MALAY SUBTITLES OF SEXUAL REFERENCES AND PROFANE LANGUAGE OF ENGLISH FILMS

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ABSTRACT

Subtitling English films in Malaysia, especially English sexual references and profane language into Malay Subtitles, presents the subtitler with specific constraints and challenges. These are due to the taboo nature of the source language texts which are deemed inappropriate to the Malay society. This article aimed to investigate the issues involved and the procedures the subtitler adopts in dealing with such translation challenges. Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) and Koponen's (2010) model were utilised to examine the accuracy of the Malay subtitle for its corresponding English dialogue by comparing the semantic components in the source text-target text pairs of selected English language films aired on Malaysian Pay TV, Astro. The findings revealed that most of the sexual references and profane language was translated via "equivalence" procedure, while "omission" and "mistranslation" were the common errors made in the translations.

Keywords: translation, Malay subtitle, sexual references, profane language, English films

INTRODUCTION

Sexual references and profane language are considered taboo, which refers to items people avoid using in society, as believe can cause harm or is offensive (Crystal 1995), in Malaysia and in many other Asian societies. As the mention and discussion of such topics are perceived to be impolite, insensitive, offensive, indecent and inappropriate, they are not publicly discussed in the Malaysian society and its citizens often censor the language they use pertaining to taboo subjects (Allan & Burridge 2006; Okwun, Siraj, & Okwun 2012; Santaemilia 2008; Siti Nor et al. 2010; Wong, Chin, Low, & Jaafar 2008).

In the case of film translation in Malaysia, censorship is present when the subtitles produced do not accurately convey the meaning of the original dialogues especially when they contain vulgar, offensive, erotic or sexual references. Semantically accurate subtitle is important because it helps to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps by sharing the original content with viewers. It also helps the viewers, especially the deaf and the hard of hearing, to comprehend the plot of the film. In addition, it functions as one of the most powerful language learning tools for foreign language viewers-learners who can also enjoy the educational opportunities offered by subtitles (Caimi 2006). Most importantly, it helps to give an interpretive act essential to the enjoyment of the film for both the hearing impaired and non-native viewers.

Problem Statement

One of the major translation issues faced in subtitling in Malaysia is on the rendering of sexual references and profane language which have always been toned down or disregarded in the target language subtitles due to their taboo nature. This practice often resulted in the lost of the spirit of the source language expressions, rhetorical and distinctive features, and even the original meaning of the source language. When reading the subtitles, viewers often felt cheated when they realized what was said in the dialogues could not have been what was written in the subtitles since the subtitles displayed did not match the images seen or the tonal nature of the dialogues heard (Scandura 2004). Such kinds of translation are considered to be a form of abuse to the target language viewers who are deprived of the chance to enjoy the film (Ghanooni 2012). It also jeopardizes viewers' foreign language learning when they mistake the inaccurate translation for accurate meaning of the foreign language dialogues heard. Hence, it is important to provide semantically accurate subtitles for the sake of the viewers' film-watching experience. Therefore, this study was undertaken to investigate how the translation of sexual references and profane language in English language films into Malay subtitles have been conducted and to explore the types of errors made in relation to the accuracy of semantic content in the rendering of sexual references and profane language in English-Malay subtitles.

This study would make a valuable contribution to the literature by providing insight into the translation procedures commonly used in the rendering of sexual references and profane language in English language films into Malay subtitles in Malaysia. The findings of this study would be useful to the subtitling industry in the production of Malay subtitles that could satisfy and enhance the Malaysian viewers' film-watching experience.

