Revealing Subtitling Strategies of Commissive Speech Act in Wednesday Film

Ahmad Jum'a Khatib Nur Ali[1*], Ichwan Suyudi[2], Agung Prasetyo Wibowo[3]

[1,2,3] Universitas Gunadarma, Jakarta, Indonesia

[*1]aj_khatib@staff.gunadarma.ac.id ; [2]ichwan@staff.gunadarma ; [3]agungpw@staff.gunadarma.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The commissive speech acts help manage situations where linguistics form does not fully reflect the intended meaning. Consequently, translating commissive speech acts in films requires particular care and consideration. Therefore, this research objective is to analyse the application of subtitling strategies in the translation of commissive speech act dialogues in the series Wednesday Episode 1, based on Gottlieb's (1992) theoretical framework. Subtitling, as a form of audio-visual translation, requires linguistic and technical adjustments so that messages can be conveyed accurately within the constraints of space and time. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with documentation techniques as the basis for data collection. A total of seven data items were obtained, consisting of utterances taken from the source script and their translations. The findings reveal that several subtitling strategies were used: paraphrase (2 data), transfer (1 datum), imitation (2 data), decimation (1 datum), and deletion (1 datum). Paraphrase strategy was the most frequently used strategy due to its flexibility in handling expressions without direct Indonesian equivalents. Transfer strategy was applied when meanings could be conveyed directly, while imitation strategy used for proper and place names. Decimation and deletion strategies used to address technical constraints like rapid dialogue and limited subtitle space. Overall, this study concludes that subtitling strategies are chosen contextually to maintain the accuracy, naturalness, and readability of subtitles for the audience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Films are one of the products of popular culture that play a role in the formation and development of language. This is due to the nature of film as a massive medium that reflects communication and interaction in daily life. As a results, film functions not only as a medium of entertainment but also a medium of education and social critique (Maulana & Aesthetika, 2023). In other words, through its visual and verbal narratives, films whether to a small or large extent-change, influence, and reflect the linguistic realities within society.

The role of film in language use becomes even more interesting in the context of international films that employ foreign languages, particularly English. Viewers of international films will inevitably be exposed to English

words or phrases after watching the film. This is especially true today, as English-language films can be easily accessed through digital platforms. Many of these films are in the form of series, which consistently reflect the use of English.

The exposure to English enables the viewers to gain knowledge of the English language, as language acquisition process. Pranata stated, language acquisition is an unconscious process in which individuals are not aware that they are learning a language, resulting in implicit proficiency similar to the way a first language is acquired (Pranata, 2020). Viewers are able to acquire how English used in conversations.

In the linguistic context, the field that studies how the intentions and scope of conversation are conveyed and interpreted by speakers and listeners is pragmatics (Baihaqi & Widyantari, 2025). One of the important aspects of pragmatics is speech acts.

A speech act refers to the function performed through language, such as making a request, giving a command, or expressing emotions. According to Searle, speech acts can be divided into five categories: assertive speech acts, directive speech acts, expressive speech acts, commissive speech acts, and declarative speech acts (Devi & Degaf, 2021). Among these categories, commissive speech acts are among the most important because they bind the speaker to a future action (Cakrawati & Wijayanti, 2023).

In other words, understanding commissive speech acts helps address situations in which there is a gap between linguistic expression and the intended meaning situations that also appear in film dialogues. Therefore, the translation of commissive speech acts in films also deserves careful attention.

In the context of translation studies involving films or audiovisual translation (AVT), one of the challenges encountered is translating dialogues that are rich in cultural references. This form of AVT is also known as subtitling, which involves translating spoken dialogue into written text while adhering to technical constraints such as limited space and synchronization with visual elements (Mantika & Nurochman, 2023). Unlike conventional text translation, subtitling demands more than linguistic accuracy. The process requires an understanding of pragmatic meaning, cultural nuances, and the intended function of the speech acts. This becomes particularly interesting in the context of commissive speech acts in film series, as the interaction between language, culture, and humor makes the subtitling process even more complex.

