
RECONSTRUCTING DIRECTIVE FORCE IN *MURDER MYSTERY* INDONESIAN SUBTITLES ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

This research investigates how translation shifts reconstruct the pragmatic force of directive speech acts in Indonesian movie subtitles. Focusing on the film *Murder Mystery*, this research aims to examine (1) how translation shifts affect the pragmatic force of directives, (2) which types of shifts are most frequently associated with pragmatic change, and (3) why such pragmatic modifications tend to occur in subtitling. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, 59 directive utterances were identified and analyzed based on speech act theory and Catford's translation shift framework. The findings reveal that translation shifts systematically reshape directive force, resulting in three major pragmatic patterns: pragmatic weakening, pragmatic strengthening, and pragmatic reorientation. Pragmatic weakening emerges as the most frequent effect, indicating a tendency of Indonesian subtitles to reduce impositive force and urgency. Structure shifts are found to be the most dominant and most pragmatically consequential type, followed by unit and class shifts. The research further shows that pragmatic modification is motivated by the technical constraints of subtitling, cross-linguistic differences, socio-pragmatic adaptation, and the multimodal nature of audiovisual texts. This research contributes to pragmatic-oriented translation research by demonstrating that subtitling operates as a pragmatically transformative process rather than a purely linguistic transfer.

Keywords:

directive speech acts; pragmatic force; translation shifts; pragmatic modification; movie subtitling



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INTRODUCTION

Language in interaction does not merely convey information, but performs actions. Through utterances, speakers request, command, warn, persuade, and negotiate social relations (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976). These actions are realized as speech acts, and among them, directive speech acts occupy a central role because they are inherently action-oriented and interpersonal. Directives aim to influence the behaviour of others and therefore encode varying degrees of authority, obligation, and politeness (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). As a result, directives are not only linguistic structures but pragmatic actions whose force depends on contextual, social, and interactional factors.

In audiovisual discourse such as film, directive speech acts function as crucial devices for constructing character relations, power dynamics, and narrative tension. Film dialogue systematically exploits pragmatic resources to represent interpersonal interaction, making directives key elements in shaping how characters are perceived and how conflicts unfold

(Culpeper, 2001; Dynel, 2011). When films are subtitled into another language, these pragmatic actions must be rearticulated within severe technical and semiotic constraints, including time, space, and mode shift from spoken to written language (Gottlieb, 1992; Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007).

Subtitling is therefore not a neutral transfer of meaning but a site of potential pragmatic transformation. Previous studies in audiovisual translation have shown that subtitles frequently involve condensation, reformulation, and omission, which may alter interpersonal meanings and pragmatic cues (Hatim & Mason, 1997; Chaume, 2012; House, 2015). While propositional content may be preserved, the pragmatic force of utterances—particularly of directives—may be weakened, strengthened, or reoriented. However, such changes are often discussed in general terms, without systematic attention to how specific translation shifts correlate with modifications of illocutionary force.

At the same time, research on directive speech acts has largely focused on classification, politeness strategies, or power relations within monolingual contexts (Searle, 1976; Levinson, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Yule, 1996). Although studies on pragmatic translation acknowledge the vulnerability of illocutionary meaning, relatively few have integrated speech act theory with translation shift analysis to explain how micro-level translation choices produce macro-level changes in pragmatic force. Moreover, studies on Indonesian movie subtitles have predominantly emphasized accuracy and acceptability, leaving the pragmatic consequences of translation shifts underexplored.

Responding to this gap, the present research examines how translation shifts in Indonesian movie subtitles affect the pragmatic force of directive speech acts. Rather than treating shifts merely as formal deviations, this research conceptualizes them as mechanisms of illocutionary modification. By analyzing directive utterances and their subtitled equivalents, this research aims to identify patterns of pragmatic weakening, strengthening, and reorientation associated with particular types of translation shifts.

Accordingly, this research addresses the following research questions:

1. How do translation shifts in Indonesian movie subtitles affect the pragmatic force of directive speech acts?
2. What types of translation shifts are most frequently associated with changes in directive force?
3. Why do such pragmatic modifications tend to occur in the context of movie subtitling?

