SEMANTIC ERRORS IN THE SUBTITLE TRANSLATION OF TED TALK "HOW BOOKS CAN OPEN YOUR MIND"

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ABSTRACT

Motivated by an increasing reliance on subtitles among audiences who may not fully grasp the source language of movies and videos, this study explores subtitle translation, as subtitles have an essential function in facilitating comprehension among audiences. Here, the study focuses on a TED Talk video titled "How Books Can Open Your Mind". The purpose is to examine the effects of translation errors in subtitles. The study employed a descriptive qualitative method, involving several viewings of the video to attain a comprehensive knowledge of the context. Errors were then identified, categorized, and analyzed using relevant literature and references, including the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI). Findings reveal that the identified errors consisted of semantic changes, singular nominal forms, reduction, misinterpretation errors, amplification, and the use of uncommon words. Of these errors, semantic changes were the most frequent, followed by reductions and uncommon words. This study hopes to discover these translation problems in order to better support subtitle translators as well as enhance the viewing experience of target-language audiences in the years to come.

KEYWORDS: *Subtitle Translation, Semantic Changes, Translation Errors*

INTRODUCTION

TED Talks is a global video platform that disseminates thought on many subjects. The website detailing the history of TED states that the inaugural TED Talks published online garnered over one million views. TED Talks are assemblies of individuals seeking to hear narratives, particularly those aiming to learn English or enhance their listening skills. TED Talks encompasses a diverse array of subjects, including AI, economics, family, geography, health, wellness, journalism, law, machine learning, NASA, personal development, and numerous others (Yektaeikarin Mohammad, 2013). Research indicates that the skill of public speaking is currently paramount (Anderson, 2017). The

significance of subtitles in TED Talks videos is to enhance audience comprehension and accuracy (Karakanta & Orrego-Carmona, 2023).

It is claimed that subtitles work best when the viewer is not aware of them, and to accomplish this, they need to conform to specific readability standards and be as concise as possible to avoid diverting the viewer's focus from the program itself (Georgakopoulou, 2009). In the context of Indonesia, Efendi (2020) argues that the language employed in subtitling is deemed suitable and appropriate in Indonesian if the films' audience comprises Indonesians.

Because they compete for viewers' attention, subtitles consume limited cognitive attentional resources to process their visual content (Kruger et al., 2017). This represents the limitation of subtitles. Subtitling may also carry the risk of inaccuracies in the audio-visual translation (Nikolic, 2021) such as films and TED Talk videos. Although subtitle translation has been widely studies in the fields of audio-visual translation and second language acquisition, most research focuses on syntactic, lexical, or technical aspects, such as synchronization, timing, or literal translation. Few studies have specifically explored semantic errors which are related to meaning in the subtitling of motivational or educational content, such as TED Talks. Moreover, while TED Talks are frequently used as teaching materials and global communication tools, there is limited research that critically analyses how semantic inaccuracies in subtitle may alter the speaker's intended message, especially in talks that rely on metaphor, emotion and storytelling such as Lisa Bu's *"How Books Can Open Your Mind"* (2013).

Nevertheless, many people are unaware that Lisa Bu's (2013) TED Talk video, "*How Books Can Open Your Mind*", addresses numerous issues. This video was chosen as the focus of this study due to its rich linguistic and thematic content. This talk not only explores the transformative power of reading but also addresses social, educational, and emotional dimensions of human development through literature. The speaker in this video employs expressive and culturally nuanced language, making it a compelling subject for analyzing semantic subtitling errors. This video discusses how the speaker reads her favorite novels in two languages, revealing issues in translation and providing her with significant insight into life.

Therefore, this gap is significant because semantic errors can mislead viewers, distort intended messages, or reduce the impact of otherwise powerful speeches. By focusing on this particular TED Talk, the study identified various sorts of semantic change in the TED Talk "*How Books Can Open Your Mind*", including semantic change, singular nominal errors, reduction, misinterpretation errors, amplifications, and uncommon

words. Semantic changes, which account for 30% of errors in subtitle translation, are primarily caused by the translator's inattention to context and insufficient vocabulary.

