

**TONING DOWN OR ADAPTATION?  
A STUDY OF ENGLISH – INDONESIAN TRANSLATION  
ON AN ONLINE STREAMING PLATFORM**

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**Abstract**

**Keywords:**  
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swearing*

The study of translation remains an exciting field for language and linguistics experts. Its process involves many factors to consider. For example, the translation process for films' subtitles must consider the broadcasting regulations. Furthermore, the translation process will be more complicated if it involves a cultural-specific concept such as swearing. Theoretically, adaptation is used to translate a cultural-specific concept, and since swearing is one, adaptation should be applied. However, this method might not be ideal for translating swearing in films. This article aims at describing the translation strategy of swearing in films on an online streaming platform. This study was descriptive-qualitative research with a recording technique. Twenty data on English-Indonesian swearing were collected from two American films on an online streaming platform in Indonesia. The results show that eight data used a toning down strategy to acceptable words/expressions, seven were adapted, 4 data were omitted, and one used an unrelated word. Apparently, the toning down strategy remains the preferable strategy in the translation process of swearing in films.

**Kata Kunci:**  
*penurunan',  
adaptasi,  
penerjemahan,  
Inggris-  
Indonesia,  
platform daring,  
makian*

**Abstrak**

Studi penerjemahan tetap menjadi bidang yang menarik untuk dikaji bagi para ahli bahasa dan linguistik. Proses penerjemahan melibatkan banyak faktor untuk dipertimbangkan. Sebagai contoh, proses penerjemahan takarir film harus mempertimbangkan regulasi siaran. Lebih jauh lagi, jika takarir tersebut melibatkan unsur konsep budaya seperti makian, maka proses penerjemahannya akan menjadi lebih rumit. Secara teori, adaptasi digunakan untuk menerjemahkan konsep budaya seperti makian. Akan tetapi, metode ini mungkin tidak ideal untuk digunakan pada penerjemahan makian di takarir film. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan strategi penerjemahan makia dalam film pada platform daring. Studi ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif-deskriptif dengan teknik merekam. Dua puluh data dari makian Inggris-Indonesia dikumpulkan dari dua film

Amerika pada platform nonton daring di Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa delapan data menggunakan strategi ‘penurunan’ menjadi kata yang lebih berterima dalam bahasa Indonesia, tujuh data diadaptasi, empat data dihilangkan, dan satu data menggunakan kata yang tidak ada hubungannya sama sekali. Rupanya, strategi ‘penurunan’ tetapi menjadi strategi pilihan untuk penerjemahan makian dalam film.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The study of translation has intrigued many scholars, mainly from linguistics and cultural study perspectives. Translation means transferring a message (Newmark, 1988; Fawcett, 1997; Benjamin, 2000; Levý, 2011). This transferring message refers to the message from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). To transfer this message, Newmark (1988) proposes eight translation methods: word-for-word, literal, faithful, semantic, adaptation, idiomatic, and communicative. Each method has its characteristics and function. For example, adaptation is a translation method mainly used to translate cultural-related texts, such as poetry, drama, and so on (Newmark, 1988). One of the most apparent cultural-related texts observed today is the translation of swearing or cursing.

Swearing or cursing is considered a negative phenomenon. After all, it is a harmful expression, and its use relates to a speaker's emotional state (Jay, 2000; Wijana, 2004; Leigh & Lepine, 2005; Dobao, 2006; Fägersten (2007); Valdeón, 2015; Briechle & Eppler, 2019). Every language in the world has this concept of swearing. Words considered swearing must be offensive in certain situations or contexts and should be prohibited or restricted by social or religious norms (Jay, 2000; Briechle & Eppler, 2019). In English, such words mostly come from sexual slangs, scatological terms, animal names, racial slurs, and even religious terms or blasphemy, such as cunt, bitch, fuck, shit, pig, nigger, and many more (Jay, 2000; Allan & Burrige, 2006; Briechle & Eppler, 2019). Meanwhile in *Bahasa Indonesia*, swear words or *makian* belong to several groups, namely situation (*celaka, astaga, gila*), animals (*anjing, babi, buaya, bandot, monyet, kunyuk*),

spirits (*setan, iblis*), things (*sompret, tai, dasar gombal*), body parts (*puki mak, cuki mak, hidung belang*), kinship (*kakekmu, nenekmu*), activities (*diamput, diancuk*), and profession (*maling, sundal, bajingan, copet*) (Wijana, 2004). Many of these words seem to be ordinary ones, and yet their meanings are pretty complicated. Understanding the meanings of swear words is not that easy. Understanding them takes years of experience (McMannis, 1987) entirely. Therefore, non-native speakers may not fully understand the meanings because swearing is a cultural-specific concept.