This research is expected to contribute theoretically by bridging speech act theory and translation shift analysis within a pragmatic framework. Empirically, it provides data-based evidence of how translation practices reshape communicative action in audiovisual discourse. Practically, it offers insights for subtitle translators regarding the pragmatic implications of translation choices, particularly in rendering directive speech acts.

Directive Speech Acts in Pragmatics

Speech act theory originates from Austin's (1962) proposition that uttering a sentence is not merely producing sounds or conveying information, but performing actions. Austin distinguishes between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, arguing that the core of communicative action lies in the illocutionary dimension, namely what a speaker does in saying something. Building on this view, Searle (1976) systematizes speech acts into several categories based on their illocutionary point, including representatives, directives, commissive, expressive, and declaratives.

Among these categories, directive speech acts are defined as attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something (Searle, 1976; Yule, 1996). Directives thus include acts such as commanding, ordering, requesting, advising, and suggesting. Searle (1976) emphasizes that directives are characterized by their world-to-word direction of fit, in which the speaker seeks to make the world conform to the words through the hearer's actions. This orientation makes directives inherently action-oriented and interactional.

Levinson (1983) argues that directives are among the most socially delicate speech acts because they involve varying degrees of imposition on the hearer. For this reason, directives are closely associated with power relations, social distance, and institutional roles. Commands and orders typically presuppose a degree of authority or entitlement, whereas requests and suggestions allow greater optionality for the hearer (Yule, 1996). This distinction reflects that directive speech acts operate along a continuum of strength rather than as a homogeneous category.

From a pragmatic perspective, directives are frequently treated as face-threatening acts, as they potentially infringe upon the hearer's negative face, or desire for autonomy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Speakers therefore often employ politeness strategies, indirectness, and mitigation to manage the interpersonal consequences of directives. The form a directive takes—imperative, interrogative, or declarative—together with its use of modality and politeness markers, contributes to how the directive is interpreted and negotiated in interaction (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996).

In discourse contexts such as film dialogue, directive speech acts function not only as pragmatic moves but also as narrative devices that construct character relationships, authority structures, and emotional tension. As argued by Culpeper (2001) and Dynel (2011), film language systematically exploits pragmatic phenomena, including directives, to represent social interaction and interpersonal conflict. Consequently, the translation of directive speech acts in films involves more than transferring propositional content; it requires rearticulating actions embedded in social and pragmatic conventions.

Within this theoretical framework, directive speech acts are understood in this research as pragmatically sensitive actions whose interpretation depends on illocutionary intent, social relations, and linguistic realization. This conceptualization provides the foundation for examining how directives, when translated into subtitles, may undergo changes not only in form but also in pragmatic force.

Pragmatic Force and Illocutionary Modification

Illocutionary force refers to the type of action a speaker performs in producing an utterance, such as commanding, requesting, warning, or suggesting (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976). While the propositional content of an utterance conveys what is talked about, illocutionary force determines what is done through speaking. Levinson (1983) emphasizes that illocutionary force is not an abstract label but a pragmatically grounded function that arises from the interaction between linguistic form, speaker intention, and contextual assumptions.

In the case of directive speech acts, illocutionary force is particularly salient because directives vary in the degree of authority, obligation, and imposition they encode. As noted by Searle (1976) and Yule (1996), directives form a continuum ranging from strong, non-negotiable acts such as commands and orders to weaker, more negotiable acts such

as requests and suggestions. This variation reflects different social relations and expectations regarding compliance. Consequently, the pragmatic force of a directive cannot be reduced to its grammatical form alone.

Levinson (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that the pragmatic force of directives is closely connected to face considerations. Because directives potentially threaten the hearer's negative face, speakers commonly employ mitigation strategies to modulate force, including indirectness, modal verbs, politeness markers, and hedging expressions. The presence or absence of such devices significantly influences whether an utterance is interpreted as imposing, neutral, or deferential. For example, an imperative structure without mitigation typically realizes a stronger force than an interrogative or declarative form with politeness markers.