The researchers anticipate that this work will yield advantages for stakeholders, and especially translators. This study examines how errors in subtitles can lead to viewers' misinterpretation. This study exclusively focuses on a specific translation version limits its ability to represent all available language versions. By comprehending these deficiencies, it is hoped that this investigation can yield precise insights.

LITERATURE REVIEW
THE CONCEPT OF SUBTITLE TRANSLATION

Subtitle translation is a type of audiovisual translation, which involves the conversion of spoken language into written text. However, it needs to adhere to specific constraints, such as time and space constraints on the screen. Subtitle translation also needs to maintain a focus on accuracy and clarity as well as the original message's intent. Hence, subtitle translation not only requires a deep understanding of the source and target languages, but also sensitivity to the cultural and contextual nuances embedded in audiovisual content (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014; Malenova, 2015). In a similar vein, Georgakopoulou (2009) outlines technical (e.g., time, space, and presentation), textual (e.g., oral–aural processing, textuality issues, and change in mode) linguistic (e.g., grammar and word order, and cross-cultural shifts) considerations for subtitle translation.

To address issues in subtitle translation, selecting appropriate translation methods and techniques is necessary. In this case, the most commonly used techniques include *reduction, expansion, paraphrasing and omission* (Baker, 2018). According to Baker (2018), *reduction* is often needed to ensure that subtitles fit within the time and space available on the screen while still conveying the essence of the message. However, excessive reduction can lead to the *omission* of critical information, causing semantic errors. On the other hand, *expansion* is sometimes used when a direct translation might not sufficiently convey the meaning or tone. *Paraphrasing* is employed when exact equivalents do not exist in the target language, allowing the translator to maintain the intended effect.

Another relevant aspect of subtitle translation is the *synchronization* of subtitle with the audiovisual content, ensuring that the text appears on screen at the right moment, matching both the audio and visual cues. This process is critical in preventing semantic misinterpretations, where viewers might misalign the subtitles with the speech or the visual context, leading to confusion (Gottlieb, 2020). Furthermore, *cultural adaptation*

is also a key factor in subtitle translation. While the primary goal is to convey the original meaning, it is often necessary to adjust the content to the cultural context of the target audience. According to Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014), there are several strategies for translating culture-bond terms in subtitles, emphasizing the importance of making content accessible and relatable to the target audience and one such strategy is cultural substitution. It is defined where a culture-specific item in the source language is replaced with a target language item that has a similar impact of meaning. This approach ensures that the translated content resonates with the target audience's cultural context, thereby maintaining the original message's intent.

Cultural adaptation can also involve *localization,* which adapts the text to fit local customs, idiomatic expressions, or societal norms, ensuring that the message is understood by viewers without losing its original intent (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007). In the case of TED Talks, where speakers address diverse global audiences, translators must navigate cultural differences carefully to avoid semantic errors that could arise from misinterpretation or lack of cultural relevance.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT STUDIES

Concerning the analysis of subtitle translation, there are several prior analyses pertinent to this topic. Yao's study (2022) evaluated machine-translated Chinese subtitles of 20 TED Talks using the FAR model. The study found that semantic errors were prevalent due to literal translations and lack of contextual understanding. The key issues included misinterpretation of idiomatic expressions, inaccurate rendering of context-specific terms, and synchronization problems affecting meaning.

Indriawati et al. (2023) analyzed the Indonesian subtitles of the TED Talk *"How to Stop Screwing Yourself Over"* by Mel Robbins. The study identified various translation shifts and methods, with the following key findings: Translation Shifts (unit shift: 74 samples, structure shift: 73 samples, intra-system shifts: 26 samples, level shift: 18 samples, and class shift: 16 samples); Translation Methods (modulation: 61 samples, equivalence: 60 samples, literal translation: 36 samples, borrowing: 23 samples, and calque and adaptation: 1 sample each).