Many experts on language and linguistics believe that swearing or cursing is a cultural phenomenon (McMannis, 1987; Jay, 2000; Leigh & Lepine, 2005; Hughes, 2006; Dobao, 2006; Sapolsky *et al.*, 2008; Briechle & Eppler, 2019). What is cultural-specific about swearing is that it conveys specific information about the language used by which swearing is used. This information may indicate that swearing cannot be fully understood by non-native speakers or speakers outside the speech community that uses swearing (McMannis, 1987). The information also relates to the fact that swear words have their hierarchy on the level of offensiveness (Sapolsky *et al.*, 2008). Thus, English swearing will never be understood fully, regarding its meaning and level of offensiveness, by non-native speakers of English, such as us Indonesian. This 'cultural information conveyed in the swearing will hinder the translation process.

As stated above, translation refers to transferring the messages contained in the SL. The messages must be transferred as closely as possible to the TL so that the non-native of SL can completely understand the message delivered by the SL (Benjamin, 2000). For a familiar concept, it will be an easy task. However, it will be more complicated for a cultural concept such as swearing. The translation of swearing from one language to another is quite complex. In addition to transferring the messages, its translation must involve the cultural-specific information conveyed in each swear word. Newmark (1988) proposes an adaptation method suitable for translating cultural aspects or information to accommodate this process. It means that in the translation process of swearing, besides the meaning of the swear words, the cultural-specific information, the

level of offensiveness, must also be translated. It is an ideal concept in theory, but it must be applied more thoroughly in practice. This translation practice can be observed in the translation of films' subtitles.

On its own, the translation of swearing is not easy because it must also involve the translation of cultural information. This task becomes even more complicated when translating swearing in films' subtitles because it involves the broadcasting regulation of appropriate language. Theoretically, since swearing is a cultural-specific concept, it must be translated by applying the adaptation method (Newmark, 1998). However, in practice, this procedure cannot be applied. Many studies on the translation process of swearing on films' subtitles have revealed that swearing is toned down or even deleted to comply with the broadcasting regulation (Bucaria, 2009; Briechle & Eppler, 2019). In Indonesia, the present writer conducted studies on the matter and perceived similar results: the swearing translation on films' subtitles was toned down into acceptable expressions and even deleted (ellipsis) (Nugraha, 2016; 2017). Another research on a similar topic was studied by Suradi (2018). He found out that swearing was toned down and altered into an acceptable word from the perspective of Indonesian audiences. Apparently, the adaptation method cannot be implemented in swearing translation in films' subtitles and novels. Jayanti *et al.* (2019) reveal that only one adaptation method is used to translate swearing in a whole novel.

From the previous studies in Indonesia (Nugraha, 2016; 2017; Suradi, 2018; Jayanti *et al.*, 2019), the translation of swearing does not use the adaptation method. Instead, it uses acceptable strategies by toning down the level of offensiveness of swearing and even deletion or ellipsis in translating swearing in film's subtitles and novel. The data of the previous studies came from films on tv, movie theatre, and novel. Another question is raised. What about films from an online streaming platform? Which is more preferable between the toning down strategy or adaptation in the translation process of swearing in movies on an online streaming platform in Indonesia? This article presents data and the analysis of swearing translation on an online streaming platform.

## **METHOD**

This article used the descriptive-qualitative method with a recording technique. A qualitative method was used to present data in their natural setting and analyze it based on what was present (Creswell, 2014). The research data were recorded from one of the most popular online streaming platforms, Netflix. The present writer chose two films from the menu ‘*Baru dan Populer*’ on Netflix. The data collection was in November 2022. The present writer watched the films, namely ‘Escape Room: Tournament of Champions’ and ‘Senior Year’ with Indonesian subtitle. During watching the films, the present writer recorded the dialogues containing swearing and wrote the Indonesian-translated version. Twenty data of English-Indonesian swearing translations from two American films were collected. Two dictionaries were used to describe the meanings of English swearing: McGraw-Hill’s Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions by Spears (2006) and Dictionary of American Slang by Kipfer & Chapman (2007). Meanwhile, to reveal Indonesian swearing, the present writer used only *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Daring* and Wijana (2004) because, up to this day, there are no Indonesian slang and swearing dictionaries available.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Twenty data on swearing translation were collected from two American films. Five data were collected from a film titled ‘Escape Room: Tournament of Champions’, and 15 data came from a film of ‘Senior Year’. Furthermore, the data are presented with the time (in hours, minutes, and seconds) when the swearing occurred.