From a pragmatic standpoint, changes in linguistic realization may lead to illocutionary modification, that is, shifts in the pragmatic force of an utterance. Blum-Kulka (1987) and House (2015) observe that pragmatic meaning is particularly vulnerable in cross-linguistic communication, as small formal changes may produce disproportionate pragmatic effects. Illocutionary modification may take the form of pragmatic weakening, when a directive becomes less imposing or authoritative; pragmatic strengthening, when force is intensified; or pragmatic reorientation, when an utterance performs a different type of directive act.

Within translation studies, such phenomena are often discussed in terms of pragmatic equivalence and pragmatic loss or gain (Baker, 2018; Hatim & Mason, 1997). A translation may preserve semantic content while altering illocutionary force, politeness value, or interpersonal positioning. As House (2015) notes, pragmatic equivalence is achieved not through formal similarity, but through the maintenance of communicative function in context. When this equivalence is not maintained, pragmatic shifts emerge.

In this research, pragmatic force is understood as a gradient and interactionally grounded phenomenon that may be reshaped through translation. Illocutionary modification is operationalized as observable changes in the degree or type of directive force between source utterances and their subtitles. This conceptualization enables the analysis to move beyond identifying directive types toward examining how translation practices reconfigure the pragmatic actions performed in film dialogue.

Translation Shifts and Pragmatic Meaning

The concept of translation shift was first systematically formulated by Catford (1965) to describe departures from formal correspondence between a source language and a target language. Catford distinguishes several types of shifts, including structure shifts, class shifts, unit shifts, and intra-system shifts. These shifts reflect the fact that languages organize meaning through different grammatical and lexical systems, making formal equivalence unattainable in many cases. From this perspective, translation shifts are not anomalies but inherent features of the translation process.

Subsequent developments in translation studies have expanded the notion of shifts beyond structural change. Baker (2018) emphasizes that translation involves continuous decision-making in which translators negotiate between linguistic form, meaning, and communicative purpose. Shifts therefore often reflect strategic choices aimed at achieving communicative effectiveness rather than formal similarity. This view aligns

with functional and discourse-oriented approaches, which treat translation as an act of communication embedded in social and cultural contexts.

From a discourse and pragmatic perspective, translation shifts may have significant consequences for pragmatic meaning. Hatim and Mason (1997) argue that translation choices can reshape interpersonal relations, evaluative stance, and illocutionary intent. Similarly, House (2015) maintains that pragmatic meaning is particularly vulnerable in translation, as subtle changes in modality, interpersonal markers, or clause structure may alter how an utterance functions communicatively. As a result, a translation may preserve propositional meaning while modifying pragmatic force.

In the case of directive speech acts, translation shifts can affect pragmatic meaning in several ways. Structural shifts, such as changes in sentence mood or clause type, may reposition an utterance along the continuum of directive force. Lexical and class shifts may involve the addition or omission of politeness markers, modal verbs, or mitigating expressions, thereby weakening or strengthening a directive. Unit shifts and intra-system shifts may condense or redistribute pragmatic cues across linguistic units, potentially leading to pragmatic loss or pragmatic gain.

Within this theoretical framework, translation shifts are conceptualized in this research as potential triggers of illocutionary modification. Rather than being treated solely as formal transformations, shifts are examined for their pragmatic consequences, specifically their impact on the force and interpersonal orientation of directive speech acts. This perspective enables the analysis to connect micro-level translation choices with macro-level changes in communicative action.

Subtitling as a Site of Pragmatic Transformation

Audiovisual translation differs fundamentally from written text translation because meaning is constructed through the interaction of verbal language, images, sound, and timing. Among various modes of audiovisual translation, subtitling is widely recognized as one of the most constrained forms (Gottlieb, 1992; Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007). Subtitles must fit into limited screen space, remain on screen for a restricted duration, and maintain readability while synchronizing with spoken dialogue. These technical and semiotic constraints make condensation, reformulation, and selective omission unavoidable features of subtitling practice.

