

Subtitling Strategies and Ideologies of Sexual Terms in The Netflix Series “Sex, Explained” Subtitles

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KEYWORDS

Netflix Series, Sex Explained, Sex Terms, Subtitling Strategy, Translation Ideology

ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the subtitling strategies used by the Netflix translator for the series "Sex, Explained." It focuses on three main aspects: the subtitling strategies, the translation ideology, and the dominant strategies employed. The study is qualitative and examines 85 phrases from five episodes, considering the cultural context of Indonesia, where discussions about sex are often taboo. The researcher utilized various theories to categorize the subtitling strategies, identifying ten methods: expansion, paraphrasing, transfer, imitation, transcription, taming, condensation, decimation, deletion, and resignation. The study found that transfer was the most frequently used strategy (35%), followed by imitation (20%) and paraphrasing (14%). The translation ideologies of foreignization (54%) and domestication (46%) were also explored, with foreignization being predominant. Common sexual terms were analyzed, revealing that "sex" and "sex acts" were the most frequently mentioned (59%), while other categories included female organs, genders, and orgasms. The findings suggest that many sexual terms are universally understood, even if not explicitly translated, highlighting the challenges of translating taboo subjects in an Indonesian context.

INTRODUCTION

This research aims to explore the evolving field of film translation, specifically focusing on subtitling as a method of audio-visual translation (AVT). Subtitling involves translating spoken dialogue into written text, usually displayed at the bottom of the screen, while preserving the 'foreignness' of the original language (Szarkowska, 2005). Subtitles are typically limited to one or two lines, with a character limit per line, to ensure readability without overcrowding the screen. The text also touches upon the concept of translation, which is defined as substituting text from a source language with an equivalent in the target language (Catford, 1965). It discusses the complexity of subtitling, which requires a deep understanding of cultural and contextual factors to accurately convey meaning.

A key area of focus is the translation of sexual terms, especially within the context of the Netflix series “Sex, explained”, which explores societal and cultural attitudes toward sex. The author emphasizes the importance of maintaining cultural integrity while translating sensitive topics like sexuality, gender, and sex in a way that aligns with the target culture's values and norms. (Venuti, 2008) proposed two translation orientations, namely foreignizing translation and domesticating translation, which are commonly employed by translators.

The study examines subtitling strategies in the series and evaluates the precision of translation in conveying sexual language and terms. Using theories from scholars like Venuti on translation ideology, Gottlieb on subtitling strategies, and Trent on sexual language, the study analyses how terms related to sex are translated

from English to Indonesian in *Sex, Explained*. The research aims to improve understanding of how translation techniques affect audience comprehension, particularly in culturally sensitive subjects.

The study also draws comparisons with previous research on the translation of sexual terms, highlighting the same in terms of data but different in terms of concept, like first previous study that entitled "English Sexual Terms and Their Indonesian Equivalents in the Subtitle of the Netflix Series *Ginny & Georgia*" by Angelie Kartika Putri (2023). The research focusing on sexual terms in the film series. Second previous study which titled "Translation Technique on English Sexual Euphemisms in *Duke of Her own*." by Anita & Julianti (2023). The research focusing on how the euphemisms regarding sexual terms are translated. Based on this explanation, both are discussing about sexual terms. While all studies are the same because they discuss sexual terms, the search boundaries are still different because this study will discuss about sexual terms that are also included with gender, and because this study has a translation ideology.

In conclusion, the research highlights the role of translation strategies in the context of the *Sex, Explained* series, particularly in conveying complex and sensitive topics related to sex, sexuality, and gender, while considering cultural nuances and translation ideologies.

METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive methodology to analyse the translation of sexual terms in the Netflix series *Sex, Explained*. The descriptive qualitative approach focuses on understanding a phenomenon by examining its unique characteristics and qualities, with an emphasis on behaviours, attitudes, perceptions, and actions (Ayton, 2023). This method involves the collection and analysis of non-quantitative data, such as text, images, or other non-numeric information.

Data gathering for this study involves analysing subtitles from the series, with English as the original language and Indonesian as the translation. The research specifically focuses on the vocabulary used in the series, particularly sexual terms, and employs Gottlieb's (1992) subtitling strategies, Trent's (2009) theory of sexual language, and Venuti's (2008) translation ideology theories to guide the analysis.