In the scope of research, discussions on subtitling and speech acts are certainly not new. Several previous studies have examined this topic, such as the work of Handayani and Yosiana, who conducted a speech act analysis on the series *Emily in Paris*, season 1 episode 1. Their findings indicate that assertive speech acts were the most dominant in the data (Handayani & Yosiana, 2024). Another study was conducted by Desica and Ambalegin on the film *Onward*. Using a qualitative method, their research focused on commissive speech acts in the film. The results showed that refusals were the most frequently used type of commissive act (Desica & Ambalegin, 2021). As for research related to subtitles, one example is the study by Mantika and Nurochman. Their research employed a qualitative

method with Pedersen's subtitling strategies as the analytical framework for the film *Bumi Manusia*. The findings reveal that *official equivalent* was the most used strategy in translating cultural words (Mantika & Nurochman, 2023). These studies strengthen that research on speech acts in films, particularly in relation to subtitling, remains relevant and compelling.

Furthermore, regarding to AVT strategies or subtitling, several research refer to Gottlieb's theory. The theory proposes ten subtitling strategies, namely; expansion, paraphrase, imitation, transcription, dislocation, transfer, condensation, decimation, deletion and resignation. These strategies are employed to adapt source language dialogue to technical constraints of subtitles and the comprehension needs of the target audience.

Paraphrase is used when the source language structure cannot be maintained, *transfer* is applied to achieve a complete translation, while *imitation* is used to preserve proper names or specific terms, and *expansion* used to add information in order to clarify context (Simanjuntak & Basari, 2016). Meanwhile, *deletion* and *decimation* are applied to address limitations of space and speech rate, ensuring that subtitles remain readable and acceptable to viewers (Tumba & Wibowo, 2024).

Based on this overview, the researcher considers it necessary to examine the topic of commissive speech acts within the context of subtitling strategies, especially using a contemporary object of study. One such assumed popular object is the series *Wednesday* (2022). In addition to its popularity, the series features unique

communication styles among its characters, filled with sarcasm, humor, and other nuances that make it an appealing subject of analysis. Translating commissive speech acts into subtitles while maintaining their pragmatic aspects certainly requires specific strategies. This raises the question: What subtitling strategies are used in translating English-Indonesian commissive speech acts in the series *Wednesday*? Therefore, this study aims to explore the subtitling strategies employed in the translation of commissive speech acts from English to Indonesian in the *Wednesday* (2022) series.

2. METHOD

The focus of this research is the subtitling strategies used for English-Indonesian commissive speech acts in the *Wednesday* (2022) series. This means that the study concentrates on the quality aspects of subtitling English commissive speech acts into Indonesian. Therefore, this research employs a qualitative method, as the aim of qualitative research is to understand the conditions of a context by providing detailed and in-depth descriptions (Fadli, 2021). In this case, the goal is to understand the condition of subtitling strategies for commissive speech acts in the *Wednesday* (2022) series. However, considering the existing limitations, this study only uses season 1, episode 1 of the series.

Regarding data collection, Ali explains that qualitative research is an approach that involves observation, analysis, and descriptive reporting (Ali, 2018). Given the nature of the object, which is the film series subtitles, this study uses documentation techniques through the steps of identifying, classifying, and categorizing subtitle

texts related to commissive speech acts. This process can be seen in the conceptual framework of the research.
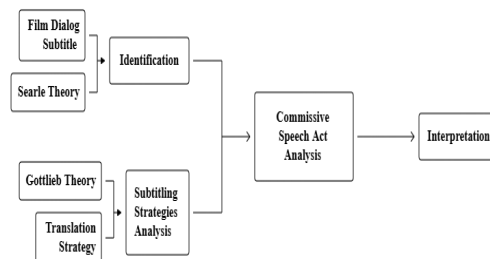