Research Objectives And Research Questions

This study aimed to analyse the translation of sexual references and profane language in English language films into Malay subtitles, and to investigate the types of translation errors made in the English-Malay subtitles in relation to sexual references and profane language. Therefore, it proposed to seek answers to the following:
1. What are the translation procedures used in English-Malay subtitling in relation to sexual references and profane language?
2. What are the types of errors made in the translation of sexual references and profane language from English into Malay?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual references and profane language are content that always poses challenges in translation since taboo words in relation to sex, body parts, bodily functions, death and dying, should not be discussed candidly or openly (Morni, Johari, Ahmad, & Jusoff 2009) in most societies. This cultural value, which is governed by perception of religious teaching, seldom encourages discussion of sexual related topics (Siti, et al. 2010). However, since sexuality is an unavoidable element in the construction of a human being, having to translate sexuality today is, therefore, unavoidable (Santaemilia 2014). Moreover, sex permeates people's lives and their discourses, symbols and texts. For instance, taboo words referring to sexual references in expressive language are frequently used by English-Spanish bilingual college students (Pilotti, Almand, Mahamane, & Martinez 2012).

Unfortunately, the translation of sexual references and profane language is not as simple since very society has its own cultural values and beliefs. Such a situation is made much more complicated when the target culture readers are not familiar with certain culture specific items from the source because the linguistic structures from the source text (ST) might not have a readily available equivalent in the target text (TT). This cross-cultural and cross-linguistic translation challenge could be observed in Ghanooni's (2012) study, where the method of comparing the translation of sexual puns in three different target languages simultaneously has provided the readers with the insight into the similarities and differences between the norm and ideological tendency of three target language societies. However, the findings were less reliable due to the unknown sample size used which led to the conclusion that certain translation strategies were more commonly used compared to other strategies. The translator must make conscious efforts to distinguish between diverse meanings of a word and to find out which one the author has intended in order to achieve the closest meaning of the ST for the subtitles. This is where the translators should also be aware of what is permitted and tolerated in a certain society in order to preserve the policy of the films censorship in a particular country (Sedighi & Tarbrizi 2012).

The translation of passages loaded with cultural elements and sexual connotations is a difficult task. It requires not only these skills; text analysis, subject expertise, language, awareness of context, and quality control, but also the subtitler's ability to apply these skills within very rigid constraints of time and space, while adhering to specific conventions of quantity and form. Thawabteh (2012) found such difficulties arising from the translation of euphemistic and dysphemistic-loaded utterances. He faced culture-specific problems, on the one hand, and technicalities involved in subtitling, on the other. Such differences between the two languages are expected to have a deleterious effect on the flow of communication in given inter-lingual exchanges. In the Arabic language context, euphemism and dysphemism are one of the linguistic phenomena, which may pose difficulty in translation from Arabic into English. Similarly, Bosseaux (2013) examined the effect and impact translation has on performance and a character's identity in one of Spike's films in French. His short analysis has shown that translating voices, accents and register was an extremely challenging task. There is not a 'one size fits all' solution and one way of tackling is to consider aspects such as characterisation when making translation choices.

Meanwhile, Lee and Ngai (2012) hypothesized that sexually sensitive material of euphemism words are used in translating eroticism, as a function of the assumed acceptability of such material by the target readership. It revealed how the ST has been translated using different strategies in handling erotic passages in the subtitles. However, the model of translation strategies used to analyse the data and to answer the research objectives was not clearly explained in the study. However, in the norms of Chinese translators, Han (2008) argues that, it is imposed an ethical constraint due to the existence of sexual taboos which leads to them deleting or neutralising sexually explicit content.

In the 21st century, there is no apparent state censorship as thousands of books are translated every year and erotic or pornographic literature is distributed without apparent interference (Santaemilia 2008). However, the translation of sexual references and profane language is likely to be censored by pressure groups. Besides, the translators themselves are

likely to transform sexually-loaded terms into merely mechanical renderings as to make the subtitles are acceptable and neutrally viewed for the public.

In Malaysia, favourite issues for censorship are sexual morality, political orthodoxy, religion and racist considerations because discussion on sexuality in Malaysia is view as inappropriate where it is governed by perception of religious teaching, which seldom encourages discussion on sexual related topic (Siti Nor et al. 2010). Thus, people choose not to discuss sexual development in detail. What it means is that translating sex-related language is not simply a lexical matter, but rather is a pragmatic and emotive challenge to translate all these 'sensitive' words.