Gottlieb (1992) characterizes subtitling as a process of diagonal translation, involving a shift from spoken to written mode as well as from one language to another. This process typically requires reduction of the source text, as not all spoken elements can be transferred into subtitles. Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007) further note that subtitles routinely apply strategies such as simplification, paraphrase, and deletion in order to accommodate spatial and temporal limitations. While these strategies facilitate comprehension, they also create conditions under which pragmatic cues may be weakened, neutralized, or reconfigured.

From a pragmatic perspective, subtitling is a particularly sensitive site of meaning transformation because pragmatic force is often encoded in elements that are vulnerable to reduction, such as discourse markers, politeness expressions, modal verbs, and prosodic emphasis (Hatim & Mason, 1997; House, 2015). When such elements are omitted or reformulated, the interpersonal dimension of utterances may change even if the

propositional content is retained. As Chaume (2012) argues, audiovisual translation frequently involves a reorganization of pragmatic meaning, since subtitles cannot fully reproduce the multimodal and interactional richness of spoken dialogue.

In the case of directive speech acts, these constraints are especially consequential. Directives often rely on subtle linguistic markers to signal degrees of authority, urgency, or politeness. The reduction or substitution of these markers in subtitles may shift an utterance from a strong command to a milder request, from an urgent order to a neutral suggestion, or from a face-threatening act to a pragmatically softened directive. Thus, subtitling practices do not merely transmit directives across languages, but actively reshape how they function pragmatically in the target context.

Within this framework, subtitling is conceptualized in this research as a site of pragmatic transformation, where translation shifts interact with technical constraints and subtitling norms to produce systematic changes in illocutionary force. This perspective provides the theoretical basis for examining why pragmatic weakening, strengthening, or modification of directives frequently occurs in Indonesian movie subtitles.

Related Studies and Research Gap

Previous studies have extensively examined directive speech acts within pragmatic and discourse frameworks. Research in this area has focused on the classification of directives, their realization strategies, and their interpersonal functions across different contexts (Searle, 1976; Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). More recent studies have applied speech act theory to media discourse, including film dialogue, demonstrating that directives play a crucial role in constructing power relations, character positioning, and narrative dynamics (Culpeper, 2001; Dynel, 2011).

Within translation studies, a growing body of research has explored the translation of speech acts, particularly the extent to which pragmatic meaning is preserved across languages. Blum-Kulka (1987) shows that translations may systematically shift levels of directness and politeness, resulting in pragmatic loss or pragmatic gain. Similarly, House (2015) emphasizes that pragmatic equivalence is often more difficult to achieve than semantic equivalence, especially when interpersonal meanings are encoded implicitly.

Several studies have specifically investigated the translation of directives in audiovisual contexts. Research on film and television subtitling indicates that subtitles frequently involve reduction, reformulation, and neutralization of pragmatic markers, which may affect the illocutionary force of utterances (Gottlieb, 1992; Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007; Chaume, 2012). Empirical studies in this area report tendencies toward pragmatic simplification, politeness levelling, and shifts in interpersonal orientation when spoken directives are rendered into subtitles.

However, much of the existing research tends to approach directive speech acts from either a classificatory pragmatic perspective or a technical audiovisual translation perspective. Studies often focus on identifying types of directives, translation strategies, or formal shifts, while fewer studies systematically examine how specific translation shifts correlate with changes in pragmatic force. Moreover, research on Indonesian subtitles has predominantly emphasized accuracy, readability, and acceptability, with relatively limited attention to how translation shifts reshape illocutionary force and interpersonal meaning.

Therefore, a gap remains in research that integrates speech act theory, pragmatic force, and translation shift analysis within the specific context of Indonesian movie subtitling. This research addresses this gap by examining how translation shifts in Indonesian subtitles of a film affect the pragmatic force of directive speech acts. By linking micro-level translation shifts with macro-level pragmatic consequences, this research aims to contribute to a more interactionally grounded understanding of pragmatic transformation in audiovisual translation.

METHOD

Research Design

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, as it aims to examine pragmatic phenomena and their transformation through translation rather than to test hypotheses statistically. Qualitative design is appropriate because the object of analysis consists of utterances embedded in interactional and audiovisual contexts, where meaning is shaped by discourse, social relations, and communicative intent (Creswell, 2013). The research focuses on identifying translation shifts and interpreting their impact on the pragmatic force of directive speech acts in Indonesian movie subtitles.

