



# A Review of Netflix's Indonesian Subtitle Translation in the "Pulp Fiction" Movie

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper attempted to analyse the Indonesian translation in the film "Pulp Fiction", by observing the pre-existing Indonesian subtitle provided by a Netflix translator, and how it represents the on-screen portrayals. With the analysis, the aim is to investigate the following subtitle translation, in order to evaluate their linguistic or lexical values at how they reflected the dialogues and expressions behind the acts that occurred within the film. This attempt utilized a descriptive-qualitative approach on the basis of case study in order to produce a scientifically acceptable proposition into the matter. Materials relevant to this analysis are comprised of English dialogues from the film itself and the Indonesian translation provided via subtitle, with the collection of data reduced as per Miles and Huberman's instructions and then analyzed in accordance to Newmark's measurements regarding translation methods. It was found, that because of the varying dynamics that occurred within conversations and the ongoing narrative; A translator's familiarity in the domain of a given language has a sizable impact on the resulting translation, since the meanings held behind the ensuing acts and dialogues may vary greatly from one end to the other.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of the new millennia, our civilization had seen an unprecedented surge of technological advancements (Khan, 2020). Within just two decades of time since, we have witnessed first-hand at how quickly things had changed from one generation to the other, as well as being subjected to numerous technological innovations, and how they were being phased in and out as time went on. While some stayed for longer, others saw improvements or even deviations, and the rest was history. Many fields of were developed further and new varieties were also made thanks to the ingenuity and the depths that some had gone through for its use and utility.

Media being one such medium that has seen a great number of changes since its inception; movies or films being one of them (Marcus et al., 2018), and since their debut, had become a prominent source of entertainment for many across the ages, among others (Dixon & Foster, 2018). In its wake, media companies and other industrial titans made headways to further increase their reach towards more potential prospects,

with some securing their positions as household names as they did, wherever they went. But of course, this leap comes with its own sets of obstacles. Including unforeseen, new ones; differing language and culture preventing their mediums from reaching full potential, among other factors (Fawcett, 2003). Necessitating elaborate technical attempts and or creative undertaking in order to prevent, rectify, or even bypass these obstacles where it is appropriate, at times costing the parties involved or the artistic values of the medias associated, in and of itself.

In another area, various studies had been made to cover the dynamics and complexities of translation, bridging the gap between two or more countries each with differing language, cultural, and social norms (Halverson, 2015; Beiler & Dewilde, 2020; Toury, 2021). Beyond it, enabling organizations and business ventures to expand past their respective horizons. With the subsequent culmination of all these combined efforts; never before has the entire human civilization been more connected. A person could delve into other far-flung communities and their history, become connected with people far away, or even keep in touch with the rest of the world with just a push of a button. Above that, this rapidity has also allowed many to reach, distribute, and make daily use of innumerable variety of technology and what other present-day contemporaries we have today with relative ease and practicality (Dubourg & Baumard, 2022). Not the least of which including convenient access to a wealth of knowledge and information, as well as forms of entertainment from far beyond (Han, 2021).

In this paper however, the aim and the object of interest is relatively straightforward. Presently common, somewhat mundane in nature and taken for granted in many occasions; subtitle and or closed caption (also referred to as CC). More specifically; subtitle translations in theatrical films, and or movies. Unlike certain television programmes or otherwise international broadcasts which may require the help of hearing and or visual aids, subtitle translations are not considered mandatory for film productions because of the nature of the media in and of itself (O'Sullivan, 2018); in that they cater towards a specified audience. Whether the producers would opt to have an "official" subtitle translation or not, were left at their discretion. Although there were several bodies which concerns themselves with the subject of standardization (such as International Electrotechnical Commission, or IEC), the topic of subtitling, as part of entertainment, has not garnered much that would require urgent attention aside from setting in recommendations and guidelines, in large part due to the nature of the matter itself.