The data for this study comes from five episodes of *Sex, Explained*, a documentary series created by Vox in 2020. The episodes cover various topics related to sex and its social and cultural implications. The researcher accessed the series on Netflix, and the Indonesian and English subtitles from the dialogues of all characters served as the primary data for analysis. The study aims to examine how sexual language is translated between English and Indonesian subtitles, exploring the subtitling strategies used and the impact of translation ideologies on the final output.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter comprises study results and discussion. The text presents study findings on the categorization of sexual terminology as described by Trent (2009), subtitling methodologies as outlined by Gottlieb (1992), and translation philosophies as discussed by Venuti (2008). The results indicate the presence of 6 distinct categories of sexual terminology, namely: genders, sex and sexual act, having sex, orgasm, female organs, and male organs. There are 10 tactics employed in subtitling, namely: expansion, paraphrasing, transfer, imitation, transcription, taming, condensation, decimation, deletion and resignation. In addition, the researcher also examined the translation of sexual phrases utilizing translation ideology based on Venuti's (2008) theory in order to assess their acceptability in translation. The findings can be seen below:

No	Type of sexual terms	Freq	%	Subtitling Strategies										Ideologies	
				EXP	PAR	TRF	IM	TRA	TAM	CON	DEC	DEL	RES	Foreignization	Domestication
1.	Genders	9	11%	1	1	1	1	3	-	-	1	1	-	6	3
2.	Sex and sex act	50	59%	4	7	21	7	5	3	1	-	1	1	28	22
3.	Having sex	6	7%	-	2	3	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	0	6
4.	Orgasm	3	4%	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0
5.	Female Organs	15	18%	1	2	5	4	-	-	1	1	1	-	7	8
6.	Male Organs	2	2%	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0
	Total	85	100%	6	12	30	17	8	3	3	2	3	1	46	39
	% Total			7%	14%	35%	20%	9%	4%	4%	2%	4%	1%	54%	46%

Table 1.1 Types of sexual terms and the subtitling strategies in Netflix “Sex, explained” series

Exp: Expansion
 Par: Paraphrase
 Trf: Transfer
 Im: Imitation
 Tra: Transcription
 Tam: Taming
 Con: Conensation
 Dec: Decimation
 Del: Deletion
 Res: Resignation

According to the data provided, it is evident that 6 types of sexual terms concepts in material culture were translated utilizing various subtitling procedures, including expansion, paraphrasing, transfer, imitation, transcription, condensation, deletion, and resignation.

1.2. Discussions

This section thoroughly examines the findings by presenting specific examples and conducting a study of the various sexual terms, subtitling strategies, and translation ideologies. This section presents a classification of sexual terms, followed by an examination of the subtitling techniques employed for the translation of such terms. Moreover, at the previous session, the translation ideas regarding the translation of sexual terminology were introduced.

1.2.1. Categories of Sexual Terms and Their Subtitling Strategies

This section covers 6 categories of sexual terminology and the subtitling strategies of each terms, the analysis are as follows:

1.2.1.1. Genders

There is a common misconception among certain individuals that the term "gender" is synonymous with "sex". Sex and gender have distinct definitions. Sex refers to biological characteristics, whereas gender is a social and psychological construct influenced by interactions within family, social, and educational environments, as stated by Gaur (2006).

Table 4. 2 Sexual terms of Genders in Netflix “Sex, explained” series

SL: if you’re trans,

TL: *transeksual*

Excerpt 1. Example of Expansion Strategies for Translating Sexual Terms of Genders

For context, here, a man is discussing his sexual inclinations. The reason he said, “if you’re trans,” is because he is open to all kind of people and he had no issue with any individual's sex, gender, or sexual orientation. The word “trans” itself means transsexual. Transsexual refers to a special population. Transsexual individuals themselves possess a gender identity that deviates from or is not conventionally linked to their assigned biological sex, and they possess a strong inclination to undergo permanent transition in order to align with their gender identity (Price et al., 2006)

Based on Trent (2009), the word “trans” is included in the type of genders. The word “trans” means an individual that exhibiting the phenomenon of transexualism.

Based on the theory from Gottlieb (1992) regarding subtitling strategies, the translator used expansion techniques. This technique used by expanding a statement to include additional details or elements, such as culture-specific references. In the source language, the word “trans” is translated into “transeksual”. It is translated like that in order to ensure clarity and comprehension among viewers and readers. As the term “trans” is merely an abbreviation or fragment of a word that is widely recognized in the Western context, it may not be readily understood or correctly interpreted in Indonesia, an Eastern country which statement asserts that their culture and religion have consistently adhered to heterosexuality (Sikap & Rusia, 2024).

1.2.1.2. Sex and sex act

It alludes to sexually related activities (Simpson College, n.d.) The way that people perceive and express their sexuality is referred to as human sexual activities, human sexual practices, or human sexual behavior.

SL: Condoms, dental dam and all kind of latex became part of **the fun**.

TL: *Kondom, dental dam, dan semua jenis lateks menjadi bagian dari **hubungan seksual**.*

For context, a speaker and a comedian by the name Margaret Cho, an Asian-American woman, is discussing about sex life and commonly used sexual tools. Here, along with the topics of BDSM, she describes that it is more interesting and challenging to have sex with an unordinary but safe way.

