



Domestication and Foreignization in Comedy and Non-Comedy TED Talk English-To-Indonesian Subtitles: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

This research presented the strategy of domestication and foreignization in translating English-to-Indonesian subtitles for the comedy and non-comedy genres of TED Talks. This qualitative-comparative study explores the way genre can determine translation strategy, with a focus on the rendition of Culture-Specific Items or CSIs. Data was gathered from some of the videos of TED Talks and analyzed using Venuti's (1995) framework. The results showed that both styles manifested the use of foreignization on subtitle translation. However, each style shared different purposes. Foreignization on non-comedy talks at TED had been made to reserve meaning, thus it needed very precise terms, especially about academic and technical issues. On the other hand, foreignization on comedy shows aimed to use foreignization on matters relevant to humor, emotions, and culture so that it had to be understandable for the target audience. Apart from this, it also showcased hybrid techniques on selected phases to maintain without losing understanding. In line with this, the present study emphasized the need to consider genre in audiovisual translation and for the translators, they considered the translation strategies used based on context and audience needs.

Keywords: Domestication; Foreignization; Subtitles; TED Talk

Introduction

Subtitling is not viewed just as a process of word translation but rather as an act of meaning negotiation at the level of words and cultures. Since YouTube contains a variety of famous platforms, Ted Talks offer an interesting content include intellectual information, storytelling, and humor. Therefore, the subtitle translator needs to make decisions regarding how to express the CSI and expressions so they will resonate with the goal spectator.

Differing from other modes of translation, subtitle translation needs consideration with regards to space and time constraints. As for what needs to be translated within the subtitles, it should be rendered with sense and readability, as subtitles should be in correct sense. It requires consideration with regards to the usage of a translation strategy to preserve meaning and audience engagement as well. There are two broad strategies that exist and have commonly been made applicable within translation. As Venuti 1995 stated domestication refers to making an original work conform to the cultural demand within the targeted audience with easy understanding. While foreignization, the elements from the source culture must be maintained and exposed to the audience. Both strategies used in dealing CSI, idioms, and even humor.

The most challenging elements to be translated would be the CSIs, words, or expressions that have been linked with specific cultural expressions, as there would be hardly to find to almost perfect equivalents in the target language. Examples of these would be food, humor, idioms, historical figures, and institutions. These elements, once translated, remained meaningful and culturally appropriate.

Khudro (2023) indicated that the relationship between domestication-foreignization directly influenced the degree the audience understood with the translation, especially in the case of audiovisual translation.

Although the previous literature might have addressed the role of such methods as they relate to meaning construction within and across media and genre, drawing on Nida's theory of equivalent effect. Al-Kahtani (2023) showed that domestication applied to Arabic subtitles for English literary films, facilitated functional equivalent when it comes to cases like social titles and statements related to religion. The other example was a science-fiction comedy titled *Moon Man*, Han (2023), it found that there was an effect of domestication in increased idiomatic meaning and foreignization in traditional and culturally specific humor utterances.

The genre will be a determining factor in the translation strategy. Dong & Li (2021) found that domestication dominated in the Chinese subtitles of the sitcom *Friends* because changing idioms and humor into more readable and accessible versions helped allow the intended message to get across. The techniques used included paraphrasing, annotation, and cultural substitution to retain humor; nonetheless, some foreignization had to be retained to maintain global references. Liu & Gao (2023) also reported that the dominant strategy for the English subtitles of the Chinese film *Hi, Mom* is domestication, which enables the audiences to connect emotionally with its 1980s cultural setting, although foreignization has been preserved for names and idioms reflecting Chinese identity.

Domestication was also seen to be dominant in other contexts. Nasir et al. (2023), in the case of Urdu-English literary translations, note that substitution and omission increase readability, although foreignization remains important in retaining cultural elements such as greetings and titles. Khalaf & Rashid (2020) discovered a tendency toward domestication in the subtitling of American crime dramas into Arabic, especially by means of deletion and euphemism, given the sensitivities of Arabic culture, while limited foreignization maintained tone and intensity. On the other hand, Puspitasari (2020) found that foreignization occurred in the subtitles of *Grown Ups* and *Laskar Pelangi*, especially for place names and institutional references. Domestication took place only if the cultural equivalent was clear, while mixed strategies emerged when elements were partially familiar to the target audience.

