



## Cultural Consideration in Pretty Woman Subtitling

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### Abstract

Subtitling is an activity which includes some factors to consider. This paper shows which translation puts culture into consideration and which one does not. The Indonesian subtitle taken from a film entitled 'Pretty Woman' was looked at and analysed to find out what the translator did to make the subtitle polite from the Indonesian culture. The finding showed that the translator translated the swearing words with the equivalence, some were not translated to keep the acceptability in the Indonesian culture, and the impoliteness occurred when the translator just translated the address terms in the similar way with the source text. It can be concluded that a film translator should be able to produce subtitle which is not only linguistically proper, but also culturally polite to be accepted by the target community. The statement is in line with Bell's idea (1991), that a translator should have grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences.

**Key words:** culture, politeness, society, subtitle

### 1. Introduction

Subtitling may be defined as a translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen (Diaz Cintas & Remael, 2007:8). They also state that there are space and line limits in subtitling. It should take up two lines, and no more than 39 characters per line which is shown no longer than 6 seconds. Gottlieb (1997) says that subtitling is a process of translating the dialogues of a film into the target language. It is preferable due to the fact that although from the producer's point of view it is a promising activity in terms of financial point of view, it is also more economical and easy to produce. Although it is financially beneficial, the more important thing than that is to keep the authenticity of the film. Subtitling is considered better compared to dubbing because it is more authentic, it can keep the foreignness (Gottlieb, 1997). Apart from the facts mentioned above, the use of subtitle prevent the film from being funny. It will be funny to see that American people speak Indonesian language with unmatched lips movement. The language does not suit the physical appearance of the person speaking it. There is also an idea saying that subtitling has the economic value, cheaper, the viewers can hear the original sound, less inference between the voice and what is said in the film, and subtitling provides the opportunity for the viewers to learn both the source and the target languages (Carrol, 2005). The idea implies that subtitling can be used as an education media. Carrol (2005) also says that subtitling does not make any changes in the film, instead it enriches the already available product.

Knowing that subtitling is financially promising, there are a lot of people try to do the job. Some are successful but there are also quite many who are not. One of the reasons of the failure is due to the fact that the subtitlers do not put culture into consideration. Subtitling must follow some of the rules mentioned by Carroll and Ivarsson (1998) which among others, are (1) saying that translation quality must be high with due consideration of all idiomatic and cultural nuances, (2) the language register must be appropriate and correspond to locution, and (3) the language should be grammatically correct since subtitles serve as the model for literacy. It has been stated through the title that culture must be considered to produce proper subtitle. However, before talking about the finding, it is necessary to present several definition about culture to provide sufficient information of what the coverage of culture is. Kramsch (1998) says that language reflects the cultural reality, Keesing (1974) says that culture is the system of behaviour that relates people with environment while Hudson (1980) says that culture is knowledge that is learned from other people, both by direct instruction and by observing behaviour. The three definitions of culture above has not changed for more than a hundred years since they are in line with the definition of culture stated by an anthropologist, Edward B. Tylor (1871) uploaded from [http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture\\_1.htm](http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture_1.htm) on March 24, 2014. He says that culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. From the definitions of culture mentioned above it can be concluded that culture is a certain behaviour, both language and attitude that enable people to be accepted in a particular society. How to use language properly can be shown through the subtitle of a film which include culture into consideration.

In relation to the culture consideration in subtitling the film "Pretty Woman", of which subtitler is Mr. Rakie, the following discussion will talk about the examples of the culturally bound subtitle and which are not.

### 2. Summary of "Pretty Woman"

This film was famous in 1990 and the fame was caused by the actors who were famous for their good-looking and the plots of the story which were romantic and touchy but amusing. The main actors of this film are Edward Lewis (Richard Gere) who was a very rich, ruthless businessman and Vivian Ward (Julia Robert) who was at first a streetwalker. Edward went to Los Angeles on his business to buy a company which he intended to tear into pieces and sell those pieces separately. By chance Edward met Vivian and took her to his hotel room. Since Edward needed friend during his stay, he asked Vivian to stay with him for a week and paid her a huge some of money. Edward treated Vivian very nicely eventhough here and there Vivian behaved improperly. A week actually was not long but that period of time brought love to their hearts. His love to Vivian was actually successful to change him from ruthless businessman into a

kind businessman. At the end, the film shows that both Edward and Vivian were about to go into separate ways, Edward would go back to New York and Vivian wanted to continue her study using the money given by Edward. However at the last moment Edward went to her house, bringing flower and acting as if he was a prince who would like to save the princess. This is what actually Vivian dreamt of. Finally, their love, unconditioned love, brought them together.