Couple with the above, films in Malaysia are regarded as a government controlled entity, therefore, films must function in line with the government's needs. If a film was found to be hostile towards the government's policies and aspirations, the film had to be censored or banned for public viewing. The film censorship systems and policies in Malaysia were created when the government wanted to control all forms of entertainment shown to the people. The Film Censorship Board was established to censor or ban films infringing any religious, cultural and moral values of the Malaysian society, prior to public viewing (Wan Mahmud, Chang, & Aziz 2009). This is where regulation and censorship are the tools used to control or reduce such threats. They imposed strict control over all forms of mass communication and imposed tight censorship measures such as pre-publication or editorial censorship on trailers, newsreel, posters, advertisements, technical and short comedy films, apart from feature films. The members of the Film Censorship Board are allowed to instruct individually producers of the media to cut or ban any film, a rather drastic policy which can tarnish the aesthetic value of a film.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was adopted to obtain answers to the two research questions of this study. Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model of translation procedures (see Table 1) was employed to obtain answers to the first while Koponen's (2010) error classification (see table 2) was used to answer the second.

The English STs and their corresponding Malay TTs were analysed and coded accordingly. Firstly, the ST-TT pairs were compared and coded based on the model of translation procedures proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) to determine the translation procedures used to translate the English dialogues into the Malay subtitles. Vinay and Darbelnet's model was used in this study because it is a classical model which continues to exert influence today (Munday 2008).

Table 1: Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model of translation procedures

Procedure	Description
Borrowing	Source language word is transferred directly to the target text
Calque	Source language expression is transferred to the target text by translating literally each of its elements
Literal Translation	Word for word translation where source language word is translated to its nearest target language equivalent

Transposition	One word class in source text is replaced with another in the target text without changing the meaning of the context
Modulation	The point of view of the source text is changed in the target text
Equivalence	Target text describes the situation in the source text by different stylistic and structural forms
Adaptation	Situation in the source text is changed when it is unknown in the target culture

Next, an error analysis was conducted to determine the types of errors commonly made in the translation. The accuracy of the Malay translation for its corresponding English dialogue was examined by comparing the semantic components in the ST-TT pairs to identify differences between the English texts and the Malay texts. The mismatches between the ST-TT pairs were categorised based on the error categories developed by Koponen (2010). The researcher's error categorization was adopted because it is simpler and it suits the purpose of this study in providing a general view on the translation errors made in the data examined.

According to Koponen's classification, categories that are classified as errors are omission, addition, untranslated and mistranslation. Another two categories, substitution and explicitation, are not classified as errors but were formed to account for cases where the source text concept is translated into another expression while the semantic content is accurately retained in the translation, thus making it an acceptable translation.

Table 2: Koponen's (2010) error categories

Error	**Description**
Omission	Source text concept is not present in the target text
Addition	Target text concept is not present in the source text
Untranslated	Source language word appears in the target text
Mistranslation	Target text has the wrong meaning for the source text context
Substitution	Target text concept is not a direct lexical equivalent for source text concept but can be considered a valid replacement for the context
Explicitation	Target text explicitly states information left implicit in source text without adding information

The data collected were coded by two independent coders and the coded data was compared for similarities and differences. The comparison of the two sets of coding registered a percentage of agreement of between 80-90 percent, thus, the inter-coder reliability was achieved and the data was bias-free (Trumbull 2005). In the occurrence of coding disagreement, discussion was held by the two coders to reconcile differences in their coding.

When all the data had been coded accordingly and a high level of inter-coder reliability had been achieved, descriptive analysis was done where the frequency and percentage were counted and calculated to present a detailed description on the results.

DATA COLLECTION

English language films were used in this study because these films tend to contain more profane language compared to non-English films aired on TV channels in Malaysia. Four different English language films containing Malay subtitles (see Table 3) were used in this study to ensure that the data were taken from an array of sources produced by different translation film companies or translators which would enable the generalization of the findings of this study to current practices in the translation industry.

Selection of films from which data for this study were collected was limited to those released between year 2011 and 2014 in order to accurately reflect the current norms of the Malay-speaking society and to make it possible for the findings to be generalised to the norms of the present Malay-speaking society.

