

Assessment of Accuracy and Naturalness in the Subtitle Translation of *Supernatural* TV Series

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ABSTRACT

Fan subtitle or fansub is assumed to be substandard in terms of translation accuracy and naturalness. However, it is not truly known whether fansub translation is really poor in quality or that it can be accurate and natural. This qualitative research analyzes the naturalness and accuracy found in the fansub of an episode of a TV series “Supernatural”, in which the utterances of Dean and Sam Winchester are analyzed using Newmark’s theories on naturalness and accuracy in translation. The translation can be classified into several different categories, which are natural and accurate, unnatural and inaccurate, unnatural but accurate, and could be more natural but accurate. The findings of the research showed that the overall translation cannot be said as completely natural and accurate because it still contains inaccuracies and unnaturalness in its translation, but does not significantly change the original messages of the text.

Keywords: Translation, Accuracy, Naturalness, Fansub, Supernatural

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, it is relatively common for many people to watch movies or TV series illegally through online streaming websites. It is so common that according to Indonesia’s Communications and Information minister, Johnny G Plate (The Jakarta Post, 2019), there are more than 1000 online streaming sites that have been blocked because they illegally hosts countless premium TV series and movies for free. A recent survey conducted by Coalition Against Piracy (CAP) and YouGov found that 63 percent of online consumers in Indonesia chose to watch premium content through illegal sites. Accordingly, because of the popularity of these streaming sites, there are high demands to provide Indonesian subtitles for those, mostly, Hollywood movies and TV series. However, because these contents are illegal and available for free, it is not possible to hire a professional translator to produce subtitles for these contents. Professional translators are expensive to hire and most of them will not meddle with illegal contents that can harm their credibility and reputation as professional translators. Therefore, as these movies or TV series still have to be translated into Indonesian, most of them rely on the fans or audience themselves to provide subtitles for these contents. These kinds of subtitles are known as fansubs or fan-subtitles.

Fansub is a different type of subtitling which is done by amateur translators (Cintas & Sánchez, 2006). As the translation is done by an amateur translator, there are several differences in the resulting translation compared with the translations done by professional translators because professionals have specific guidelines or procedures that are used when they translate SL text to TL. However, there are no uniform standards to regulate fansub translations, and there are certain people who are not serious with their translation and result in many mistakes (Wang, 2014). As a result, perhaps the most notable difference between fansub and professionally translated subtitles is related to the quality such as accuracy and naturalness in the translation.

In general, there are several aspects that can contribute to the quality of a translation, but perhaps accuracy and naturalness of translation are two of the most important factors that determines the overall quality of the translation. A translation can be deemed as accurate when the translated texts have the same meaning as the original source language text. Naturalness in translation can be defined as a translation that reads naturally, that it is written in ordinary language, the common grammar, idioms and words that meet that kind of situation. (Newmark, 1998)

Accuracy is an important aspect in translation that affects the quality of translation as a whole. A translation is of good quality when it has high accuracy, whereas low quality translations usually contain many inaccuracies in the translation. Accuracy in translation usually refers to a state where there is no change, addition, or reduction in meaning from SL to TL. Therefore, if there is any change or loss of original meaning from SL to TL, then the translation can be deemed as inaccurate. Accuracy in translation must also refer to pragmatic and referential accuracy, where pragmatically accurate means that a translation is accurate in relation to the context of the text, while referentially accurate means that a translation is objectively accurate.

Naturalness in translation can be described as “the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style, with the use of grammatical constructions and combinations of words which do not violate the ordinary patterns of a language” (Nida&Taber,1969). Naturalness is also an important aspect in translation because if a translation is natural, written in common idioms, grammar, lexicon, etc, the audience will feel that the translation is more readable in a way that it is ‘not a translation’ because the choice of words, grammar, etc feels relevant and not out of place in relation to the TL audience.

This research aims to assess the fansub translation’s naturalness and accuracy of Sam and Dean Winchester’s utterances in one of the episodes of *Supernatural* TV series. *Supernatural* is an American dark fantasy TV series first aired in 2005 which the story revolves around two ordinary guys, Sam and Dean Winchester who were born in a world plagued by supernatural beings such as vampires, ghosts, demons, witches, etc. They grew up to be “hunters” who hunt supernatural beings to save the world from these beings. The reason why only Dean and Sam Winchester’s utterances are chosen to be analyzed is because they are the main protagonists of the series; the researcher also thinks that the quality of translation of the protagonists is very important compared to other supporting characters.

METHODS

The data for this qualitative study is Sam and Dean Winchester’s utterances found in the fansub of 22nd episode, eighth season of *Supernatural* TV series. This particular episode is chosen randomly without specific reason for this research, which then the researcher selects only Dean and Sam Winchester’s utterances found in the episode as the data for analysis. The data were then analyzed using Newmark’s theories on translation accuracy; there can be no change of meaning from Source Language (SL) to Target Language (TL) text while also fulfilling both pragmatical and referential accuracy. On the other hand, naturalness in translation means that the translation should read naturally; that it is written in ordinary language, the common grammar, idioms and words that meet that kind of situation (Newmark, 1991).