### 3. Discussion

The discussion will be divided into (1) the discussion about the subtitle which considers culture, and (2) the subtitle which does not consider culture. However, before starting the discussion, it must be once again stressed that to be accepted in a particular society, people must behave accordingly meaning that their behaviour including language behaviour, must not be offensive to the people of that particular society.

#### 3.1 Subtitle With Culture Consideration

The followings are the examples of subtitle with meaning adjustment to suit the Indonesian culture. The examples are mostly in the form of words because wrong translation of words can damage the politeness, and thus, can make the audience of the film unhappy.

##### 1. I am going to find a pimp = *Aku akan mencari mucikari.*

Sentence (1) was said by Kate to Vivian when they thought that they did not get enough customers that night. Kate thought by having a pimp, the pimp would find customers for her. The word *mucikari* is a more polite word compared to *germo*, and the word *mucikari* is used to make the word softer and accepted in Indonesian culture. Prostitution in Indonesian culture is not considered as an honourable occupation, but still for that kind of work, the Indonesian provide polite word.

##### 2. Holly shit! = *Astaga!*

Sentence (2) was an exclamation and it was said by Vivian when Edward took her to enter the Beverly Wilshire Hotel which was very luxurious. The phrase "holy shit" is swearing phrase but in this context, the phrase was used to express surprise. Vivian was surprised to see that the hotel was big and luxurious. Here, Vivian felt amazed with the hotel and the translator translate it into "astaga" of which function is to show amazement in Indonesian language. Actually "holly shit" has closer equivalence in Indonesian language, that is "busyet". That is also the swearing word but since the Indonesian do not like swearing words to be openly expressed, the subtitler used "astaga".

##### 3. That's bullshit. = *Itu bohong.*

Kate said sentence (3) to Vivian when Vivian told her on the phone that she would get paid for 3000 dollars in a week. Actually "bullshit" has the equivalence of "omong kosong" but this is considered rude, moreover "omong kosong" was not supposed to be used to someone she liked. Vivian was her best friend, so the word "bohong" which actually means "to lie" is more proper.

This is similar to the case of Kate saying "Bullshit" which is translated into *bohong* instead of *omong kosong*. It was said by Kate when Vivian told her that Edward would pay her \$3000 for six days. Kate did not believe it so that she said "bullshit" which is actually a swearing word which is used for showing intimacy if it is seen from the context.

##### 4. You don't know shit Sherlock = *Kau tahu apa Sherlock?*

Sentence (4) was said by Phillip, Edward's lawyer, to one of his staf when the staf said that the contract of the owner of the company (Morse) which would be bought by Edward, with the army, will raise the stock and this can disturb the plan of buying the company. "Shit" actually means "feces" and the Indonesian word for it is "*tahi*". If there is no culture consideration, sentence (4) is translated into *Kau tidak tahu tahi, Sherlock*. The word *tahi* is very rude and offensive for the Indonesian, so that to keep the mood of anger, the sentence structure is modified and the word "shit" is omitted.

##### 5. He is not quite a bastard everybody says he is = *Dia tidak sejahat yang dikatakan orang.*

Sentence (5) was said by Mr Morse about Edward's father concerning the idea of purchasing and selling companies which are in financial trouble. The word 'bastard' has a very bad meaning in Indonesian language, meaning a child of no marriage. In Indonesia culture, a child who has no father, or a child as the result of adultery, is sometimes treated differently eventhough it is not his/her fault. Thus in Indonesian, being a bastard is not convenience. Indonesian culture appreciate marriage very much since all religions teach that sexual intercourse can only be legally done after marriage. Thus to say that someone a bastard is very offensive. For that reason, "bastard" is translated into "jahat" which actually means "evil" eventhough a bastard is not necessarily evil.

##### 6. Ashhole = *Brengsek*

Word (6) is a swearing word and it was said by Vivian who was angry with Edward who had revealed that she was a streetwalker to Phillip. Actually 'ashhole' has the equivalence in Indonesian language, that is 'bangsat'. Ashhole is a part of body which should not be exposed in anyway. This part of body is considered to be dirty in Indonesian culture. Since it is a dirty swearing word, the equivalence should be the equivalence of the same level of dirtiness. However if the closest equivalence is used, the subtitle will not be considered polite and it will cause inconvenience for the audience. To be properly put into the subtitle which is read by many people, the word *bangsat* is not proper, too rude for the Indonesian culture. Based on this consideration, the translator used the softer word "*brengsek*".