While trivial, the lack of unionized effort in this sector, as well as the complexity involved in translating, means that discrepancy and inconsistency are commonplace, often failing to appropriately convey the meaning from the contexts and dialogues provided (Nitzke et al., 2022). This phenomenon can be found within areas of subtitle translation in films and movies, where officially sanctioned subtitles, that would normally inquire the expertise of qualified translator/s, alongside the cooperation of producers and writers themselves, are scant; as they are not considered a legal requirement or a necessity for producers (Kapsaskis, 2008). Considering

their value of convenience, many took the matter into their own hands, which yielded mixed results with varying levels of success; With "open-source" tools readily available online, enabling their endeavour. Inevitably, this development would come with resulting translations which may include ambiguous or mixed interpretations, if not complete and total confusion in what was portrayed. While not necessarily damaging, it leaves more to be desired and may affect the overall experience negatively.

According to Nida (2002), misconceptions are commonplace when interpreting the context behind the meanings of words due to the nature of semantic domains in a given language; how words may appear to be synonymous to one another, leading to a variety of relatively mixed interpretation that may or may not represent or convey their true meaning; because the real meaning sits behind the contexts, and not necessarily their lexical order. As such, the main focus should be the context provided, rather than their dictionary terms. To this, Nida also added that "the semantic boundaries of all meanings are fuzzy and indefinite"; This is because certain meanings may have more to them than they appear at a glance, mechanically. Like for example "whisper" and "murmur", or "run" and "sprint", and how they might be mistaken as the same exact term, in under two separate occasions.

With this in mind, John C. Catford, in his book "A Linguistic Theory of Translation", specified how the "discovery of textual equivalents is based on the authority of a competent bilingual informant or translator." This is because there can be no TL equivalent of a given SL item, in certain cases. And so it is down to the translator to find the best equivalents in which the TL's audience would understand, be familiar, and or comfortable with. Catford (1965), then, describes textual translation equivalent as any TL form that is observed to be the equivalent of a given SL form. As such, there is more beyond translations than just grasping the idea of a context, finding the right balance and or "equivalent" for the TL must also be taken into consideration.

To that end, Venuti (2017) proposed the idea of domestication and foreignization; stressing the importance of social and cultural values from a given language, as the analogues and parallels of meaning varies between one language to the other. Whereas Domestication focuses on the TL and its intended audience, Foreignization focuses on the SL and the author/s associated.

In this attempt, the goal would be to investigate the subtitle translation made by a translator on behalf of the Netflix service, and their effectiveness at conveying the dialogues present in the film; *Pulp Fiction*. This film was chosen specifically due to the manner of which conversations were delivered; In that the type of languages involved, mimics that of "daily languages" and mannerisms common in social interactions, or otherwise less-stringent, "informal", or "casual", in that sense. In enabling this analysis, this attempt will be accompanied by other studies which will provide some background into the topic at hand.

A study done by Oktaviani (2019) concerning translation procedures of technical texts, came to the conclusion that a translation effort may be attributed towards meeting a particular objective or fulfilling certain criteria, such as target audience, and of the aim, purpose, and function of a given translation after the fact; All

of which contributes into what method should be undertaken. The "methods" in question, falls under two specified category; The idea of Domestication, and of Foreignization. Whereas the prior deals with TL, and the latter with SL, each of which caters towards their respective elements in play (factors such as writer, translator, reader, cultural norms and the type of text involved), or tailored towards the text's intended purpose.

In addition, Anggawijaya and Adika's (2023) research into translation showed how the use of paraphrasing could enhance translation clarity. By using multiple approaches in paraphrasing and with the main focus being general audience, or otherwise non-specific target respondents whom had an understanding of English, as acting participants in the research. The results indicate that participants exhibited greater levels of comprehension of the texts associated, as paraphrasing helps in improving readability and translation effectiveness in relation to the type of texts involved and of the target audience respectively, thus firmly conclude its application (role?) as a mainstay/vital comp, for further translation efforts.