### **ENGLISH-INDONESIAN TRANSLATION**

The 5 data below were collected from Escape Room: Tournament of Champions film.

(1) Shit! (09:22)

*Sial.*

Datum (1) contains the swear word 'shit'. According to Spears (2006: 535), this word means "*a general expression of disgust*," while Kipfer & Chapman (2007: 1669) explain that this word is "*an exclamation of disbelief, disgust, disappointment, and emphasis*". The word 'shit' in datum (1) was used to curse or swear the situation the speaker was experiencing. The word 'shit' is translated to 'sial' in Indonesian. Based on *KBBI Daring* and Wijana (2004), the word 'sial' is used to describe the unfortunate situation. Therefore the translation process in datum (1) has similar meanings in English and Indonesian (adaptation).

(2) Asshole! (12:09)

*Bodoh.*

Datum (2) presents the swear word 'asshole'. Spears (2006: 39) states that this word meaning of "*a worthless and annoying person*," and Kipfer & Chapman (2007: 53) define it as "*a despised person*". The context in datum (2) was also suitable because the word was used to refer to someone (in the film). The word 'asshole' is translated to 'bodoh' in Indonesian. Wijana (2004) describes the word 'bodoh' as a swear word used in a situation referring to stupidity. *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Daring* also states that this word refers to someone who has difficulty understanding or perceiving knowledge. From its meaning, it is clear that the word 'bodoh' does not equal the 'asshole'. In the translation process of the word, the word 'asshole' was toned down to an acceptable word, 'bodoh' in Indonesian.

(3) Holy shit! (14:16)

*Astaga.*

The swear word on datum (3) is 'holy shit'. Spears (2006), unfortunately, does not explain the such word. He only states that the word 'holy' is used as an exclamation. Kipfer & Chapman (2007: 983), on the other hand, suggest that the word 'holy shit' is "*an exclamation of surprise, wonder, dismay, admiration, etc.*" From the meaning and context in datum (3), the word 'holy shit' was used as an exclamation towards the situation the speaker was experiencing. The word 'holy shit' is translated to 'astaga' in Indonesian. Wijaya (2004) classifies 'astaga' as an Indonesian swear word for the situation. Meanwhile, the *KBBI Daring* does

not state any specific meaning of the word 'astaga'. It only writes that 'astaga' is a word in a conversation similar to 'astaghfirullah'. Even though the word 'astaga' is used to swear situation, similar to 'holy shit', its meaning seems unequal. Thus, the word

'holy shit' was toned down to an acceptable word, 'astaga' in Indonesian. Please note that 'holy shit' contains the word 'shit' (feces), a derogatory term.

(4) Hope you enjoyed that, assholes! (21:27)

*Kuharap kau menikmatinya!*

Datum (4) contains the word 'asshole'. Such a word is the same as datum (1). Even though it is a swear word, the translator omitted it in the translated version. The word 'asshole' is not translated into Indonesian. This strategy (Omission/Ellipsis) is quite common in the translation process of English swearing to Indonesian (Nugraha, 2017; Suradi, 2018).

(5) I hate these sons of bitches! (35:10)

*Aku benci mereka.*

Datum (5) shows the swear word 'sons of bitches'. Spears (2006) and Kipfer & Chapman (2007) agree that the word 'bitch' is used to refer to an unpleasant or irritating woman and is considered rude and derogatory. Unfortunately, such a word is not translated into Indonesian. Although such a strategy is expected, the message in the SL is not delivered. Thus, the result of the translation is a lack of information.

Data 6 to 20 were collected from a film entitled 'Senior Year'. It is a film available and accessible on Netflix in Indonesia.

(6) What.....the slut! (10:26)

*Dasar sial!*

Datum (6) presents the word 'slut'. Spears (2006: 265) defines it as "a woman of low morals", while Kipfer & Chapman (2007: 1734) states that 'slut' refers to "a sexually promiscuous woman". Of these two meanings, the word 'slut' is a swear word used to refer to a woman. Meanwhile, in Indonesian, instead of translating to an equivalent word (a derogatory word for woman), the word 'sial' is used to

describe the word 'slut'. Therefore, the word 'slut' was toned down into 'sial' as an acceptable word in Indonesian.

(7) All right, sluts! (12:47)

*Baiklah. Semuanya dengar.*

Datum (7) also presents the word 'slut', the same as datum (6). Of its meaning, 'slut' is a swear word, but it is omitted in the translation process into Indonesian. Therefore, some information conveyed by the word 'slut' in the SL is not transferred to the TL.