##### 7. I'm sorry I got in your stupid car. = *Aku menyesal masuk ke mobilmu.*

Vivian said sentence (7) to Edward in her anger knowing that he told Phillip about who she was. She regretted the time when she got in into Edward's car that initiated their acquaintance. In Indonesian customs, the phrase "stupid car" which refers to a car causing problem is never used. The word "stupid" which means "bodoh" in Indonesian language cannot collocate with car, thus, instead of saying *mobil bodoh* (mobil = car, bodoh = stupid) the Indonesian would say *mobil sialan* (sialan = damn) which is less rude. The translator does not translate the word 'stupid' into 'sialan' to reduce the rudeness of the sentence. The sense of anger is reduced by the intention of being more acceptable in Indonesian culture.

#### 8. I almost pee in my pants. = *Aku hampir buang air kecil di celana.*

The sentence (8) was said by Vivian to an old lady who asked her opinion about the opera. The phrase 'buang air kecil' is used instead of 'kencing' since the first is more proper in Indonesian culture, in the sense that it is more polite especially when it is said to an older person. In Indonesian culture, younger people are taught to respect the older.

#### 9. Cinde-fucking-rella = Cinderella

Kate said sentence (9) to Vivian when they had a conversation in which Kate considered Vivian as a lucky girl who had a sudden change, from a poor girl to rich one. They tried to look for a name that reflected that similar situation and Kate picked the name Cinde-fucking-rella which actually referred to Cinderella. The 'word 'fucking' was not translated since it is not proper in Indonesian culture to play with someone's name that way since name is given through ritual ceremony. Moreover, the word that was put in between was not a good one. It was a good choice for the subtitler to ignore that swearing word.

#### 10. Will somebody tell me what is fucking going on here? = *Adakah yang dapat menjelaskan apa yang terjadi?*

Sentence (10) was said by Phillip, Edward's lawyer. He was very angry knowing that Edward cancelled his intention to buy Morse's company, instead Edward helped Morse. He was the one who really wanted Edward to buy Morse's company since it would bring much benefit for him. The word 'fucking' was not translated since in Indonesian culture, people do not swear in business meeting since it can damage the good perception of the businessman. However, this omission will result in the reduction of mood of anger that Phillip wanted to show.

Similar thing happens in this following sentences. **Where the fuckin' do you wanna go? = *Kau mau kemana?*** That was Kate's question to Vivian when Vivian asked Kate to go out. The 'fuckin' was not translated, since it is too rude to be translated into Indonesian. However, this omission does not damage the mood since the swearing word which is supposed to be said when someone is angry, is said by Kate to Vivian when she was not angry. She was simply asking.

Another example of omitting improper word for subtitle is **Can somebody tell me what the fuck is going on here? = *Apa yang sebenarnya terjadi?*** Phillip said it angrily knowing that Edward changed his mind to buy Morse's company. "what the fuck" is not translated since those words will never ever uttered in a business meeting, no matter how angry the participants are. It is too rude for the Indonesian culture. However, the subtitle cannot carry the level of mood of anger as it should be.

#### 11. Oh Jesus = *Keterlaluhan*

Sentence (11) was said by a police asking a question to an old lady taking picture whom he thought to be a reporter. Actually she was a tourist from Orlando. Since taking a picture of a dead body is considered to be improper than he said "keterlaluhan" which means "too much". In Indonesian custom taking picture of a dead man on the street for a kind of souvenir is considered improper and there is no one in Indonesia, uses the phrase "Oh Jesus" for something unrelated to church activities.

#### 12. She was with him last night = *Semalam dia bersama Mr. Lewis.*

Dennis the elevator attendance said sentence (12) to Barnard Thompson, his manager, that Vivian was with him (Mr. Lewis) last night. Him was translated into Mr. Lewis because he was an honorable guest there. Pronoun "him" was translated into "Mr. Lewis" since in Indonesian culture, it is impolite to address the one with higher social status by using pronomina *dia* (him). Just for information, Indonesian language does not differentiate male and female pronouns, so that *dia* can be used for both the third person male and female. Actually, there is an honourable address term for the third person singular, that is *beliau*. However the subtitler chose the more specific referent, that is "Mr. Lewis".

#### 13. Edward, what the hell was wrong with you this week? = *Edward, ada apa denganmu minggu ini?*

Sentence (13) was said by Phillip to Edward. However the phrase "what the hell" was not translated since in Indonesian culture an employee would not use such phrase to his employer even though he is angry. There is a custom in Indonesia that employee should show respect to the employer because in this kind of business, the sustainability of his job depends on his employer. Phillip was angry because Edward did not listen to his suggestion to call the bank Plymouth Trust from which Mr. Morse would borrow the money to save his company. Phillip wanted Edward to call the bank so that the bank would not agree to give the loan. The phrase was used to show that he was not merely angry but very angry. However, the deletion of the phrase has weakened the mood of anger.