Zhang's study (2023) about an analysis of subtitling translation in TED Talks from the perspective of Skopos Theory revealed that subtitle translation should be tailored to meet the communicative needs of the target audience, ensuring that the translated content is both accessible and culturally relevant. He emphasized that Purpose-Driven Translation became the priority to underscore the primary goal of subtitle translation in TED Talks in order to facilitate understanding for a global audience. Moreover,

omission, naturalization and free translation are three approaches employed by Zhang to achieve the intended communicative effect.

Putri's research (2022) focused on the impact of translation techniques on the translation quality in the White Lady's subtitle, and found that the established equivalent was the most common translation accounting for 62.4%, while exploitation made up approximately 9.60%. This study indicated that 96% were accurate, indicating that translation quality was high in terms of correctness, acceptance, and readability.

Further, Sutaji's research (2022) on the translation errors of the English-Indonesian subtitled text of the Netflix series "The Queen's Gambit" showed that unjustifiable omission in translation occurred at a rate of 37.5%, followed by distortion at 21.43% due to its insufficient attention to context and cultural circumstances, as well as the lack of clarity in conversation pronunciation resulting from varying accents. This analysis revealed commonalities with multiple others, particularly in the use of descriptive qualitative research methods, the employed procedures, and the effects of translation methods, including the faults that arises in translation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to investigate the types of semantic errors in the subtitle translation of the TED Talk video entitled *"How Books Can Open Your Mind"* by Lisa Bu (2013). This video was purposefully selected due to its rich cultural and linguistic content, which makes it a compelling subject for subtitle analysis. Lisa Bu shared personal narratives that intertwined Chinese and Western cultural experiences, philosophical reflections, and emotional anecdotes, all of which pose unique challenges for translation. The combination of narrative, conversational, and reflective tones, along with its wide accessibility and popularity on the TED platform, provides an ideal basis for examining the accuracy and quality of subtitle translation, especially regarding semantic fidelity.

To begin the data collection process, the video was retrieved directly from the official TED website (Bu, 2013). Both the English subtitles (source language) and Indonesian subtitles (target language) were extracted using subtitle download tools named *DownSub*. The extracted subtitle files, in either *.txt* format was then cleaned and reformatted into a comparative table, aligning each English subtitle line with its corresponding Indonesian translation. This structure facilitated a clear and systematic comparison between two language versions.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select subtitle segments for analysis. From the entire subtitle script, approximately 50 to 80 subtitle pairs were chosen based on their potential to contain semantic challenges. This study focused on analyzing several semantic elements, including semantic changes (such as metaphorical usage, metonymy, or synecdoche), singular nominal forms, reduction, misinterpretation errors, amplification, and the use of uncommon words.

The analysis was carried out using a qualitative approach, with reference to established linguistic and translation theories, such as Newmark's (1988) semantic translation principles and Farahzad's (1992) classification of translation errors. The goal was to identify the types of semantic errors presented in the subtitle and to interpret their causes and impacts on the transfer of meaning from source to target language. Where applicable, the analysis was supported with examples drawn from the data, presented in side-by side format, accompanied by commentary to highlight how semantic meaning was preserved, altered, or lost in the translation process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
RESULTS

The results of this study revealed some features of semantic errors, namely *semantic changes, singular nominal forms, reduction, misinterpretation errors, amplification,* and *uncommon words.* According to the analysis from "*How Books Can Open Your Mind*" video, the findings indicate that *semantic changes* constituted 30% of the total errors, being the largest rate. Then it was followed by the same proportion of *uncommon words* (20%) and *reduction* (20%), while *amplification, singular nominal forms* and *misinterpretation errors* shared the same percentage (10%).