Based on Trent (2009), the word “the fun” is included in the type of sex and sex act. The word itself is used and referred to when people having sex willingly and use sexual tools with consent, it will make both parties feel fun. The translator employed expansion techniques based on Gottlieb's (1992) theory of subtitling strategies. This strategy involves the expansion of a statement by incorporating additional details or components, such as references that are peculiar to a certain culture. In the source language, the word “the fun” is translated into “**hubungan seksual**” in Indonesian due to the presence of a speaker discussing sex life and commonly used sexual tools. This translation was made to ensure that viewers comprehend the context of the discussion, as the phrase in question is a form of slang.

1.3. Having sex

Sexual intercourse is a consensual act in which the male penis is inserted into the female vagina, involving thrusting movements, with the purpose of experiencing sexual pleasure, reproduction, or both (Dictionary.com).

SL: one was a man and a woman **having sex**.

TL: *satu video berisi pria dan wanita yang **berhubungan seks**.*

For context, a narrator is talking about a sexual response in sexual activities test that include to watch vulgar videos such as naked man and woman, homosexual porn, heterosexual porn, lesbian porn, and a video of bonobos mating. The participants ranging from all gender and sexual orientation, which is a bunch of homosexual man, heterosexual man and woman, and lesbian. The test is done to see which videos to make a section of sexual orientation to have sexual arousal faster.

Based on Trent (2009), the term of “having sex” is included in the having sex section. From the definition, having sex is when a man and woman have an intercourse, hence the chosen sentence.

According to Gottlieb (1992), paraphrase strategies refer to the act of altering language-specific phenomena using an appropriate representation that does not rely on visual aspects. Paraphrasing is a method used to convert the structure of the source language (SL) into the target language (TL) while maintaining the original meaning and improving understanding. The translation of English word “having sex” is translated into “berhubungan seks” in Indonesian which although changing the structure of the word, still have the same meaning.

1.3.1. Orgasm

An orgasm, also known as a sexual climax or simply climax, refers to the abrupt release of built-up sexual excitement during the sexual response cycle. This release leads to involuntary rhythmic contractions of the muscles in the pelvic region, accompanied by intense sexual pleasure (Winn, 2003).

SL: where you’re on the brink of **orgasm**

TL: *dan saat kau di ambang **orgasme**,*

For context, the narrator discusses experiencing sexual fantasies when viewing explicit videos, as well as the unique and unfamiliar sensations that arise during masturbation and just before reaching climax.

Based on Trent (2009), orgasm is included in the sexual terms of orgasm. Orgasm, also known as a sexual climax or simply climax, refers to the abrupt release of built-up sexual excitement during the sexual response cycle. This release leads to involuntary rhythmic contractions of the muscles in the pelvic region, accompanied by intense sexual pleasure (Winn, 2003). According to Gottlieb (1992), imitation is the process of reproducing anything with absolute accuracy or a similar representation. Capitalization is necessary for proper nouns, international greetings, and other forms, especially when mentioning names of individuals and locations, as is customary. The translator opted to render the English word "orgasm" as "orgasme" in Indonesian due to its simplicity and loanword status.

1.3.2. Female Organs

The internal reproductive organs in females consist of the vagina, uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries. The female reproductive tract comprises the vagina, uterus, and fallopian tubes (Scoullar, 2021).

SL: Men like women with big **breasts**

TL: *pria suka wanita **berpayudara besar***

For context, a psychologist by the name of Lisa Diamond, is explaining about the myth that say men tend to favor women with big breasts because they believe that women with larger breasts are more fertile and are better suited for raising children. The psychologist broke the myth by stating that there is no evidence of any link between large breasts, pretty face, and fertility. Furthermore, she stated that if the latter was true, our planet would be populated only with beautiful, large-breasted women.

Based on Trent (2009), the term of “breasts” is included in the female organs section. Both males and females possess breasts, although they are more developed in females. The breasts consist of several glands and other structures that enable them to carry out their tasks. Specifically, the main physiological purpose of the breast is to generate milk for the nourishment of new-borns. Nevertheless, the breast can also serve as a representation of femininity and contribute to sexual allure and gratification (Santhakumar, 2021).

According to Gottlieb (1992), Paraphrase techniques involve modifying language-specific phenomena by employing a suitable representation that does not depend on visual elements. Paraphrasing is a technique employed to transform the organization of the source language (SL) into the target language (TL) while preserving the original significance and enhancing comprehension. The translation is correct, but only changing the location of words in the target language.

1.3.3. Male Organs

The primary male reproductive organs consist of the penis and the scrotum, housing the testicles responsible to produce semen and sperm, essential for sexual intercourse.

SL: That carry sperm out of the **testicles**

TL: *yang membawa sperma keluar dari testis*

For context, here, the narrator explores many techniques and instruments used to avoid conception, with sterilization being highlighted as one effective method of preventing pregnancy. Male sterilization is a straightforward surgery that involves cutting or clamping the tubes responsible for carrying sperm out of the testicles.