On the topic of filming and subtitling, Sugiharti (2019) had made an analysis onto the matter which delves into details surrounding the production stages and creative process of filming in Indonesia. The analysis drew its attention towards the subject of subtitling; elaborating how the sector was under-utilized, and how the exercise towards effective translation has yet to reach desirable levels within areas of filming's creative endeavors. The underlying issue, it was found, has to do with the "practice" of using non-professional translation personnel/team due to technical concerns related to the production efforts, as well as the common attitude amongst the producers towards subtitling and translation in general. In conclusion; The laissez-faire attitude and lack of motivation combined, played a hand on how the case was handled which compromised the quality of subtitling and hindering further efforts towards maximizing its role.

Further elaborating on the subject of subtitling specifically, Hudi et al. (2020) delved into the matter by examining translation techniques and the resulting quality of Indonesian subtitles within the movie; The English Teacher. Along with the relevant instruments, this assessment also involved a select few participants, all of whom potent candidates with an aptitude in English language, including several lecturers, with the rest being EFL students; To rate and partake in differing questionnaires. The collection of data was then quantified and measured based on feedback given by the participants of the research. The resulting evaluation was able to triangulate, and surmise that; The domineering method of translation within the subtitle was that of literal translation, and conclude, with the correspondents, that the subtitle was deemed viable, for the majority of the movie. This shows that although the translation technique was not the most advanced or thorough, the method in question does indeed have a certain capacity at producing adequate translations with reasonable success, should the co-existing elements associated were to be gauged properly.

On another front, Wahyuningsih (2021) made a report-analysis of translation errors in procedural texts, which concerns a number of students who were undergoing an Indonesian-English translation workshop. In this report-analysis, it was found that despite no noticeable issues in understanding the source text, the

participants had difficulties in factoring proper English grammar, including but not limited to; Writing, application, as well as finding apt/relevant equivalents when translating. The errors are compiled into quantitative data and then narrowed down into 4 categories, depending on the cause; The problems of meaning transfer, probing and analyzing content, usage of language and style, and verbal writing. Although the subject matter in this case may not necessarily coincide with subtitling exclusively, the findings regarding how translational errors could emerge are worth noting. As it details a number of variables relevant in triangulating probable errors when interpreting contexts, and realizing them into their intended language.

Anyhow, it must be pointed that the studies mentioned above had not delved into the subject of context, their significance, and how their role might have an impact on meaning. That is where this attempt would come in, so as to hopefully be able to remedy the situation and to further substantiate the aforementioned research endeavours as well.

## METHODS

This attempt relied on a descriptive-qualitative approach involving a case study based on textual translation; By means of observation and documentation, in order to assess the contents within the object of this research. Using Miles and Huberman's theory regarding qualitative data analysis, in that the data collected would be reduced in order to display the most relevant contents, to which a conclusion could be met based on the findings highlighted (Miles et al., 2019).

The collection of data would be documented by surveying the film itself, including the script which would help to better determine the overall contexts, and the main source of this research attempt; Which are the contents of the Indonesian subtitle for the film Pulp Fiction (effective as of May 23rd, 2023), provided by a translator on behalf of the Netflix service. The subtitle would be inspected in comparison with the English dialogues for them to be analysed, based on their translation method, using Newmark's insights in 'A Textbook of Translation (1998)' as a measurement to which further observation and conclusion could then be met.

Using 524 lines of dialogue to represent the subtitle as a whole, only a handful will be used as the basis for the majority of the translation. "Lines", are defined as complete sentences which forms a dialogue within a conversation, or parts of it. To that end, relevant portions of the English dialogues will be presented so as to give a basic view of the proceeding conversation, which will be laid in a table format alongside the provided Indonesian translation, and followed by their corresponding timestamps. Points of interest within the table would be shown in underline format, and details of the examination then highlighted further in bold, and italics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Translation Method

At first glance, translation may appear as if it would only require dictionary terms and the knowledge of singular words to interpret an entire text. The confidence which could arise from "knowing" what meaning sits behind a collection of words, might give translators an idea of the arrangement and flow of a text. However, dictionary terms only consist of lexical translation, and the method has little in the way of grammars and the structure of a sentence as a whole, not to mention "implications" that may reside within the confines of a text's composition; Their contextual meaning, and how to identify them. Thus, inconsistencies and discrepancies became a common occurrence (Nida, 2002).