The English language films used in this study were those that were aired on Astro, a Malaysian direct broadcast satellite Pay TV service provider. Astro was chosen because of the highest rating of viewership and subscribers of Pay TV in Malaysia. Based on Astro Annual Report in 2013, Astro is the largest operator in ASEAN, which has a customer base of over 3.8 million residential customers or approximately 55% penetration of Malaysian TV households (Astro Malaysia Holdings Bhd 2013). Besides that, Astro broadcasts a wide range of films of different genres compared to films broadcasted in public-access television channels in Malaysia which made Astro a better source for data collection in this study.

Only English language films classified as 18 by the Film Censorship Board of Malaysia were selected to be the sources of data as films with such classifications contain more sexual references and profane language which were relevant to this study.

Table 3: Bilingual corpus of the study

No.	Film Title	Original Air Date (in United States)	Genre	Astro Channel	Running Time (Minutes)	Translated By
1.	Louie S2 Ep1	June 2011	Comedy-Drama	726	22	I-Yuno Media Group
2.	Man Up S1 Ep4	November 2011	Sitcom	710	22	(unknown)
3.	Mixology S1 Ep3	March 2014	Sitcom	709	22	(unknown)
4.	Suits S3 Ep16	April 2014	Comedy-Drama	702	45	SDI Media

English language films aired on Astro channels in May 2014 that met the film selection criteria of this study were recorded with video recorder while the films were airing on TV. Next,

the recorded films were viewed to look for English dialogues that contain sexual references and profane language. Then, the identified English dialogues and their corresponding Malay subtitles were collected and recorded by transcribing and copying both the English dialogues and the Malay subtitles.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

112 instances were collected from the study. Table 4 shows few examples of how the data were analysed, while Table 5 shows the translation procedures used in each film. The frequency and percentage of each translation procedure used in the English-Malay translations in all the films are shown in Table 6. Apart from Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model of translation procedures, two new categories called "nil" and "unknown" were added to the translation procedures model to account for instances that did not fall into any existing categories.

Cases where sexual references or profane language existed in English dialogues but their meanings were left out in the Malay subtitles were categorised as "nil" because there was no translation for them and therefore no translation procedure was employed. The category "unknown" was formed to account for cases where Malay translations which were comprehensible and grammatically correct existed while part of their corresponding English dialogues were muted or bleeped with a beep sound and thus became inaudible to the audience. English dialogues with muted or bleeped sections were assumed to have contained either sexual references or profane language which were deemed not suitable for the audience and thus resulted in being muted or bleeped. In such cases, the English dialogues and their corresponding Malay subtitles were incomparable due to the incomplete information in the English dialogues. Therefore, it was unable to analyse how the translation into the Malay language was being done and thus the translation procedure was categorised as "unknown".

Table 4: Examples of data analysis

No.	Source Language (English)	Target Language (Malay)	Translation Procedure	Error Categories
1	So he decided to study women the way a general studies the enemy and then use that knowledge to **crush ass** on a global scale.	Jadi dia buat keputusan untuk mengkaji wanita macam seorang jeneral mengkaji musuhnya. Kemudian gunakan pengetahuan itu untuk **memikat** wanita pada skala global.	Adaptation	Mistranslation
2	Well, I **don't give a shit**.	Saya **tak peduli**.	Equivalence	-
3	And somehow Kenny **has sex**.	Apa saja cara Kenny **adakan seks**.	Literal Translation	-
4	Gentlemen, I think you underestimate my **horniness**.	Awak berdua saya rasa awak memandang rendah pada saya.	Nil	Omission
5	Don't ***mute***	Jangan **berlagak**!	Unknown	Unknown