TABLE 1. Semantic changes

No	Time	Source Text	Target Text	Alternative Translator
1	00:00:19	*But my* **tiger mother** *said, "No".*	*Tapi ibu saya yang* **tangguh** *berkata, "Tidak".*	*Tapi ibu saya yang* **ketat** *berkata, "Tidak".*
2	00:03:51	*I also compare the same stories in different* **genre***s or similar stories from different cultures.*	*Saya juga membandingkan ceruta yang sama dengan* **aliran** *yang berbeda.*	*Saya juga membandingkan ceruta yang sama dengan* **genre** *yang berbeda.*
3	00:05:25	*Where* **passion** *comes from, where happiness comes from.*	*Darimana* **kerinduan** *untuk itu berasal, darimana kebahagiaan itu sendiri berasal.*	*Darimana* **hobi** *itu berasal, darimana kebahagiaan itu sendiri berasal.*

According to the Table 1, the translator renders the source text *"tiger mother"* into Indonesian *"tangguh"*. This term undergoes a semantic shift, leading to a somewhat unsuitable word selection. In the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI), *"tangguh"* signifies *"sukar dikalahkan; atau kuat"* (difficult to defeat; or strong). In this context, however, the speaker refers to a highly stringent mother. In the sentence number two, which discusses *"genres",* the translator renders it in Indonesian as *"aliran"*. In this context, the term *"aliran"* is inappropriate because it is not commonly used in Bahasa Indonesia. It is preferable to continue using the term *"genre"* as it is commonly employed in Indonesia when inquiring, for instance *"What genre of book do you read?"* or *"Buku genre apa yang kamu baca?"*. The third sentence, the speaker exemplifies *"passion"* and the translator renders it in Indonesian as *"kerinduan"*. Similarly, we commonly inquire about passion by asking, *"Apa hobi kamu?"* in English, *"What are your passions?"*.

Table 1 illustrates that the errors in meaning arise from the translator's lack of attention or care in selecting contextually relevant words, leading to a change in meaning. Analysis of the data in Table 1 indicates that the borrowing strategy is applicable. The local culture frequently employs certain words with specific meaning, negating the need for translation to maintain their important significance. This is especially true for situation where the target language does not have equivalents.

TABLE 2. Singular nominal forms

No.	Time	Source Text	Target Text	Alternative Translator
1	00:55:00	**The host of a radio show.** *But no adults liked the idea*	**Ke satu pembawa acara radio.** *Tapi tidak ada satu orang dewasa pun yang menyukai ide saya*	**Pembawa acara radio.** *Tapi tidak ada satu orang dewasa pun yang menyukai ide saya*

The English language often employs *"one"* as the quantity, which was highlighted by the translator in the singular nominal form. The article *"a"* does not consistently highlight quantity; instead, it signifies that the object is nonspecific. The translator typically refrains from translating the amount unless the sentence is explicit. Referring to Table 2, *"The Host of a Radio Show",* the translator renders it in Indonesian as *"Ke satu pembawa acara radio"* (*To a radio host),* which emphasizes the quantity.

TABLE 3. Reduction

No.	Time	Source Text	Target Text	Alternative Translator
1	00:02:19	*That's just not convenient for propaganda.* **Got it.**	*Itu bukanlah sesuatu yang cocok untuk propaganda.* **(not translated)**	*Itu bukanlah sesuatu yang cocok untuk propaganda.* **Paham.**

Table 3 in this analysis indicates that the speaker states *"got it"* while the translator omits the translation of *"got it"*, which can be inferred from the preceding sentence. The speaker states, *"That is simply not conductive to propaganda, and she seeks to ensure her comprehension of the words beforehand"*.

TABLE 4. Misinterpretation errors

No.	Time	Source Text	Target Text	Alternative Translator
1	00:02:55	*It offers many* **insights.**	*Banyak sekali* **pengertian** *yang saya dapatkan*	*Banyak sekali* **wawasan** *yang saya dapatkan*

A misinterpretation error refers to the choice of destination text that significantly, deviates from the source text. In Table 4, the translator renders *"insights"* into Indonesian *"pengetahuan"*. However, the word "insights" is better translated to *"wawasan"* in Indonesian. The translator misinterpreted the meaning, resulting in an erroneous translation.

