audiovisual media like the films because of space and time limitation in the translation of the subtitles. Idioms can be used to lead to character growth, humour and emotional richness which is essential in the authenticity of the story. Subtitling this type of content demands linguistic parity and putting within the space constraint and legibility of text on screen. The animated movies, especially, offer vast source of analysis due to the use of expressive language, humor and referencing to various cultures.

Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse (2023) is a good example of idiomatic translation. The movie is based on the adventures of a young Spider-Man, Miles Morales, chasing the villains through a multiverse full of various heroes and rich in both dialog and punning jokes. All these idioms do not only pass through humor and emotion, but also they emphasize on the generational and cultural identity. Such dialogue needs strategic choice in translating to the Indonesian language to maintain the meaning and cultural import.

This study examines the nature of idioms within *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* and discusses how the idioms were translated into Indonesian. It uses the typology of idioms presented by Fernando (1996) to categorize the idioms and the framework created by Baker (2018) to explore the strategies used in translation. Concentrating on this popular animated film that unites the popularity of all the world and the use of specific language peculiar to culture, the research makes its contribution to the better comprehension of the ways idiomatic expressions are translated into the audiovisual one. The results will be useful in the field of translation research, especially the topic of cultural equivalence, choice of translation strategy, and maintenance of meaning and tone during cross-cultural communication.

2. Methods

The study is dedicated to idiomatic expressions that occur within the verbal conversation in the movie *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*. The movie was watched via *AppleTV* and has the estimated length of about 2 hours and 20 minutes. The Source Language (SL) was the English dialogues and the Target Language (TL), the Indonesian subtitles. The data were gathered through documentation method, which implied identification of idiomatic expressions and studying their translation according to the classification provided by Fernando (1996) and translation strategies provided by Baker (2018).

The data collection involved several stages that were implemented in a systematic manner. First, the movie was watched several times in order to determine the idiomatic expressions that were present in the chosen scenes. Second, the sentence-laden idiomatic passages were translated into the English dialogue. Third, the Indonesian subtitles were reviewed, and all the idiomatic expressions and their translations were noted. Fourth, the identified idioms were classified into pure idioms, semi-idioms and literal idioms based on how Fernando (1996) typologized them. Lastly, the translation of every idiom was evaluated and categorized based on the four strategies to idiom translation developed by Baker (2018): using the idioms with similar meanings and forms, using the idioms with similar meanings but different form, paraphrasing, and omission.

In this study, a qualitative descriptive approach was used to give a detailed description of the meaning and translation of idiomatic phrases in the intended language. The comparative one consisted in the analysis of idiomatic expressions in the SL and their equivalents in the TL to assess the accuracy, naturalness, and cultural adequacy. Individual idiom has been analyzed with regard to its linguistic form, pragmatic role, and role to humor, tone and emotional richness of the film.

Both descriptive and tabular representation of the findings were done. The textual (descriptive) analysis was very detailed explaining each of the idioms and the strategy used in translation, with idiomatic expressions marked with bold font. The idioms together with their Indonesian equivalents, types, and the strategies were summarized in a systematic manner in a tabular format. This dual presentation allowed keeping things clear and understanding the work of idiomatic translation in full through the action of a developing audiovisual setting like that of *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*.

3. Findings and Discussion

Based on the data analyzed, the researcher identified a total of 182 idiomatic expressions in the movie *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*. The analysis revealed the presence of all three types of idioms according to Fernando's (1996) classification: pure idioms, semi-idioms, and literal idioms. These idioms reflect the film's dynamic language use, cultural context, and character interactions throughout the narrative.

This section discusses the types of idiomatic expressions found in the movie and the translation strategies applied in the Indonesian subtitles. The analysis follows Fernando's (1996) categorization of idioms and applies Baker's (2018) idiomatic translation strategies to examine how meaning is preserved or adapted across languages in an audiovisual context.

(1) Types of Idioms and Their Translation Strategies

Idioms are a vital part of language, often carrying figurative and culturally embedded meanings that cannot be interpreted literally. Fernando (1996) classifies idioms into three types: pure idioms, semi-idioms, and literal idioms. This study identified all three types in *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*, with a total of 182 idiomatic expressions: 108 pure idioms, 32 semi-idioms, and 42 literal idioms. These idioms illustrate the film's informal and expressive language, reflecting cultural nuances and character interactions.

To examine how these idioms were translated into Indonesian, Baker's (2018) four strategies were applied: using an idiom of similar meaning and form (59), using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form (35), translation by paraphrase (72), and translation by omission (16). Each strategy is further analyzed with examples to evaluate how effectively meaning and tone are preserved in the subtitles.

(2) Data Analysis

a. Pure Idiom

Data 1

SL: "Nothing. **Everything's cool, man. It's all good.**"

TL: "Tidak ada apa-apa. **Semua aman, Bung.**"

According to The Free Dictionary (2019), the idioms everything's cool and it's all good are informal expressions used to reassure others that a situation is under control. These non-literal expressions exemplify pure idioms, as defined by Fernando (1996). In the Indonesian subtitles, they are translated as *semua aman* ("everything is safe/okay"), effectively preserving the original tone and informal register. This reflects Baker's (2018) strategy of using an idiom of similar meaning and form, ensuring both clarity and cultural relevance for the target audience.

Data 2

SL: "Benny, man. Come on, **drop the beat!**"

TL: "Benny, **mainkan musiknya!**"

According to Urban Dictionary (2025), *drop the beat* is a slang term in music, especially in hip-hop, signaling the start of a strong rhythmic section. As its meaning cannot be inferred from the literal words, it is classified as a pure idiom (Fernando, 1996). In the Indonesian subtitle, the phrase is translated as *mainkan musiknya* ("play the music"), applying Baker's (2018) translation by omission strategy. This approach avoids literal translation while preserving the intended meaning and ensuring clarity and naturalness for the target audience.

b. Semi-Idiom

Data 3

SL: "We, uh-- We **caught a break** in the Spider-Woman case."