A balanced or hybrid approach is often necessary. Wang (2023) has identified the presence of both in *Turning Red*: domestication provided clarity to both emotional and idiomatic meaning, whereas foreignization maintained cultural authenticity. Han (2023) and Zhang (2023) have confirmed similar patterns in the *Moon Man* and *Cats*, respectively: through the use of domestication in translating the emotional aspect and by foreignization in retaining stylistic and cultural nuances. Zhang (2023) has further identified that domestication increased understanding, while foreignization maintained rhythm and poetic tone. Menghan (2023), in drawing on Skopos Theory in her study of *The Green Book*, put forward that strategy choice was determined by the translator's purpose; hence, domestication enhances relatability, while foreignization ensures authenticity.

Previous subtitling studies have only focused on single genres, providing few intergenre comparisons within the same platform. TED Talks blend educational, inspirational, and humorous content and, therefore, constitute an ideal context in which to explore the shaping of translation strategies by genre. This study analyzed English-to-Indonesian subtitles of comedy and non-comedy TED Talks, focusing on how CSIs were dealt with through the strategies of domestication and foreignization. This study aimed to analyze and formulate the way genre influenced translation decision whether it was preserved or modified. The study's findings will also be significant for subtitlers and instructors because Indonesian digital content is increasingly being engaged by the international audience. Given that previous research indicated that comedy is disposed toward domestication in the service of humor and that non-comedy is inclined toward foreignization in the interest of accuracy, the present study tests these assumptions by adopting a comparative approach in order to gain more profound insight into genre-sensitive subtitling practices. These are addressed in the research with the following questions:

1. How are domestication and foreignization applied in both comedy and non-comedy TED Talk subtitles?
2. What are the differences in the application of these strategies between the two genres?

Research Methodology

The qualitative comparative research design used in this paper explored the use of domestication and foreignization procedures in the subtitle translation of TED Talk videos from English to Indonesian. Comparative method is a systematic way of comparing at least two subjects by an establishment of similarities and differences among them (Miri et al. 2019). In this research, comedy and non-comedy genres were compared as a way of comprehending the translation procedures triggered by genre characteristics, such as humor and terminology.

Data Collection Procedure

Two videos from TED Talks were selected with careful consideration for genre. It was selected for comedy genre and the non-comedy genre. Selection was based on a variety of key criteria, which included both reaching a notable number of views from audiences, thus showing wide audience interest in these talks; having embedded English and Indonesian subtitle options available in the video; and each definitively represented defining characteristics typical of its genre. For comedy, these traits included humor, cultural references, and informal expressions, while the characteristics given priority for the non-comedy genre included formal language, technical terminology, and/or motivational tone.

The data of subtitles in this study ranged from the original English subtitles as the source text, and the Indonesian subtitles as the target text. Both were accessed through the subtitle options directly available on the TED Talks YouTube channel. Whichever comes from professionally produced or volunteer-translated, no source check was done for the subtitles. However, they were chosen because these are the publicly provided translations for the general viewers. In AVT, the translator could come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds since platforms like YouTube allowed participation in subtitle creation worldwide (Adams & Diaz-Cintas, 2022).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in subtitling was devised to explore how the factors of CSI across genres would impact subtitling strategies. According to the domestication and foreignization concepts presented by Venuti (1995), this research explored how different kinds of culturally embodied content are expressed within translation as well as analyzed the way in which these specific strategies may differ within comedy and non-comedy genres. The above-mentioned goal has been achieved through several steps, which have been explained below.