#### 14. I've got the money, thank you very much for saving my ash. = *Aku sudah terima uangmu.*

Kate said sentence (14) to Vivian in the hotel when Kate took the money Vivian left for her. The sentence contains two important cases. First there is phrase "thank you" which was not translated and this is against the Indonesian culture since in Indonesian culture, people are obliged to say "thank you" or in Indonesian language *terima kasih* when receiving something from others. Phrase 'saving my ash' was not translated since that too rude expression does not exist in Indonesian culture.

### 3.2 Subtitle without culture consideration

The followings are some examples in which the source language is translated without considering culture to produce more polite language that can suit the pleasant feelings of the audience.

#### 15. He's leaving. = *Edward mau pergi.*

Edward's staff told Phillip who was also Edward's employee (sentence 15) that Edwards was about to leave. 'He' which refers to Edward is translated into "Edward" only without any honorific address term such as Mr. In Indonesian culture the staff should call their boss by using honorific address term like 'Bapak' for male which means 'Mr', while 'Ibu' for female which means 'Madame'. Thus the subtitle is considered impolite and is not in accordance with the Indonesian custom.

#### 16. She's a strawberry. = *Dia melacur.*

Somebody on the street said sentence (16) when he was referring to a lady who happened to be a streetwalker was killed. "Strawberry" which was used to refer to her is translated into "*melacur*". The use of the word "strawberry" has the purpose to make the word sound less vulgar. This intention was not understood by the subtitler so that it was translated into the most vulgar Indonesian word "*melacur*". A noun was shifted into a verb. Actually there are Indonesian less vulgar words that can be used such as *kupu-kupu malam* (literal meaning is "night butterfly"), or *penjaja cinta* (literal meaning is "love vendor").

This is similar to the case of the sentence **She is a hooker** = *dia pelacur*, which was said by Edward to Phillip because Edward was not happy when Phillip accused Vivian as a spy who would bring information from Edward to David Morse about the purchasing of More's company. Vivian was talking at the time with David Morse whom she met in the horse race. The word "hooker" is a better word for "prostitute". Eventhough Edward was upset, he tried to be more polite by using the word "hooker" since he was actually care about Vivian. By saying this, Edward was not angry to Vivian, but he was actually angry to Phillip. This condition was not understood by the subtitler. Thus, it is rather improper if the word is translated into *pelacur*, the most vulgar word in Indonesian language.

#### 17. Mr. Stuckeys wants to see you. = *Mr. Stuckeys ingin bicara denganmu.*

Sentence (17) was said by Edward's secretary. In Indonesian culture a secretary should respect her boss. So, actually she has to use 'Bapak' (Sir) as the translation for 'you' instead of using "-mu" (the enclitic form of "kamu"). *Kamu* is the pronoun used by friends of similar social status.

#### 18. I am looking forward to it, Sir. = *Aku amat menantikannya.*

The sentence (18) was said by Edward to Mr. Morse who threatened him. Edward who was much younger than Mr. Morse put 'Sir' to respect him, but it was not translated. This is not in accordance with the Indonesian culture, since in Indonesia, younger people must respect the older. "Sir" (in Indonesian language *Tuan/Bapak/Pak* (the short form of *Bapak*) must not be omitted if politeness is put into consideration.

This case is similar to **Your plane will be on schedule, Sir** = *Pesawat anda akan berangkat sesuai jadwal*. The sentence was said by the driver to Edward on his way to the airport. 'Sir' was not translated, meaning that the subtitler left out an important address term usually used to honour someone of a higher status in Indonesian culture. The pronoun "Sir" must be translated to be included in the subtitle since that is the marker of respect which is obliged in Indonesian culture.

#### 19. If you were to get control evethough I doubt it... = *Jika kau dapat mengendalikan meski aku ragukan itu...*

The sentence (19) was said by David, the grandson of Morse said it to Edward.. *Kau* in the subtitle is only proper if David and Edwards are the persons of the same age and the same social status. However, David is younger and his social status is lower because David is the son of the Morse whose company was about to be bought by Edward. Then to be culturally accepted, *kau* should be replaced by *Bapak* "Sir".

## 4. Conclusion

To carry the mood of a film, a subtitler must really understand the situation in both the source and the target languages. He also has to know what is suitable in one culture so that he can produce proper subtitle. In the process of subtitling, a subtitler should make some modification so that the subtitle becomes proper and acceptable in the target culture. To be able to be accepted, the subtitler of the film *Pretty woman* did the followings: (1) finding the proper equivalence, (2) omitting improper words, and (3) changing the improper pronouns into the proper ones. However, some mistakes were also done by the subtitler which are (a) deleting important words so that the speaker sounded impolite and not in accordance with the Indonesian custom, and (b) using improper equivalence so that the real condition was not reflected.

The discussion above is expected to provide description as how important for the subtitler to deal with appropriacy considering that subtitle can be used as a media for education.

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