(8) All right, bitches! (13.24)

*Baik, teman-teman.*

The swear word 'bitch' is presented in datum (8). This word is considered rude and derogatory (see datum (5)). In the translated version, the word 'bitches' is represented by 'teman-teman'. The context in datum (8) supports the result of the translation. The speaker used the word 'bitches' to refer to her female friends from the same group. Thus, such a word was toned down in its translation into Indonesia.

(9) All right, places, skanks! (13.53)

*Baiklah, ke posisi kalian.*

Datum (9) contains the word 'skanks' According to Spears (2006:547), this word 'skank' means "an ugly young woman", while Kipfer & Chapman (2007: 1708) state that the word 'skank' refers to "an unattractive woman' a malodorous woman". It is such a derogatory term for a woman. However, in Indonesian, such a word is translated into 'kalian', a pronoun that is not derogatory. It is the same strategy as datum (8) that during the translation process, it was toned down.

(10) Oh, crap! (17:10)

*Sadar.*

In datum (10), there is the word 'crap'. Spears (2006) explains the word 'crap', meaning feces or, in conversation, lies or nonsense. Meanwhile, Kipfer & Chapman (2007) put this word in the same meaning as 'shit'. It is used as a swear word for a particular situation (see datum (1)). In the Indonesian version, the word



'crap' is represented by '*sadar*'. It is not an Indonesian swear word at all. Thus, in the translation process, the word 'crap' is replaced by a non-swear word completely unrelated.

(11) Bulldog, fuck yeah! (58:44)

*Bulldog, ya.*

Datum (11) presents the swear word 'fuck'. Spears (2006) includes this word as an exclamation with a taboo meaning. A similar definition is applied as well by Kipfer & Chapman (2007). They state that the word 'fuck' is an exclamation of anger, dismay, and disgust, and even in specific contexts, 'fuck' is considered the strongest swear word. However, the word is omitted in the Indonesian translated version, resulting in missing some information conveyed in the SL.

(12) Bitch, turn your ugly face around and watch the movie. (1:07:24)

*Jalang, putar wajahmu dan tonton filmnya.*

Datum (12) contains the word 'bitch'. This word, as described by Spears (2006) and Kipfer & Chapman (2007), refers to a derogatory woman. In Indonesian, it is translated into the word '*jalang*'. Wijjana (2004) includes a word as the swearing of profession used to refer to a woman, while the *KBBI Daring* also explains that the word '*jalang*' is used to call an immoral woman. Such a word in Indonesian is considered rude and derogatory. Of these meanings, it can be concluded that the translation method used was adaptation.

(13) Skank face! (1:15:10)

*Muka jalang.*

In datum (13), the word 'skank' is present. Such a word is a derogatory term used to refer to an ugly and unattractive woman (Spears, 2006; Kipfer & Chapman, 2007). In Indonesian, it is translated into the word 'jalang', a derogatory term for a woman (Wijjana, 2004; *KBBI Daring*). Thus, the translation method used was adaptation.

(14) Slut bag! (1:15:15)

*Wanita jalang.*

Datum (14) presents the word 'slut'. This word is previously used in datums (6) and (7), referring to a derogatory woman. It is a rude word for a woman (Spears, 2006; Kipfer & Chapman, 2007). In the Indonesian translated version, the word 'jalang' is used. As Wijana (2004) and *KKBI Daring* propose, this word is a derogatory term for a woman. Therefore, it is an adaptation from the SL to TL.

(15) Possum pussy! (1:15:19)

*Gedebok pisang.*

Datum (15) is quite interesting. The swear word used is 'pussy'. It is a rude and derogatory term for female genitalia (Spears, 2006; Kipfer & Chapman, 2007). Meanwhile, the word possum is a kind of small animal in English. From the context of the conversation in the datum (15), 'possum pussy' is a sexual term to refer to a rigid woman during sexual activities. In the Indonesian translated version, the translator used '*gedebok pisang*'. In Indonesian, they are just ordinary words meaning 'banana trunk'. It is interesting that the present writer experienced the same term in Sundanese. In Sundanese, the term is '*gebog cauk*' (*gedebok pisang*/banana trunk). The present writer once experienced such a term in a sexual joke in Sundanese to refer to a rigid woman during sexual activity. Does this mean the translator has a similar background to the present writer? Nevertheless, this is some adaptation.