Table 5: Translation procedures used in each film

No.	Translation Procedure	Louie		Man Up		Mixology		Suits	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Literal Translation	3	14.29	7	35.00	9	47.37	11	34.38
2.	Modulation	2	9.52	-	-	-	-	1	3.13
3.	Equivalence	14	66.67	4	20.00	7	36.84	18	56.25
4.	Adaptation	-	-	4	20.00	3	15.79	-	-
5.	Nil	2	9.52	5	25.00	-	-	2	6.25
	Total	**21**	**100**	**20**	**100**	**19**	**100**	**32**	**100**
6.	*Unknown*	*13*		*-*		*1*		*6*	
	Total	**34**		**20**		**20**		**38**	

Table 6: Frequency and percentage of translation procedures used in all films

Translation Procedure	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Literal Translation	30	32.6
Modulation	3	3.3
Equivalence	43	46.7
Adaptation	7	7.6
Nil	9	9.8
Total	**92**	**100**
Unknown	*20*	
Total	**112**	

Translation errors found in each film are shown in Table 7. Table 8 shows the frequency and percentage of each type of translation error found in the Malay subtitles in all the films. Another category named "unknown" was added to Koponen's (2010) error categories to account for instances that did not fit into any existing categories. This category was formed to account for instances in which the quality of the translations, whether the translations contained error or were error-free, was unable to be assessed due to incomparable ST-TT pairs as a result of incomplete information on the part of the source language texts. Therefore, instances which fell into this category were not deemed as having errors but were merely undeterminable.

Table 7: Translation errors found in each film

No.	Error	Louie		Man Up		Mixology		Suits	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Omission	4	80	5	50	-	-	2	100
2.	Mistranslation	1	20	5	50	4	100	-	-
3.	*Unknown*	*13*		*-*		*1*		*6*	
	Total	**5**	**100**	**10**	**100**	**4**	**100**	**2**	**100**

Table 8: Frequency and percentage of translation errors found in all films

Translation Error	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Omission	11	52.4
Mistranslation	10	47.6
Unknown	*20*	
Total	**21**	**100**

Of the 112 instances collected, only 92 instances which were comparable were analysed in terms of frequency and percentage. The most frequently used translation procedure was equivalence with 43 (46.7%) occurrences out of 92 instances, followed by literal translation which accounted for 30 (32.6%) instances. No translation procedure was used in nine (9.8%) instances in which the sexual references and profane language existed in the English dialogues were not rendered in the Malay subtitles. A total of 20 instances of muting and bleeping were found in the study, showing that about 18% (20 out of 112 instances) of taboo language broadcasted were censored by the responsible party or parties. No borrowing, calque or transposition was used in any of the English-Malay translations examined.

Of the 92 instances analysed, a total of 21 errors were made in the English-Malay translations. The most typical error was omission which accounted for 11 (52.4%) of the errors and closely followed by mistranslation which was found in 10 (47.6%) out of the total errors. In other words, about 23% of the Malay subtitles analysed contained errors that had somehow affected or changed the meaning of the original dialogues in the films, in which about 12% of the sexual references and profane language existed in the source language dialogues was not rendered in the target language subtitles. No error belonging to the category of "addition" or "untranslated" was found in the study.

Upon closer examination, there was a close relation between "nil" translation procedure and "omission" type of error. When a sexual reference or profane language was not translated, no translation procedure was adopted and thus causing part of the meaning of the original dialogue to be left out or omitted in the translation. This finding suggested that the absence of translation procedure was a direct contributor to the error of omission.

Findings also showed that the use of the adaptation procedure in the process of translation was directly associated with the error of mistranslation. Since the adaptation procedure made changes to the original meaning of the dialogues to suit the culture of the target language viewers, the translation produced thus conveyed meaning which was different from the originals. In addition, 30% of the mistranslation instances were found in translations produced via the literal procedure.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that "equivalence" and "literal translation" were two of the most prevalent translation procedures adopted among all other procedures in the rendering of sexual references and profane language into the target language. The more frequent use of equivalence procedure compared to the literal translation procedure suggested that most of the sexual-related and obscene expressions that existed in English language did not exist in the culture of Malay

language society, therefore in such cases, the STs could not be rendered literally because that would produce inaccurate and unacceptable translation (Vinay & Darbelnet 1995). Therefore, such STs underwent the equivalence procedure which produced equivalent texts that described the intended meaning in different linguistic styles.