From the dialogues gathered, it would appear that a literal translation method was used, in where the grammatical structure of the SL was kept and then translated to the nearest TL equivalent (Newmark, 1988). In addition to the likelihood of disruptions stemming from the lack of TL's grammatical structure, this method may also leave out several necessary details, since it might not take into account the connotative meanings the wordings within the SL, or the contexts within. The findings in the study made by Hudi et al. (2020) did showcase that the resulting translations, produced by this method, would not necessarily hinder the research participants from understanding the dialogue. However, the findings in question also showcased a number of inconsistencies within the translations as well.

**Table 1. [00:07:03 → 00:07:08]**

Characters	SL	TL
JULES	"-Okay, so tell me again about the <u>hash bars</u> ?"	"-Baik, katakan lagi soal <u>bar ganjanya</u> ."
VINCENT	"Okay, what you want to know?"	"Kau mau tahu apanya?"
JULES	"Well, hash is legal there, right?"	"Ganja legal di sana?"

The following lines has the audience immediately thrust into the fray and onto the midst of a conversation between two characters; Jules, beginning his very first line in the film, rather abruptly, to his colleague Vincent, whom had recently returned from an assignment overseas, as Jules were driving them both towards their next destination.

The sudden nature of the dialogue which follows may leave very little room for interpretation, at least within the first minute of the scene. Pieces of the puzzle are put in place as the conversation continued later on in the scene which gave clues as to their background and of the current setting. However, only the first three lines would be used as the primary focus of this observation; With Jules asking Vincent how certain European countries handled the matter and common use of a particular commodity, phrased as "hash bars".

For the words "hash bars", the translator loaned the term "bar". In SL, the word "bar" has different meaning depending on the context; It may refer to a place or a counter which primarily serves drinks and or beverages, a material of a certain shape, or a preconfigured obstacle. In TL, the word "bar" would usually be associated with a place which serves alcoholic drinks. On this occasion, the term "hash bars" was used in SL since the conversation revolves around the selling and or distribution of the material, in abundance. So even if the term "bars" would be understood by TL audience as "*Batangan/per-batang*", as in singular noun, the plural here refers to a collection of "hash" which were packaged in a manner that does not coincide with "singular items", or otherwise readily available for consumption, immediately upon acquisition. This highlights the first discrepancy within the subtitle.

### Contexts and Interpretation

Since literal translation had little emphasis in connotative meaning, it might happen that the translator would find trouble in discerning certain words and translating them into the intended meaning or its equivalent in TL, context not being a priority. As a result, some parts of the translation may become incoherent, or "unnatural" sounding. This is also compounded by literal translation having the tendency to be "off-putting", or harder to read than usual for the readers. And so, Newmark, emphasizes the need for accuracy alongside maintaining a degree of naturalness. Naturalness, refers to the levels of transparency a resulting translation has. By paying special attention to the composition of words, and the "textual flow" within; how comprehensible, or *easy-going* the text would be, for the intended readers of TL (Newmark, 1988), hence "naturalness". In an ideal scenario, a resulting translation would look "as if it wasn't a translation at all." However, there is more to translation than just accuracy and naturalness, and the ways to achieve said parameters.

In understanding the meaning of a text, contexts could determine how words are used within a sentence; rather than analysing the terms on their own, the composition of words in a sentence affects their function significantly, and ultimately, their meaning.