Based on Trent (2009), testicles are included in the male organs section. The male reproductive system consists of a variety of sexual organs that play a role in the process of human reproduction. These organs are located both externally and within the pelvic area. The principal male reproductive organs comprise the penis and the scrotum, which contain the testicles responsible for generating semen and sperm, crucial for sexual intercourse. According to Gottlieb (1992), imitation is the process of reproducing anything with exact accuracy or a similar representation. Capitalization is crucial for proper nouns, international salutations, and various other forms, especially when mentioning names of individuals and places, as is customary. The translator's choice to preserve the identical translation from the original language is grounded in the word's widespread usage on a global scale, notably in scientific domains and conversations pertaining to sexuality.

2.1. Categorization of Sexual Terms and Translation Ideologies

This section describes the techniques used to translate 6 types of sexual terminology. The objective of the technical study was to determine the fundamental ideology of translation, as various procedures used in translation practice demonstrate different ideological tendencies.

2.1.1. Domestication

Domestication refers to a translation strategy that concentrates on modifying unusual terms from the target culture into more recognizable ones, with the aim of ensuring that the translated content is comprehensible and approachable for the intended audience. This approach entails integrating culturally specific values into the foreign text that are exclusive to the target language. One of the biggest contributors to translation referring to the domestication ideology is the transfer subtitling strategy, which is translating the source language exactly without reducing anything in the target language.

Example:

SL: or even just to **have sex** with an individual, requires so much more than just biology.

TL: *atau **bercinta** pun membutuhkan lebih dari sekedar biologi.*

The word “have sex”, despite the potential for viewers to comprehend and grasp the meaning of the term without it being translated into Indonesian, the translator nonetheless opts to render it as 'bercinta'. Indeed, while this may be deemed harsh and crude, it is nonetheless accurately and suitably translated, enabling viewers to comprehend the corresponding connotation of the phrase in Indonesian.

SL: **the womb** is everyone’s first environment,

TL: ***Rahim** adalah lingkungan pertama semua orang,*

The word "womb" is a part of the female reproductive system. The uterus, sometimes referred to as the womb, is a symmetrical organ that has a shape like that of a pear. The subtitler accurately translates the discourse verbatim, without any more elucidation or alteration of the viewpoint. Furthermore, this method maintains the original text's formatting.

2.1.2. Foreignization

This translation methodology emphasizes maintaining the cultural essence of the original text while transferring both the source language and its cultural context into the target language. The goal is to preserve as much of the "foreign flavour" as possible, meaning the distinctiveness of the source language and its culture. In foreignizing translation, "foreign" refers not just to a direct or literal representation of the original content, but to the significance it carries within the original context.

The translation based on the foreignization ideology is not necessarily "right" or "wrong." This is because many borrowed terms, especially from English, have become widely recognized and understood, making them feel familiar to the audience. Thus, the choice to preserve the foreign terms depends on the context and the degree of recognition in the target language.

SL: Orgasm

TL: *orgasme*

The word “orgasm” is translated into Indonesian as "orgasme" because of its simplicity and the fact that it is a loanword. It is also just different in terms of pronunciation.

SL: First, the **cervix**

TL: *Pertama, **serviks***

The word “cervix” is a component of the female reproductive system. In Indonesian, the term "cervix" is rendered as "leher rahim". The translator refrained from providing an equal translation due to the potential confusion it may bring, as the usage of the word "leher rahim" is uncommon in Indonesian, but the term "cervix" is more frequently employed.

SL: It blocks anything, like a **penis**

TL: *la menghalangi apapun, misalnya **penis**,*

The word “penis” is a component of the male reproductive system. Although this word is not of Indonesian origin, it is commonly used and familiar. Therefore, the translator decided to retain the word in English for better comprehension, to avoid confusion, and to conserve translation space.

2.2. Most Dominant Strategy

Based on the data, research, and calculations provided, it is evident that the transfer strategy is the most commonly employed subtitling strategy. The transfer subtitling strategy is frequently employed for translating the subtitle series due to the prevalence of English words or sentences that may cause confusion among viewers. This strategy ensures clarity, ease of understanding, and direct translation of the precise Indonesian counterpart for that word.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the researcher suggests that future studies consider using different types of movies or series as research subjects. This study focused on a documentary series, which provided a substantial dataset. However, the genre of the film or series significantly influences the amount of data available for analysis. Therefore, the researcher recommends using data from films or series in genres like historical, period dramas, or those rich in cultural components for future research.

Additionally, the study did not specifically focus on translation accuracy, and there is a gap in evaluating the precision of word translation. The researcher encourages future studies to explore the accuracy of translating sexual terminology and to investigate more precise methods of translation.

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