1. In the preliminary stage, instances of CSI were identified within the English subtitles. These included idioms, humor, culturally specific references, proper names, and culturally embedded expressions deeply rooted in the source culture, generally untranslatable literally.
2. A classification system for each CSI ensured either domestication, foreignization, or a combination of both as translated could be identified. The present research adapted the classification system of Venuti (1995), underlining the fact that translation represents the cultural position.
3. Then the comparison between subtitling methods on the genre was carried out.
4. Lastly, there was analysis, interpretation, and conclusion of results.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

General Patterns of Translation Strategies

Clear patterns emerged in the analysis of domestication and foreignization strategies in subtitle translations of comedy and non-comedy TED Talks. The patterns were clearly related to the communicative goals, type of content, and cultural elements of each genre. Foreignization was the more dominant strategy in both non-comedy and comedy TED Talks, as observed from the two coded data tables. The dominance indicates a tendency by TED subtitle translators to retain the global and cross-cultural character of TED content. Proper nouns such as "Guantanamo," "Carnegie Mellon University,"

"Duolingo," and "Broadway" were maintained in their original forms, with little or no explanatory addition. Translators seem to assume that Indonesian audiences, being familiar with international discourse, are either able to understand or look up such names.

However, domestication appeared more in comedy genre. It helped to make idioms, metaphors, or culture-bound humor more relatable to Indonesian viewers. For example, in the non-comedy, the metaphor "making the broccoli taste like dessert" was domesticated to "membuat brokoli terasa seperti makanan penutup." In comedy subtitles, domestication appeared more in expressions requiring emotional or humorous equivalent, such as "we all got my mother's slipper" translated into "(pukulan) sandal Ibu," a culturally image of parental discipline familiar to Indonesian audiences. Figure 1 is the overall strategy distribution across genres.

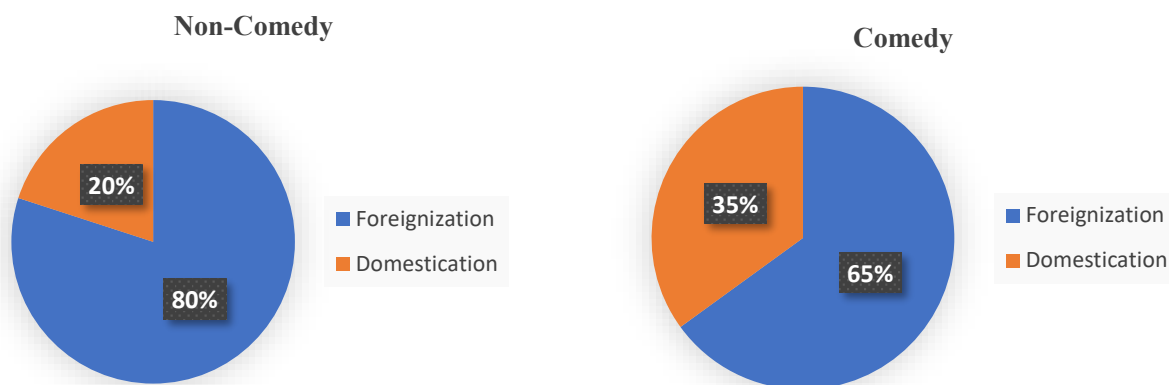


Figure 1. Distribution of Foreignization and Domestication on Non-Comedy and Comedy Genre

This quantitative difference suggested that, while both genres favored foreignization, comedy relied more heavily on domestication in order to ensure that humor, emotion, and character.

Differences Between Comedy and Non-Comedy Subtitles

There were four differences which came out from the analysis: Audience engagement, treatment of nouns and landmarks, treatment of figurative language, and genre expectations. The following section elaborates in detail how these differences emerged in translated subtitles.

Audience Engagement

A significant difference appeared in how translators approached translation to consider audience engagement. The humor-oriented talks prioritize audience connection and entertainment value, while the non-comedy talks prioritize accuracy and assumed global understanding. In comedy TED Talks, domestication was more in evidence when the humor relied upon cultural familiarity or when literal translations were likely to cause confusion. For example, in the phrase "poor Gumby mouth terrorist," the reference to "Gumby," a US clay animation character, was replaced by "Teroris mulut miring yang malang," which changed the American cartoon reference to a descriptive image that can relate to Indonesian audiences. This suggests the translator's sensitivity toward cultural accessibility: the humor remains understandable even when the intended culture of source language has shifted. In contrast, non-comedy subtitles preferred foreignization even when comprehension might be reduced slightly. Of course, this was understood in the terms "freemium model," "Duolingo," and "SNL skits," which had not been domesticated. In such a non-comedy genre, the talk was educational and informational rather than performative. In this context, the translator's role is closer to the mediator of knowledge rather than the cultural adapter.