Data Source

The data were taken from the film *Murder Mystery* and its official Indonesian subtitles. The film was selected because it contains a high density of directive speech acts occurring across diverse interactional contexts, including commands, requests, and suggestions. The primary data consist of English utterances containing directive speech acts and their corresponding Indonesian subtitle renderings. Both verbal dialogue and subtitle texts served as the corpus of analysis, while visual and situational contexts were consulted to support pragmatic interpretation.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through several stages. First, the film was repeatedly watched to gain contextual familiarity. Second, all utterances potentially realizing directive speech acts were identified and transcribed. Third, the English utterances were aligned with their Indonesian subtitle equivalents. Finally, utterances that met the criteria of directive speech acts were selected as data. A total of 59 directive utterances were identified and compiled into a data set for analysis.

Analytical Framework

The analysis integrates three theoretical components. First, directive speech acts were identified based on speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976; Yule, 1996). Second, the pragmatic force of each directive was interpreted by considering linguistic form, contextual features, and interpersonal relations (Levinson, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Third, translation shifts were categorized using Catford's (1965) typology, including structure, class, unit, and intra-system shifts. The relationship between translation shifts and changes in pragmatic force was then examined to determine patterns of illocutionary modification.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis followed an interactive qualitative model. Each directive utterance was first analyzed in the source text to determine its pragmatic force. The corresponding subtitle was then examined to identify translation shifts and to assess whether the directive force

was maintained, weakened, strengthened, or reoriented. Comparisons between source and target utterances were supported by contextual interpretation from the film scenes. The results were subsequently grouped into patterns linking types of shifts with types of pragmatic modification.

Trustworthiness

To enhance analytical rigor, theoretical triangulation was applied by drawing on multiple frameworks from pragmatics and translation studies. Contextual validation was conducted by interpreting utterances in relation to visual cues, character relations, and situational dynamics in the film. Analytical consistency was maintained through systematic coding of directive types, shift categories, and pragmatic effects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the empirical results of the research. The data consist of 59 directive utterances identified in the movie *Murder Mystery* and their Indonesian subtitle translations. The results are organized into three parts: the distribution of directive speech acts, the distribution of translation shifts, and the pragmatic impact of translation shifts.

Distribution of Directive Speech Acts

From the 59 data analyzed, four types of directive speech acts were identified based on Yule's (2006) classification: commands, requests, orders, and suggestions.

Table 4.1 Distribution of Directive Speech Acts

NO	TYPE OF DIRECTIVE SPEECH ACT	FREQUENCY
1	Command	34
2	Request	11
3	Order	5
4	Suggestion	9
	Total	59

Table 4.1 shows that commands are the most frequently occurring type of directive speech act, followed by requests, suggestions, and orders.

Distribution of Translation Shifts

All directive utterances were found to involve translation shifts. The shifts were classified based on Catford's (1965) framework into level shift and category shifts, consisting of structure shift, class shift, unit shift, and intra-system shift.

Table 4.2 Distribution of Translation Shifts

NO	TYPE OF TRANSLATION SHIFT	FREQUENCY
1	Level shift	1
2	Structure shift	37
3	Class shift	7
4	Unit shift	12
5	Intra-system shift	2
	Total	59

Table 4.2 indicates that structure shifts dominate the data, followed by unit shifts, class shifts, intra-system shifts, and level shifts.

Pragmatic Impact of Translation Shifts

The analysis further shows that translation shifts affect the pragmatic realization of directive speech acts. The pragmatic impacts were categorized into pragmatic weakening, pragmatic strengthening, and pragmatic reorientation.

Table 4.3 Pragmatic Impact of Translation Shifts on Directive Speech Acts

NO	TYPE OF PRAGMATIC IMPACT	FREQUENCY
1	Pragmatic weakening	28
2	Pragmatic strengthening	14
3	Pragmatic reorientation	17
Total		59

As shown in Table 4.3, pragmatic weakening is the most frequent impact, followed by pragmatic reorientation and pragmatic strengthening.