TL: "Kami, **dapat petunjuk** untuk kasus Spider-Woman."

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary (2025), *caught a break* means experiencing unexpected good luck in a difficult situation. As a semi-idiom (Fernando, 1996), it combines literal and figurative elements. In the Indonesian subtitle, it is translated as *dapat petunjuk* ("got a clue"), applying Baker's (2018) strategy of using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form. This translation maintains the contextual meaning while ensuring clarity and naturalness in the target language.

Data 4

SL: "Cause no matter what I do, **someone always thinks I'm blowing it.**"

TL: "Apa pun yang kulakukan, **selalu ada yang mengira aku akan gagal.**"

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary (2025), the idiom *blow it* means to fail or make a serious mistake, particularly in crucial situations. This expression is categorized as a semi-idiom (Fernando, 1996) because, while *blow* retains a partial literal sense, the phrase as a whole conveys a figurative meaning related to failure rather than physical action. The Indonesian translation *aku akan gagal* ("I will fail") applies Baker's (2018) paraphrase strategy, effectively delivering the intended meaning even without a direct idiomatic equivalent. The choice of words *akan gagal* maintains the speaker's sense of frustration and self-doubt, reflecting the emotional tone of the original line while ensuring the translation remains natural and contextually appropriate in the target language.

c. Literal Idiom

Data 5

SL: "Being **your own boss**. You don't need all this."

TL: "**Mengatur hidupmu sendiri**. Kau tak perlu ini."

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary (2025), *your own boss* means having control over one's work or life, often implying independence. As a literal idiom (Fernando, 1996), its figurative meaning remains close to the literal words. The Indonesian translation *mengatur hidupmu sendiri* ("manage your own life") reflects Baker's (2018) strategy of using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form. This choice preserves the sense of autonomy while ensuring naturalness and clarity in the target language.

Data 6

SL: "I'm very **good at reading people**."

TL: "Aku **pintar menebak orang**."

According to *The Free Dictionary* (2019), the phrase *reading people* refers to the ability to understand others' thoughts, feelings, or intentions through observation. Because its figurative meaning closely aligns with its literal sense, it is categorized as a literal idiom (Fernando, 1996). The Indonesian translation *menebak orang* ("guessing someone's intentions") employs Baker's

(2018) translation by paraphrase strategy, effectively conveying the intended meaning in a way that sounds natural and culturally appropriate to Indonesian audiences.

Compared to pure and semi-idioms, literal idioms such as *reading people* are generally easier to translate directly, as their meanings remain partially transparent. However, context and naturalness are still essential to ensure that the tone and communicative intent are preserved. While pure idioms often require full adaptation and semi-idioms demand cultural adjustment, literal idioms primarily rely on precise word choice and contextual alignment to maintain both clarity and nuance in translation.

4. Conclusion

This study examined how idiomatic expressions in *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* were adapted and translated into Indonesian subtitles. Drawing on Fernando's (1996) typology of idioms and Baker's (2018) translation strategies, the analysis highlights the challenges of maintaining meaning, tone, and cultural nuance in audiovisual translation. Out of 182 idiomatic expressions identified in the film, 108 were categorized as pure idioms, 42 as literal idioms, and 32 as semi-idioms. These findings demonstrate that the film relies heavily on figurative language to convey humor, emotion, and character identity.

In terms of translation strategies, paraphrasing emerged as the most frequently used method (72 instances), followed by the use of idioms with similar meaning and form (59), idioms with similar meaning but dissimilar form (35), and omission (16). The findings underscore that translators prioritize clarity and naturalness over structural equivalence when translating idiomatic expressions.

Overall, this study demonstrates that idiomatic translation in films requires sensitivity to both linguistic and cinematic contexts. The results contribute to translation studies by emphasizing the importance of cultural and contextual adaptation in subtitling, offering insights into how meaning and emotional resonance can be effectively conveyed across languages and audiences.

5. References

- Catford, J.C. (1978) *A linguistic theory of translation: An essay in applied linguistics*. 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fernando, C. (1996) *Idioms and idiomaticity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baker, M. (1992) *In other words: A coursebook on translation*. London: Routledge.
- Baker, M. (2018) *In other words: A coursebook on translation*. 3rd edn. London: Routledge.
- Creswell, J.W. (2014) *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 4th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Sugiyono. (2015) *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan: Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.

- Newmark, P. (2008) *A textbook of translation*. 12th impression. London: Longman.
- Larson, M.L. (1984) *Meaning-based translation: A guide to cross-language equivalence*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Napitupulu, R. (2024) *Strategies used for idiomatic translation in J.K. Rowling's novel entitled Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Denpasar: Udayana University.
- Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse. (2023) [Film] Directed by Joaquim Dos Santos, Kemp Powers, and Justin K. Thompson. Los Angeles: Sony Pictures Animation.
- Cambridge English Dictionary. (2025) Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/> (Accessed: 3 April 2025).
- The Free Dictionary. (2019) *Dictionary, Encyclopedia and Thesaurus*. Available at: <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/> (Accessed: 3 April 2025).
- Merriam-Webster. (2025) *America's Most Trusted Dictionary*. Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/> (Accessed: 3 April 2025).
- The Idioms. (n.d.) *The Idioms*. Available at: <https://www.theidioms.com/> (Accessed: 3 April 2025).
- Urban Dictionary. (2025) *Urban Dictionary*. Available at: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/> (Accessed: 3 April 2025).