Treatment of Nouns and Landmarks

Both styles kept foreign nouns and institutional names such as "Carnegie Mellon University", "Arizona State University," and "Broadway." However, it had different behavior across contexts. In comedy, translators sometimes added clarifications or indirect allusions, such as "Opera Sabun' General Hospital," which added "opera sabun" (soap opera) style explanations to help Indonesian audience

could identify with the context. This was an evident of hybrid strategy which inserted subtle explanation when translating in the comedy corpus. While, in non-comedy dialogue, such additions were rare. The translators might assume that such names were already known so it was left untranslated, trusting the audience's global knowledge.

Treatment of Figurative Languages

Another important observation had to do with figurative language. Both genres employed metaphorical language. However, these were handled differently by the translators. Sometimes, in a humorous text, idioms were modified or interpreted to obtain an equivalent effect. But for example, "I blew it" translated into "Saya menghancurkannya", which is a more literal form of a phrase to convey failure. Also, "Fasting from sunrise to sunset is a piece of cake" translated into "hal mudah", which conveyed no idiomatic meaning but instead conveyed meaning literally. Idioms were less often conveyed and more often translated into something more literal. Further, it demonstrated the genre's focus on clarity and understanding. The metaphorical idiom, "Make broccoli taste like dessert", carried an equal meaning as it stuck to a similar structure. It suggested that idioms have functioned as pedagogical metaphor and as a result it required less localization.

Genre Expectations

Translator's choices were based on different expectations about audience knowledge for these two genres. Non-comedy TED talks targeted at a universal and educated audience acquainted with English terms at least about technology, business, and educational fields. Thus, it left those terms as they were and untranslated, as is the case with "smartphone," "freemium model," and "meme." However, comedy genre talks had a more universal audience. Still, humor relies on common knowledge about cultures. So, domestication also served the same purpose. Likewise, metaphors, idioms, and culturally-specific behavior, like "mother's slippers", signaled that the translation of comedy depended on dynamic equivalence, argued by Nida's theory, where the translator aimed to achieve equivalent effects rather than equivalent form. Moreover, it was also noticed that they preserved names such as Shakira, Madonna, and Whoopi Goldberg to remain as it were, demonstrating there has been selected domestication.

The Presence of Hybrid Translation Strategy and Foreignization on Jokes

Through the analysis of the findings, it was found that there were hybrid forms of translation strategies. Therefore, it was evident that either foreignization or domestication can happen at the same time in a single subtitle on a document. For example, in the non-comedy subtitle "maskot burung hantu hijau... banyak meme," the translator retained "meme" (foreignization) but added "maskot burung hantu hijau" (domestication). It implied flexibility. In comedy subtitles, the inclusion of "opera sabun 'General Hospital'" signaled the paraphrased adaptation, and it verified Venuti's (1995) statement that sometimes foreignization and domestication co-existed in practical translation contexts.

The other unexpected finding that came out was foreignization in humor had been significantly employed, particularly in regard to rendering the jokes about global occurrences and famous locations. For instance, "before 9/11" or "Broadway," "New Jersey Turnpike" were not translated. It underlined that Indonesian people assumed having global understanding on major media and historical subjects. Therefore, there was not any need for localization. It also reflected an increase in global consumption of Western media.

Discussion

In the present study, the researchers wanted to explore how domestication and foreignization strategies were used in Indonesian subtitling of comedy and non-comedy TED Talks, focusing on translators' approaches to handling CSI. The comparative study of two different genres within the same media platform intended to investigate how genre influences translation choices and how cultural meaning is adapted or preserved for the Indonesian audience.

The results indicated that the dominant strategy in both styles was foreignization. Non-comedy dialogue comprises approximately 80% foreignization, with a focus on vocabulary accuracy and retention of source cultural references relating to, for example, institutions, nouns and technical terms. In comedy talk, domestication was more frequent, about 35%, especially when humor and idioms were subtitled, requiring a degree of cultural editing to facilitate audience understanding and enjoyment. This genre-based difference was considered the key finding of this research. By comparing the subtitling of two genres within the same setting, the study demonstrated how translators resort to context-sensitive and hybrid strategies, instead of strictly following one approach.