Discussion

The Effect of Translation Shifts on the Pragmatic Force of Directive Speech Acts

This section discusses how translation shifts influence the pragmatic force of directive speech acts. The discussion is grounded in representative data taken from the 59 directive utterances analyzed.

Pragmatic Weakening

Pragmatic weakening is the most frequent effect observed in the data. It occurs when the directive force of the source utterance is reduced in the subtitle, particularly in terms of obligation, urgency, or authority.

Example 1

SL: *You know, you just have to tell him.*

TL: *Beri tahu saja.*

(Structure shift)

In the source utterance, the modal expression *have to* explicitly encodes obligation, while *you know* functions as an interpersonal framing device. In the target subtitle, these elements are omitted, leaving a short imperative clause. This reduction weakens the degree of obligation and removes interpersonal engagement, resulting in diminished directive force.

Example 2

SL: *Would you just please, please shh?*

TL: *Bisa tolong...*

(Unit shift)

The source text contains repeated politeness and urgency markers (*would you, please, please*), signaling both mitigation and emotional intensity. The subtitle fails to fully reproduce these features, producing a pragmatically weaker directive.

These examples illustrate that pragmatic weakening in the subtitles is commonly realized through the omission of modal markers, politeness strategies, and intensifiers, leading to less forceful directives.

Pragmatic Strengthening

Pragmatic strengthening is identified when the Indonesian subtitle intensifies the directive force of the original utterance.

Example 3

SL: *Let's stop removing and reinserting the murder weapon into the victim's chest.*

TL: *Jangan mencabut dan menancapkan senjata pembunuhan.*

(Structure shift)

The source utterance is framed as an inclusive suggestion (*let's stop*), positioning the speaker as part of the action. The subtitle, however, employs the prohibitive form *jangan*, transforming the utterance into a direct command. This structural shift increases authority and urgency, thereby strengthening the pragmatic force.

Example 4

SL: *Cavendish, you move, I'll blow your head off!*

TL: *Cavendish, bergerak, kutembak kepalamu.*

(Structure shift)

Here, the conditional structure in the source language is condensed into a direct threat. The subtitle presents the utterance in a more immediate and commanding form, reinforcing the coercive force of the directive.

These data demonstrate that pragmatic strengthening often arises from shifts that replace mitigated or inclusive constructions with direct imperatives or prohibitions.

Pragmatic Reorientation

Pragmatic reorientation occurs when translation shifts alter the functional orientation of the directive, changing how the utterance operates pragmatically.

Example 5

SL: *Play it cool.*

TL: *Tak apa, tenang.*

(Unit shift)

In the source text, the utterance functions as a command directing behavior. In the subtitle, it is rendered as an expressive reassurance rather than an instruction. This shift changes the communicative action from directing to comforting, indicating pragmatic reorientation.

Example 6

SL: *We'll do the yacht, okay?*

TL: *Kita naik yacht saja, ya?*

(Class shift)

The source utterance is declarative with directive implicature, whereas the subtitle explicitly encodes suggestion. The directive force is reconfigured from an implicit proposal to an overt suggestion.

These examples show that pragmatic reorientation does not merely adjust the degree of force but reconstructs the illocutionary function of the utterance.

Summary

The presentation of data confirms that translation shifts affect directive speech acts in three principal ways: reducing force, intensifying force, and reorienting communicative function. This empirical evidence supports the view that subtitling is a pragmatically transformative process rather than a purely linguistic one.

Translation Shifts Most Frequently Associated with Changes in Directive Force

This section examines which types of translation shifts are most frequently associated with changes in directive force. Drawing on the 59 data, the findings indicate that not all shifts contribute equally to pragmatic modification. Among the five types identified, structure shifts are the most dominant and the most pragmatically consequential, followed by unit shifts and class shifts. In contrast, level shifts and intra-system shifts show more limited pragmatic impact.

Structure Shifts and Pragmatic Modification

Structure shifts account for 37 of the 59 data, making them the most dominant shift type. These shifts primarily involve changes in sentence mood, clause structure, or syntactic organization, all of which are central to how directive force is encoded.