Figure 1. conceptual framework

In the analysis stage, this study employed Searle's theory of commissive speech acts to identify the data. A total of seven data items were obtained. The identified data were then analyzed using Gottlieb's theory to determine the English-Indonesian subtitling strategies used in the film. The results of the analysis were then described and concluded.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
3.1 Findings

The objective of this research is to analyse the application of subtitling strategies in the translation of commissive speech act dialogues in the series *Wednesday.* Based on the results of the analysis, this study shows that the translator employs a variety of subtitling strategies to adapt the film's dialogue to the needs of Indonesian viewers, particularly through the use of **paraphrase** (2 data) to make foreign expressions sound more natural, **transfer** (1 datum) to preserve the original meaning without alteration, and **imitation** (2 data) to retain character and place names in their original forms. Meanwhile, strategies such as **decimation** (1 datum) are used when the dialogue is fast-paced and needs to be condensed, and **deletion** (1 datum) is applied to remove parts

considered unnecessary or unnatural if translated literally. Altogether, these strategies demonstrate that subtitling is not merely a matter of translating text but an effort to adapt meaning while considering visual context, clarity of message, and reading comfort for the audience.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of the study reveal that the research object employs various subtitling strategies. The use of these strategies depends on specific needs, including contextual factors, communicative purposes, and the linguistic characteristics of both English and Indonesian. Because as means of communication, language must be capable of connecting meaning with expression in order to convey thoughts and feelings verbally (Irawan et al., 2022). For that reason, the discussion analyzes the data by highlighting how translation choices affect message clarity and naturalness. The results show that the paraphrase strategy is the most frequently used. In data 1 and 2, the subtitles are not literal translations; instead, they are modified expressions that better align with Indonesian cultural context. Goettlieb states that paraphrasing allows for interpretation of the source text, especially when a direct equivalent is unavailable or may lead to ambiguity (Tumba & Wibowo, 2024).

Datum 1. Episode 1, 14:01 – 14:05
SL: I will   escape this educational penitentiary and you will never hear from me again.
TL: *Aku akan kabur dari penjara berkedok sekolah ini dan menghilang selamanya.*

In datum 1, the phrase *"you will never hear from me again"* is translated into *"menghilang selamanya"*. This translation not only retains the original intention but also enhances the dramatic effect to better align with the character's emotional expression. The use of paraphrase in this datum shows a pragmatic consideration to convey emotional nuance. Pedersen notes that in subtitling, meaning structure is often more important than form structure (Mantika & Nurochman, 2023). Thus, paraphrase in this case functions as a bridge between contextual meaning and subtitle readability.

Datum 2. Episode 1, 36:07–36:09
SL: *Perfect. Put that quad in a to-go cup*
TL: *Boleh. Kopinya untuk dibawa pergi, ya.*

The paraphrase strategy is also used in datum 2. A cultural term like *quad*, referring to a coffee with four espresso shots, is replaced with a more general expression, *"kopinya untuk dibawa pergi"*. This reflects an adaptation based on the assumption that the target audience may not be familiar with the term *quad*. Therefore, paraphrasing becomes crucial in avoiding confusion without reducing the substance of the source message. The strategy used in both data 1 and 2 demonstrates the connection between subtitling and audience-oriented translation principles.

Datum 3. Episode 1, 05:08 – 05:13
SL: I promise you, my little viper, you will love Nevermore.
TL: *Ular manis, Ayah jamin, kau akan suka Nevermore.*

In datum 3, a different strategy is employed. The sentence *"you will love Nevermore"* is rendered directly as *"kau akan suka Nevermore"* without significant modification. This illustrates the use of the transfer strategy, as both the structure and meaning of the source sentence are preserved in the target language. This shows that the translator judged the lexical and syntactic correspondence between English and Indonesian to be sufficient, requiring no additional interpretation. Transfer is often used when SL and TL structures are relatively compatible or when message clarity is not at risk (Tumba & Wibowo, 2024).