**Table 2. [00:10:37 → 00:10:55]**

Characters	SL	TL
VINCENT	"Then what did Marcellus do?"	"Apa tindakan Marsellus?"
JULES	"Sent a couple of cats over to his place. They <u>took him out</u> on his patio. Threw [him] over the balcony. [He] fell four stories. <u>He had a little garden down at the bottom enclosed in glass, like a greenhouse.</u> [He] fell through that."	"Kirim orang ke rumahnya. <u>Dibunuh</u> di teras <u>dan</u> dilempar dari balkon. Jatuh dari empat lantai. <u>Ada kebun kecil di bawah, dalam semacam rumah kaca.</u> <u>Dia jatuh menimpa itu.</u> "
VINCENT	"..."	"..."

JULES	"Since then, he kind of developed a speech impediment."	"Sejak itu ada gangguan bicara."
<p>The ensuing dialogue took place in an elevator, shortly after Jules and Vincent reached their intended destination; An apartment complex of which their target resides in. At this point in the narrative, as they went and had casual remarks with one another; It's not yet determined as to what form of business and what type of affairs they have into the matter, at least not explicitly. Although the implication of their roles were amplified after they had left their car prior to this, and took possession of firearms within the trunk of their vehicle.</p> <p>The conversation which follows has Jules describing an incident with regards to a particular person, whom have had an issue with a certain "Marsellus" figure. Jules elaborated this to Vincent as they went, and whilst in the elevator.</p>		

\*Note: Strong languages are used, and the words in the brackets were meant as an alternative

In this instance; The term "took (him/her/them) out" was misunderstood as "killed", or "dibunuh". This is likely due to the translator confusing the term "took/take...out" as "[to] kill...", because of the way the sentence was delivered, structurally, and possibly contextually, to a degree; In which the term itself was generally used to convey an act of murder under most circumstances, in this case; A narrative film which have depictions of crime. It should be noted however, that the application of this "term" is varied, and is used widely. For example, it may be associated with a person having an arrangement, or to accompany someone on an activity (ex "took her out *on a date*", "took them out *on a trip*", etc). The translator also used a conjunction [*dan*] (meaning "and") within the Indonesian subtitle, to connect two separate sentences together. While not strictly necessary, it can be relatively viable. Even so, the lack of subjects were noticeable in certain areas; A missed opportunity where conjunctions could have been used. Following the conversation afterwards, the translator did not determine the main subject in the sentences (e.g; "*Jatuh dari empat lantai*", *Who fell?/Siapa yang jatuh?*), neither indicating that the "...*little garden* down at the bottom..." belongs to the aforementioned subject of the current conversation (possessive phrase), which reads: "He had *a little garden* down at the bottom...". This detail was not present in the following Indonesian subtitle.

Subsequently, the Indonesian subtitle in the very last portion of the highlighted conversation also shared the same issue, but substantially more so. In which neither the subject, nor the necessary complements required to complete the sentence were present in the translation. On top of that, the English portion of the dialogue also implies that the subject matter of the ensuing conversation; The "victim", involved in the prior incident, *did survive*. Hence, Jules continued with; "Since then, *he kinda developed* a speech impediment". But unfortunately, since the translator/s misunderstood the context prior to this (in that the victim *wasn't* killed), it is likely that/the proceeding line might have caused some confusion and thus the resulting translation would contradict what was actually said by Jules.



## Notable Errors

Table 3. [01:10:10 → 01:10:20]

Characters	SL	TL
MARSELLUS	"What'cha got?"	"Dapat apa?"
DAVE	"He <u>booked</u> "	"Dia <u>pakai bandar</u> "
MARSELLUS	"His trainer?"	"Pelatihnya?"
DAVE	"Says he don't know nothing. I believe him. Think Butch surprised [him] same as us-"	"Katanya tak tahu. Aku percaya. <u>Kupikir</u> Butch mengejutkannya."

In this scene; Dave, Marsellus's acting agent, went ahead in person to inform Marsellus and report the progress on his side of the investigation regarding an individual whom, had suddenly disappeared, carrying Marsellus's interest along with it. Marsellus too, is currently in the process of interrogating a person which may hold relevant information in some manner or the other.