Example 7

SL: *Let's stop removing and reinserting the murder weapon into the victim's chest.*

TL: *Jangan mencabut dan menancapkan senjata pembunuhan.*

The structure shift from an inclusive suggestion (*let's stop*) to a prohibitive imperative (*jangan*) directly alters the interpersonal orientation of the utterance, transforming a cooperative directive into an authoritative command. This demonstrates how structure shifts frequently trigger pragmatic strengthening.

Example 8

SL: *You know, you just have to tell him.*

TL: *Beri tahu saja.*

Here, the restructuring of the clause removes modal obligation and interpersonal framing, resulting in pragmatic weakening. These examples show that structure shifts are closely linked to both the intensification and reduction of directive force, depending on how syntactic elements are reorganized.

Unit Shifts and Condensation of Directive Force

Unit shifts, which occur in 12 data, are commonly associated with the condensation or expansion of utterances. In subtitling, this often involves compressing multi-clause directives into shorter forms.

Example 9

SL: *Hang on. Hang on.*

TL: *Tunggu.*

The shift from two clauses to a single imperative compresses the utterance and removes repetition. While the propositional meaning is preserved, the loss of repetition reduces emotional intensity, leading to pragmatic weakening.

Example 10

SL: *Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait!*

TL: *Tunggu!*

The extreme repetition in the source utterance signals urgency and emotional escalation. Its elimination in the subtitle illustrates how unit shifts frequently correlate with reduced expressive and directive force.

These data suggest that unit shifts are often motivated by spatial and temporal constraints of subtitles, resulting in pragmatic condensation.

Class Shifts and Functional Reorientation

Class shifts, identified in seven data, often involve changes in grammatical category, such as verbs rendered as nouns or imperatives reformulated into different lexical classes. These shifts are particularly associated with pragmatic reorientation.

Example 11

SL: *Play it cool.*

TL: *Tak apa, tenang.*

Here, a verbal command is rendered as an expressive construction. This class shift contributes to a reorientation from directive to expressive function.

Example 12

SL: *Get an ambulance.*

TL: *Panggil ambulans.*

Although the utterance remains directive, the lexical class change restructures how the command is realized and aligns it with Indonesian conventional forms, sometimes modifying perceived urgency or authority.

These findings indicate that class shifts frequently operate at the interface between grammatical change and pragmatic function.

Level Shifts and Intra-system Shifts

Level shifts and intra-system shifts are least frequent. While they reflect important grammatical adaptation processes, they are less consistently associated with major pragmatic modification. Their effects tend to be limited to formal adjustment rather than illocutionary restructuring.

Summary

Overall, the data confirm that structure shifts are the primary drivers of pragmatic change in directive speech acts, as they directly reshape sentence mood and interpersonal grammar. Unit shifts often contribute to pragmatic weakening through condensation, while class shifts are closely linked to pragmatic reorientation. This distribution highlights the central role of syntactic restructuring in the pragmatic transformation of directives in movie subtitles.

Reasons for Pragmatic Modification in Movie Subtitling

This section addresses the third research question: Why do pragmatic modifications tend to occur in the context of movie subtitling? The findings suggest that pragmatic changes in Indonesian subtitles are not random but are shaped by technical, linguistic, and socio-pragmatic constraints inherent in audiovisual translation.

Technical Constraints of Subtitling

One major factor driving pragmatic modification is the technical constraint of subtitling. Subtitles are restricted by spatial and temporal limitations, requiring utterances to be condensed without exceeding reading speed norms. As a result, force-carrying elements such as repetitions, modal expressions, discourse markers, and interpersonal framing devices are frequently omitted.

This tendency is evident in data involving unit shifts, such as (*“Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait!”* → *“Tunggu!”*), where repetition signaling urgency is eliminated. While propositional meaning is preserved, pragmatic intensity is reduced. This confirms

Gottlieb's (1992) observation that subtitling prioritizes brevity and readability, often at the expense of pragmatic richness.

Linguistic and Structural Differences Between English and Indonesian

Another reason for pragmatic modification lies in systemic differences between English and Indonesian. English directives often rely on modal verbs, interrogative forms, and hedging devices to encode politeness and indirectness, whereas Indonesian frequently employs direct imperatives to achieve communicative efficiency.