Datum 4. Episode 1, 36:04 – 36:06
SL: To show my appreciation, how about I drive you to Burlington?
TL: *Sebagai balas budi, mau kuantar ke Burlington?*

Datum 5. Episode 1, 30:27 – 30:29
SL: This is a safe space, Wednesday.
TL: *Ini tempat aman, Wednesday.*

The strategy used in data 4 and 5 is imitation. This strategy is applied when translating proper nouns such as names, places, countries, and product names (Simanjuntak & Basari, 2016). In both data, the place name and character name are kept in their original forms. The use of *Burlington* and *Wednesday* without modification aligns with standard subtitling conventions, which recommend leaving proper nouns intact when they are already known or lack cultural equivalents. This avoids meaning distortion and ensures consistency with the visual context.

Datum 6. Episode 1, 19:31 – 19:32
SL: This is your final warning.

TL: *Peringatan terakhir.*

In datum 6, the strategy used is decimation. This strategy reduces the sentence structure without removing the main message (Simanjuntak & Basari, 2016). The translation of *"this is your final warning"* into *"peringatan terakhir"* demonstrates simplification while retaining the essential meaning. Meanwhile, in datum 7, the translator employs the deletion strategy. The phrase *"I'm afraid"* in *"it won't be possible, I'm afraid"* is omitted because it does not carry significant meaning within the visual and situational context. Deletion is used to maintain subtitle brevity, especially when the information is already inferable from expressions or visual signs (Tumba & Wibowo, 2024).

Datum 7. Episode 1, 38:41 – 38:43
SL: It won't be possible, I'm afraid. He's been expelled.
TL: *Tidak bisa. Dia sudah dikeluarkan.*

Overall, the use of diverse strategies indicates that subtitling is not merely a linguistic activity but also an interpretive process requiring pragmatic, cultural, and technical understanding. Translators must determine whether a dialog segment should be translated literally or adapted. These decisions are influenced by spatial constraints, on-screen timing, readability, and contextual relevance. The findings confirm that subtitling strategies are dynamic and context-dependent.

Furthermore, the dominance of paraphrase, transfer, and imitation strategies suggests a tendency among translators to maintain a balance between meaning accuracy and readability. This balance aligns with the principle of functional equivalence, which emphasizes the importance of conveying meaning effects rather than relying solely on lexical equivalence (Alyfia & Ali, 2021). Overall, the discussion shows that the subtitling strategies used in translating Episode 1 of the *Wednesday* series reflect audiovisual translation practices that simultaneously consider linguistic, pragmatic, and technical aspects. The variety of strategies found demonstrates the translator's flexibility in handling subtitling challenges and their commitment to presenting messages that are accurate, natural, and easily understood by Indonesian viewers.

4. CONCLUSION

This study analyses the application of subtitling strategies based on Gottlieb's theory in the translation of commissive speech acts in *Wednesday* Episode 1. The results show that the translator employs various strategies, such as: paraphrase, transfer, imitation, decimation, and deletion, to maintain message clarity, communicative effectiveness, and subtitle readability for Indonesian viewers. Paraphrase appears as the most dominant strategy because it provides flexibility for the translator to adjust expressions that do not have direct equivalents in Indonesian, without altering the original intent of the utterance.

The transfer strategy is used when the structure and meaning of the source language can be rendered directly without creating ambiguity. Meanwhile, imitation is proven by the keeping of personal names and place names, which is important for maintaining visual and factual consistency in the film. Decimation and

deletion are applied as forms of adjustment to the technical constraints of subtitling, such as subtitle display duration and rapid speech. Thus, the findings demonstrate that subtitling is a dynamic process that requires simultaneous consideration of linguistic, pragmatic, and technical factors.

The findings of this study also provide several important implications for the field of audio-visual translation. First, the study highlights that a full understanding of subtitling strategy theory is essential for future translators. Both translation students and practitioners need to develop the competence to distinguish situations that require paraphrasing, reduction, or preservation of the original form so that the translation remains effective and culturally appropriate.

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