TABLE 5. Amplification

No.	Time	Source Text	Target Text	Alternative Translator
1	00:02:58	*At first because this is what Chinese students grew up with it had never occurred to me.*	**Awalnya saya merasa peta ini aneh** *karena inilah peta yang dipakai oleh murid-murid di Cina.*	**"Awalnya, saya tidak pernah terpikirkan"** *karena inilah sesuatu yang dipakai oleh siswa Cina.*

Table 5 shows, *"At first because this is what Chinese students grew up with, it had never occurred to me"*, which the translator renders in Indonesian as, *"Awalnya saya merasa peta ini aneh karena inilah peta yang dipakai oleh murid-murid di Cina"*. This statement serves as an example of amplification, a technique that adds extra information not present in the source text to improve clarity and aid in reader comprehension.

TABLE 6. Uncommon words

No.	Time	Source Text	Target Text	Alternative Translator
1	00:01:35	*I* **turned** *to books*	*Saya* **berpaling** *ke buku-buku*	*Saya* **beralih** *ke buku-buku*

Uncommon words are those infrequently utilized by the local populace and may appear as atypical. In Table 6, number one was translated the phrase *"I turned to books"* into Indonesian as *"berpaling"*. Although this translation is accurate, in practice, people prefer to use *"beralih"* instead of *"berpaling"*. The term *"paling"* in the KBBI means "*memalingkan, memutarkan sesuatu ke kiri atau ke kanan; membelokkan; memutar haluan*" (to turn something to the left or right; to divert; to change direction).

DISCUSSION

Semantic changes had the highest percentage of semantic errors from the *"How Books Can Open Your Mind"* video. Semantic changes refer to the alteration in meaning that transpires throughout the translation process, wherein words or phrases undergo modifications in meaning within the context of the target language, sometimes due to cultural disparities (Akidah, 2013). According to Hellrich (2019), semantic change arises from both intralinguistic and extralinguistic development. Intralinguistic changes pertain to modifications in meaning usage, whereas extralinguistic changes stem from effects of other languages, rendering their research important for linguists and scholars alike. Similarly, Stehling (2013) observes that sematic shift can arise from various forms of alteration, including metaphorical usage, metonymy, or synecdoche. Consequently, the percentage of reduction and uncommon words is 20%, while the percentage of misinterpretation errors, amplification and singular nominal errors is 10%.

Furthermore, in terms of ***singular nominal*** feature, the translator typically refrains from translating the amount unless the sentence is explicit. According to Pauzan (2021), an indefinite article defines a word in a non-specific or generic manner. Referring to Table 2, *"The Host of a Radio Show",* the translator renders it in Indonesian as *"Ke satu pembawa acara radio"* (*To a radio host),* which emphasizes the quantity. Similarly, the *singular nominal forms* could be presumed to be similar to identify the noun phrase and it could be challenging. Voita et al. (2019) explored how context-aware neural machine translation (NMT) systems can address issues related to deixis, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion (phenomena closely tied to the accurate translation of noun phrases). Their research indicated that incorporating broader contextual information enabled NMT systems to make more informed decisions regarding articles usage and noun phrase translation, thereby reducing semantic errors. This approach is particularly beneficial in subtitle translation, where sentences often lack extensive context, making the accurate rendering of singular nominal features challenging.

Reduction entails the elimination of superfluous content, resulting in a concise and lucid target text. According to a definition by Putra (2017), reduction entails the elimination or condensation of information from the source text to the target text. Film subtitle translators must consider several technical factors in audiovisual translation. Moreover, in a study analyzing the use of reduction techniques in Indonesian subtitle of the movie *National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets,* Aisyiah (2023) found that while reduction can aid in maintaining subtitle brevity, it often impacts translation quality. Specifically, the study revealed that 43.22% of the reduced interrogative sentences were deemed less accurate, and 4.23% were inaccurate. This indicates that excessive or

inappropriate reduction can lead to semantic loss, affecting the viewers' understanding of the original message.