(16) Rumpel-slut-skin! (1:15:20)

*Murahan.*

The swear word in datum (16) is 'slut'. It is used as an infix of an altered word, 'Rumpelstiltskin'. Rumpelstiltskin is a German fairy tale describing an evil character. The word 'slut' in English is a rude and derogatory term for a woman. In the Indonesian translated version, the word '*murahan*' is used. This word seems to be from '*Wanita murahan*', a rude term used for an immoral woman similar to '*jalang*' in some contexts. Thus, this is an adaptation method.

(17) Jizz collector! (1:15:20)

*Binal.*

Datum (17) presents the word 'jizz'. The word 'jizz' in English means semen, a bodily fluid produced by men (Spears, 2006; Kipfer & Chapman, 2007). Of this

meaning, 'jizz collector' can be defined as a woman who is highly active in sexual intercourse with multiple men. In Indonesian, the word 'binal' is used. *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Daring* explains the meaning of 'binal' as the same as 'wild' in animals. In specific conversational contexts in Indonesian, this word is often used as a rude and derogatory term for an immoral woman. Thus, this translation process is also included in the adaptation.

(18) Fuck it! Fuck it! (1:28:40)

*Masa bodoh.*

The word 'fuck' is present in the datum (18). This word is a swear word in English. Spears (2006) and Kipfer & Chapman (2007) agree that this word is taboo and used to express disgust, dismay, and disappointment. In the context above, it is used to refer to a disappointing situation. In Indonesian, it is translated into 'masa bodoh'; according to Wijana (2004) and KBBI Daring, such a word is a rude term for an unpleasant situation. In some contexts, it is an adaptation because, both in SL and TL, the words refer to a similar situation. However, the word 'fuck' is considered very rude and taboo and one of the strongest swear words in English (Hughes, 2006). Meanwhile, in Indonesian, the word 'bodoh' seems to be as not a powerful swear word. Thus, the translation process was toned down.

(19) It's the president, bitch! (1:28:43)

*Ini presiden, sial.*

Again, the word 'bitch' is used as a swear word (datum 19). The previous explanations by Spears (2006) and Kipfer & Chapman (2007) state that the word 'bitch' is a rude and derogatory term for a woman. However, in Indonesia, the word 'sial' is used. As described before, the word 'sial' is used as a swear word for the situation. Furthermore, the word 'bitch' is considered rude, taboo, and powerful in English swearing (Hughes, 2006). Meanwhile, Indonesia's word 'sial' is not that powerful (Nugraha, 2013). Thus this sort of translation was toned down.

(20) You know what? Fuck you, Steve Aoki. (1:32:24)

*Kau tahu? Enyahlah kau, Steve Aoki.*

Datum (20) contains the swear word 'fuck you'. Hughes (2006) considers this swearing a powerful one in English. Powerful swearing means it is taboo that the use of it is limited to certain contexts and situations. Spears (2006: 240) states that 'fuck you' is "a very insulting curse", while Kipfer & Chapman (2007: 716) explain that it is "an exclamation of very strong defiance and contempt". However, in Indonesian, this strong and powerful swearing is translated into 'enyahlah Kau'. Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Daring proposes 'enyah' as similar to the word 'go' in English with the additional meaning of unpleasant feeling. Therefore, it is some swearing in Indonesia. Even though both are swearing, the translation is different. Thus the translation process was toned down.

## **CONCLUSION**

The translation process is a complicated procedure. Its process involves many factors. The translation process for films' subtitles must also consider the broadcasting regulation applied. Theoretically, the adaptation method translates a cultural-specific concept such as swearing. However, by considering specific regulations, several strategies are implemented. Of the 20 data taken from two American films on an online streaming platform, it is revealed that eight of them still used the toning-down to acceptable words or expressions strategy as many previous studies. Seven of the data applied the adaptation method as theoretically suggested; four were omitted, resulting in missing some SL information in TL. One showed an unrelated word as the result of the translation process. It can be concluded that the toning down strategy remains the primary strategy selected by translators to translate a cultural-specific concept such as swearing. Such a strategy may be chosen to consider the Indonesian audiences who still apply strict norms in daily life.

This study only shows 20 data on the English-Indonesian translation of swearing. It does not mean that there are only 20 data available—many data are recorded during the data collection. For example, there are more than 5 data on the word 'shit'. However, these data show the same result in its translation process (using the word '*sial*' in Indonesia). Therefore, the 20 data above were selected

carefully by considering the translation process results. Furthermore, this study does not elaborate more on the broadcasting regulation because the regulation on online streaming platforms in Indonesia is unclear, making the present writer face difficulty in finding such regulations.

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