This study both supported and expanded the findings of previous research on domestication and foreignization in audiovisual translation. Indeed, earlier research has often noted that domestication consistently dominated in the field of audiovisual translation, especially in those genres that were more dependent on humor or emotional appeal. The Chinese subtitles of the sitcom *Friends* made much use of domestication to make certain aspects, like humor and idioms, more accessible to the target audience (Dong & Li, 2021). Liu & Gao (2023) have demonstrated that domestication was preferred for the translation of English subtitles of the Chinese comedy *Hi, Mom* to evoke a sense of emotional warmth and cultural atmosphere. Indeed, this study corroborated that comedy TED Talks also demonstrated higher occurrences of domestication, especially while translating idioms, jokes, and culture-bound expressions such as “mother’s slipper”. That domestication remained crucial as a strategy for maintaining humor and engagement across languages seems evident in this observation.

Given that foreignization was the overall dominant strategy, particularly in non-comedy talks, this result ran counter to studies such as Al-Kahtani (2023) and Nasir et al. (2023), in which domestication had been found to be more frequent in both literary and narrative contexts. This finding of the translators' preference for foreignization in TED Talks was in line with Puspitasari's (2020) observation in her film subtitle translation about foreignization used for place names, institutional terms, or other culture-specific references that have no natural equivalents. Similarly, this study is in concert with the translator's intention to preserve its originality when retaining terms like “Duolingo,” “Broadway,” or “freemium model,” as in Han's (2023) observation in *Moon Man*.

The coexistence of the two strategies in individual subtitles supports the previous arguments for a hybrid approach: Menghan (2023), Wang (2023), and Zhang (2023). In this study, hybrid cases such as “opera sabun ‘General Hospital’” showed that in doing so, translators combine domestic explanation additions to attain both clarity and authenticity. This agrees with the findings presented by Wang (2023) from *Turning Red*, where one could note domestication for emotional clarity and foreignization for cultural preservation. In the same way, Menghan (2023) stated that translation's objectives determined which strategy was prioritized, thus providing balanced access in comedy dialogue with accuracy in non-comedy dialogue.

Moreover, the genre-sensitive application of those strategies added a new dimension to existing studies. Different from previous studies that focused on only one genre, such as literary film (Al-Qahtani, 2023), comedy (Dong & Li, 2021), or drama (Khalaf & Rashid, 2020), this study directly compared comedy and non-comedy under the same platform and translation conditions. The results showed that genre determined the motivation for choosing a strategy. Comedy genre emphasized emotional and comic equivalence while non-comedy emphasized information. This dual focus added another layer to previous findings by providing empirical evidence that style had an effect not only on the frequency of domestication and foreignization but also on its communication function.

The last aspect was the foreignization of some global references and humor even in comedy subtitles. It opposed the earlier research done by Khalaf and Rashid (2020), where they indicated that normally, cultural sensitivity required strong dominance in Arabic subtitling. TED data showed that the translators perceived the Indonesian audience as familiar with global media contexts, reflecting increased globalization in digital audiences according to Khuddro (2023).

The findings of this study focused on the translator's responsibilities to maintain fidelity to the source while ensuring comprehensibility and cultural relativity for Indonesian audiences. It illustrated that subtitling practice in globalized media environments is dynamic and adaptive, extending earlier research by showing how translators' choices were not fixed but genre-sensitive, purpose-driven, and audience-responsive.

Conclusion and Suggestion

The present research has investigated the use of domestication and foreignization strategies in English-to-Indonesian subtitling, contrasting comedy and non-comedy TED Talks. Results showed genre as a strong influencing factor on translation choices. Foreignization dominated in non-comedy dialogues as a means of maintaining accuracy and a global tone, while comedy dialogues dominated more often in fitting humor and culture-specific expressions to the Indonesian audience. Sometimes translators combined both approaches by adding short explanations to the foreign words so that clarity is ensured without losing authenticity.

Overall, the findings have pointed out that translators need to strike a balance between fidelity and audience accessibility. Subtitles need to take into consideration the genre, purpose, and cultural background of the audience for effective communication. Further research should extend to other genres of TED Talks, such as motivational or political talks, and involve audience-based research in order to better understand how viewers perceive and respond to different subtitling strategies.

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