In terms of **misinterpretation errors**, the translator renders "insights" into Indonesian *"pengetahuan",* which is better translated to *"wawasan"* in Indonesia. The translator misinterpreted the meaning, resulting in an erroneous translation. Magfiroh and Kheryadi's (2021) study revealed that inattention is likely the cause of misinterpretations, leading to a failure to recognize the discrepancies between the source text and target text. This leads to an error in the delivery of the content. Guk Guk et al. (2025) conducted a study focusing on semantic errors in English to Indonesian translation using DeepL Translator. Their research identified that inappropriate word choices were the most prevalent semantic errors, often stemming from a lack of contextual understanding. The study emphasized that such misinterpretations could significantly alter the intended meaning of the source text. This aligns with this study where the term "insights" was inaccurately translated as "pengetahuan" instead of the more contextually appropriate "wawasan".

Additionally, Camelia and Wahyuningsih (2023) analyzed errors in the English-Indonesian subtitles of the movie *Avengers; Endgame*. Their findings revealed that 76.2% of the errors were related to accuracy, primarily due to poor word choices. The study highlighted that a lack of thorough research and understanding of the source material often leads to misinterpretations, resulting in translations that mislead viewers. This supports the point of this study regarding the necessity for translators to pay close attention to context to avoid semantic errors.

For the **amplification** feature, *"At first because this is what Chinese students grew up with, it had never occurred to me",* was translated in Indonesian as, *"Awalnya saya merasa peta ini aneh karena inilah peta yang dipakai oleh murid-murid di Cina".* This statement serves as an example of amplification, a technique that adds extra information not present in the source text to improve clarity and aid in reader comprehension. Amplification is an enhancement that aids the reader in comprehending the context. Fahrurrozi and Wicaksono (2017) contend that the inclusion of extraneous information not present in the original text is evident in the target text. Aligned with this, Rahayu (2021) analyzed the translation of the Indonesian novel *Tarian Bumi* into English (*Earth Dance*), focusing on the amplification technique. The research revealed that translators added information to bridge cultural gaps and clarify implicit meanings, ensuring that the target audience receives the same message as the source audience. This technique was particularly useful in conveying cultural nuances and grammatical differences between Indonesian and English.

Lastly, the feature of **uncommon words**, in Table 6, number one was translated from the phrase *"I turned to books"* into Indonesian *"berpaling"*. Although this translation is accurate, in practice, people prefer to use *"beralih"* instead of *"berpaling"*. Iskandar (2016) analyzed the translation of English idiomatic expressions in the film *Big Hero 6* and found that translators sometimes opted for literal translations that, while accurate, might not resonate with the target audience due to their uncommon usage. Hence, it is essential for translators to consider the naturalness in the target language to ensure that the translated products are both accurate and relatable to the audience (Trisnawati & Bahri, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

The study has identified six categories of translation errors whilst the translation techniques included reduction and amplification. Errors identified in the translation consisted of semantic changes, the use of singular nominals, misinterpretation errors, and the use of uncommon words. The findings revealed that the predominant translation error was semantic changes. The translator in the TED Talk video demonstrated a lack in understanding the context in several sentences, leading to errors and implying a lack of review of the translation results. This subtitle translation study seeks to elucidate current errors and enhance understanding of the errors that may lead to audience misreading. The study proposes the following recommendations for future translation enhancements and further study in the light of the aforementioned conclusions and implications. It is necessary to comprehensively grasp the context to ensure clear and accurate understanding for the audience, to review the translated material to mitigate the possibility of critical errors; and to have an extensive vocabulary for delivering brief, process, and lucid translations.

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