Language that is appropriate according to situations, customs and beliefs is expected of Malaysian speakers when speaking to other people while offensive language is to be avoided at all times in order to maintain social harmony, stability and politeness (Morni et al 2009). The findings of this study showed that this kind of expectation and avoidance had extended to film broadcasting in Malaysia, which resulted in muted and bleeped sections in the dialogues of films. Such censorship, the muting and bleeping, imposed on dialogues containing taboo elements is the reason contributed to the findings of the cases of "unknown" translation procedure and "unknown" error type in this study.

In terms of errors, omission being the most common type of errors found in translation, was generally consistent with the findings of Taivalkoski-Shilov (2008) who found that most of the obscenities in the source language had been omitted in the subtitles. It was not surprised that omission occurred frequently in the translation since the mention of sexual references and use of profane language were deemed inappropriate in Malay society. While the occurrence of omission error in the subtitles is often the result of censorship imposed on subtitles by the government agencies or film distributors for political, cultural, religious or financial purposes, error of omission may also be made due to self-censorship exercised by the translators (Chen 2004; Santaemilia 2008; Taivalkoski-Shilov 2008).

Self-censorship occurs when the translators decide to omit certain elements because they view that such elements are inappropriate and they feel they need to protect the viewers. It also happens when certain taboo elements are translated differently by factoring the target readerships of these translations into the consideration of the translational norms. The translators may have adopted different assumptions about the commensurability of these taboo elements with the general ethical atmosphere within the target language community. This is supported by Lee and Ngai (2012) as they found the translators working from English into Chinese might practice self-censorship based on the assumption that erotic material presents a taboo to the Chinese-reading community, translators working in the reverse direction would not have the same assumption. Hence, it is differed how taboo subjects are conventionally expressed in each culture.

However, it is viewed that the target language subtitles in films rated as 18 should not contain the error of omission especially when the films are intended for adult viewers and broadcasted in specially subscribed channels in Pay TV, such as Astro channel 709, 710 and 726 in this study, where adult viewers have paid extra to watch and enjoy the films. This view is supported by Chen (as cited in Chen 2004) who stated that subtitles in film should faithfully reflect the tone of the film when it is geared towards an adult viewer.

Similarly, the error of mistranslation is often being made in relation to translation of sexually suggestive elements and profanities due to self-censorship on the part of translators. Besides this, mistranslation may happen when the translators misinterpret the meaning of the ST due to their inadequate knowledge of the language and the culture of the source language (Anazawa, Ishikawa, & Kiuchi 2012; Scandura 2004). This might be true for the findings of the current study, particularly in subtitles rendered through literal translation procedures which had

resulted in mistranslation, when the literally translated subtitles failed to convey the deeper or figurative meanings of the dialogues which lie beneath or within the linguistic structure of the language. Therefore, it is suggested that translators working with a particular language pairs need to have sufficient knowledge by always enhancing their language and cultural knowledge of the language pairs. Errors caused by translators' lack of knowledge could also be reduced by having language and culturally-savvy editors to review the subtitles produced.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the translation procedures commonly used in translating sexual references and profane language in 18 rated films from English language into Malay language, as well as the errors commonly made in the translation. The results of the study revealed that relationship exists between certain types of translation procedures and certain types of translation errors. By analyzing the translation of sexual references and profane language into Malay language, insights are gained into the attitudes as well as social and moral acceptability of the translators and Malay language community towards human sexual behaviours and profanities in this decade such as the indication of lower acceptance of taboo elements in subtitles with higher occurrences of "nil" translation procedure or "omission" translation error.

This study had several limitations due to the small sample size and material used. Further research with larger sample size and sample from different sources is needed to better understand the tolerance and acceptability of the translators and the target language community towards taboo language and to enable the generalization of the results. Despite the limitations, this study could serve as preliminary study that sets forth a direction for future research particularly in the area of translation accuracy of other elements into Malay language in Malaysia.

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