In context of the narrative; Marsellus is currently seeking the whereabouts of Butch, a boxer; whom had either worked for or made an agreement with Marsellus that he would perform a "dive" in his next exhibition match. A "dive", roughly meaning an act of losing (a contest, a game, or a match) intentionally, in this case for the purpose of deliberately taking advantage of the odds, laid in an already established betting activity. Butch broke the agreement, and sought the profits for himself and his unnamed accomplice out of town, later on in the scene. Hence why he made himself scarce after the match and angered Marsellus.

\*Note: Strong languages were used, and the words in the brackets were meant as an alternative

Aside from a number of discrepancies with varying degrees of disruption, there were also errors in the translation, which could be traced down to the type of language used in the conversation. Here, the term "booked", is a slang which refers to an act of leaving suddenly and or escaping, generally associated with a person/s running away from a thing or an event. However, should context and TL's grammatical functions be taken into account, the translation "*pakai bandar*", could roughly be interpreted as "used [his] connections with [some form of] dealers". Thus, has no correlation to the scene unfolding, nor the narrative at this point in the film. To clarify; the term "*pakai*" in Indonesia, is a verb meaning [use/ing] or [wear/ing], and "*bandar*" equates to a person or a place whom had/is linked, or has particular connection/s. This could mean a hub of some form (e.g commercial city, or port city/harbor), or a person/agent who distributes certain commodities, generally (although not always necessarily) associated with illicit merchants or sellers.

The conversation then continued, as Marsellus asked Dave regarding Butch's trainer if he had information regarding Butch's sudden escape. The following sentence "(I) Think Butch surprised [the trainer] (the) same (way) as (he'd surprised) us" conveys that the trainer and Marsellus's associates were either tricked, or otherwise unknowingly collaborated or cooperated in Butch's escape.

Thus, the use of the word "surprised" in this exchange has a more mechanical, technical function in its use (cooperative principle, maxim of relevance), in that they didn't know, or expected the outcome. In the subsequent translation of the exchange, in literal translation, almost word-for-word on this occasion; "*Kupikir Butch mengejutkannya*", "*mengejutkan*" in this particular instance, suffix and prefix included, had a more emotional, expressive connotation associated to its function. In that the term describes an expression of "shocked", "jumped", or "startled". While it does reflect the meaning to a degree, it might not accurately depict the flow of the conversation in the scene.

## CONCLUSION

The highlights of this attempt showed how the meanings or contexts were misunderstood, and how even a marginal oversight in one area could snowball into more noticeable, substantial errors which contradicted the proceedings. The film chosen in this attempt has actors engaging and conversing with one another in a leisurely fashion, similar to how we would interact in day-to-day social endeavours, especially amongst our own peers; That is to say, not within the circumstance that'd normally require levels of constraint, or under the pressure to maintain specific codes of conduct –"friendly", less civilized. This distinction may have been the main contributing factor towards discrepancies found within the translation; As it is a territory within a given language that necessitates the role of a translator, or a *local*, who's well versed and is accustomed to their use, for these "terms" to be understood. As much of the foundations within "casual speak" doesn't have conform to the language's proper applications and structures associated.

As such, it must be noted that while the role and authority of a translator is significant, it's also elaborate; Translators must be acquainted with the domain of SL and TL, be familiar with their norms and cultural values respectively, as well as their day-to-day usage in order to produce the best possible result when translating. The method of literal translation and similar to it are to be used sparingly, under the supervision of the relevant parties, or only at places where its deemed appropriate to do so; As each language may have their own sets of terminology or parallels that varies depending on the context. And context, on their own, could belie their lexical terms and compositions

On a final note, it must be stressed that this attempt was not without its faults and weaknesses, open for further investigations and discussions that are not limited to decisive corrections, and neither was it meant to be directed towards anyone in particular. In all, it is with the hope that this attempt would incentivize the confidence for a more involved efforts in translation, for the benefit of all parties involved, including that of the translator/s.

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