Structure shifts such as “*Let's stop...*” → “*Jangan...*” reflect the need to reorganize interpersonal grammar to fit Indonesian conventional patterns. These shifts inevitably affect how directive force is realized, supporting Catford's (1965) view that structural non-correspondence between languages necessitates re-patterning that may trigger pragmatic change.

Socio-pragmatic and Cultural Adaptation

Pragmatic modification is also motivated by socio-pragmatic considerations. Subtitles are designed for a broad audience and must align with target-language norms of naturalness, politeness, and emotional acceptability. Translators may soften or intensify directives to ensure that interactions sound plausible and culturally appropriate.

The frequent occurrence of pragmatic weakening suggests a tendency to reduce face-threatening force (Brown & Levinson, 1987), making directives sound less confrontational. Conversely, pragmatic strengthening is often observed in high-tension scenes, where subtitles reinforce authority and urgency to preserve dramatic impact.

Audiovisual Synchronization and Multimodality

In audiovisual contexts, subtitles function alongside images, gestures, facial expressions, and intonation. Translators may rely on visual cues to convey emotional or interpersonal meaning, allowing verbal subtitles to be simplified. This multimodal environment permits pragmatic information to be redistributed across semiotic channels.

Thus, what appears as pragmatic loss at the verbal level may be compensated visually or prosodically, leading translators to prioritize semantic clarity over pragmatic detail (Chaume, 2012).

Summary

Pragmatic modification in Indonesian movie subtitles arises from the interaction of technical constraints, cross-linguistic differences, socio-pragmatic adaptation, and multimodal synchronization. These factors collectively explain why translation shifts frequently result in changes to the pragmatic force of directive speech acts.

CONCLUSION

This research investigated the impact of translation shifts on the pragmatic force of directive speech acts in the Indonesian subtitles of the movie *Murder Mystery*. Drawing on 59 directive utterances, the research examined how pragmatic force is affected, which types of translation shifts are most closely associated with such changes, and why pragmatic modification tends to occur in subtitling contexts.

The findings demonstrate that translation shifts systematically affect the pragmatic realization of directives. Three major patterns were identified: pragmatic weakening,

pragmatic strengthening, and pragmatic reorientation. Among these, pragmatic weakening emerged as the most frequent, indicating a strong tendency for Indonesian subtitles to reduce impositive force, urgency, and authoritative tone. Pragmatic strengthening, though less frequent, plays an important role in reinforcing dramatic tension, while pragmatic reorientation shows that translation may reconstruct the communicative function of directives rather than merely adjusting their degree of force.

Furthermore, the research reveals that structure shifts are the most dominant and most pragmatically consequential type of translation shift. Changes in sentence mood and syntactic organization are particularly influential in reshaping directive force, while unit shifts commonly contribute to pragmatic condensation, and class shifts are closely linked to functional reorientation.

Finally, pragmatic modifications are shown to be motivated by the technical constraints of subtitling, cross-linguistic differences between English and Indonesian, socio-pragmatic adaptation, and the multimodal nature of audiovisual texts. Together, these factors explain why subtitles frequently reconstruct directive force rather than reproduce it.

Overall, the research confirms that movie subtitling is a pragmatically transformative process, in which translation shifts actively participate in redefining interpersonal meaning.

Implications

Theoretically, this research contributes to pragmatic-oriented translation research by demonstrating that translation shifts operate not only at the formal level but also at the illocutionary level. The findings support the view that pragmatic force should be treated as a central unit of analysis in audiovisual translation studies.

Methodologically, this research illustrates the value of integrating speech act theory and translation shift analysis to examine pragmatic change. This integrated framework allows researchers to trace how micro-linguistic shifts produce macro-pragmatic effects.

Practically, the results have implications for subtitlers and translation training. Awareness of how structural and unit shifts influence directive force can help translators make more informed decisions when balancing technical constraints with pragmatic fidelity. Training programs may benefit from incorporating pragmatic sensitivity into audiovisual translation curricula.

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