In the analysis, the data is organized into tables where the data is classified into several categories based on the result of analysis using Newmark’s theories on translation naturalness and accuracy. Each translation categories were elaborated further to pinpoint what errors or mistakes that the translator(s) made and also includes suggested translation to provide examples

on how the translation should be done in reference with Newmark's theories on translation accuracy and naturalness.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Both naturalness and accuracy are aspects that needs to be fulfilled in order to produce a high quality translation. It is not possible to just fulfill one aspect while completely abandoning the other in order to produce a high quality translation because both aspects work in complement and required for a high quality translation. Based on the data analysis, the translation can be classified into several categories, which are natural and accurate, unnatural and accurate, natural and inaccurate, unnatural and inaccurate, and could be more natural and accurate.

In the category of natural and inaccurate translation, the translator did not translate the original word from SL into TL, where the words from the SL are left untranslated in the resulting translation. Untranslated words can be deemed as inaccurate translation because a translation is basically a transfer of meaning from SL to TL using the target language's form. Another thing that makes the translation inaccurate is because there are changes in meaning from SL to TL which is not supposed to happen as translation is basically a process of meaning transfer from SL to TL form. Newmark (1998) also mentioned accuracy in translation by referential and pragmatic accuracy. However, despite these shortcomings regarding the accuracy of the translation, the translation overall feels idiomatic and natural enough for the audience, which renders the translation as natural but inaccurate. Below are some examples of natural and inaccurate translations.

Utterance: Magic that powerful comes at a price, and right now we don't know what that price is.

Translation: **Kekuatan** sehebat itu pasti ada harganya, dan saat ini kita tidaktahu seberapa tinggi harganya.

Suggested Translation: **Sihir** sehebat itu ada harganya, dan saat ini kita tidaktahu berapa harganya.

We can see that there are some inaccuracies in the translation. Firstly, the word *magic* is translated into *kekuatan*. This translation is inaccurate both in pragmatic and referential level because the word *magic* means *sihir* in Indonesian. Secondly, the translator adds the word *pasti* in the translation while in the SL text there is no word that translates to *pasti*. Lastly, the word **what** is translated into *seberapa tinggi*, which unnecessarily adds the word *tinggi* into the translation. Instead, the SL word should be translated into *apa/berapa*. Therefore, the translation is both referentially and pragmatically inaccurate.

Here is another example of natural and inaccurate translation.

Utterance: But he happens to have an army of Angels behind him

Translation: Tapi dia punya sepasukan malaikat **bersamanya**

Suggested Translation: Tapi dia punya sepasukan malaikat yang **mendukungnya**.

There is an instance of inaccuracy in the resulting translation, where the word **behind him** is translated into *bersamanya*. This translation is inaccurate because it only fulfills referential

accuracy and not pragmatical accuracy as the word here refers to an act of supporting or backing someone instead of being together physically. Therefore the use of *bersamanya* in the translation is not acceptable and instead could use word like *mendukungnya*.

The second category of the translation is a translation that is both unnatural and inaccurate, where the translations contains both inaccuracies and unnaturalness at the same time, which in many cases results from poor word choice, too literal translations and irrelevant to the context, and only fulfills referential accuracy but not pragmatical accuracy. Below are examples of unnatural and inaccurate translations:

Utterance: Welcome to the club. Something funny?

Translation: *Selamat datang di klub kami. Ada yang lucu?*

Suggested Translation: *Selamat **bergabung**. Ada yang lucu?*

The first phrase of the dialogue, **Welcome to the club** is translated into *selamat datang di klub kami*. In terms of naturalness, the TL translation is not idiomatic because it is very literally translated without understanding the actual meaning behind it. **Welcome to the club** in the context of the dialogue is an expression that is used to congratulate a person that has recently joined with the protagonist. Therefore, the more appropriate translation will be something like *selamat bergabung* in Indonesian. In terms of accuracy, the translation is inaccurate because it adds unnecessary word *kami* because in the SL utterance there is no word that can be translated into *kami* in the TL.

Another example of unnatural and inaccurate translation is as follows.

Utterance: Let me guess. Yea big, trench coat, sensible shoes?

Translation: *Biar kutebak. Tingginya sekitar ini, memakaimantel hujan dan sepatu nyaman?*

Suggested Translation: *Biar ku tebak. **Besarnya** sekitar ini, memakaijas hujan dan sepatu sederhana?*

Here, the term **trench coat** is translated into *mantel hujan*, which in terms of meaning is correct but is not natural in TL form because trench coat is a coat that is used to protect oneself from rain that is not commonly found in Indonesia and there is no direct equivalent of this term in TL form. The term *mantel hujan* itself is rarely used Indonesian as most Indonesians prefer to use *jas hujan*. Therefore, the term **trench coat** should be translated into *jas hujan* so that the translation feels more natural. Another problem is that the term **sensible shoes** is translated into *sepatu nyaman*, which is inaccurate because actually sensible shoes here refers to shoes that is more practical and simple as opposed to something fancy or glamorous. Therefore, it is more accurate if the SL term is translated into *sepatu sederhana*.

In the data, there are some utterances that are accurate in terms of meaning both pragmatically and referentially, but sometimes the choice of words and how the sentences are structured is not idiomatic and natural in the TL form, which renders the translation unnatural and accurate in terms of meaning. Below is an example of unnatural and accurate translations.

Utterance: Oh, and you're done.

Translation: *Oh, dan kau sudah selesai.*

Suggested Translation: *Oh, tamatlah kau.*

The translation from SL to TL is accurate but unnatural because the choice of words made the emotions contained in the utterance feels different from the original. Here, the phrase **you're done** is translated into *kau sudah selesai*, which is accurate meaning wise but the choice of words did not capture the emotion of the original utterance because **you're done** in the context of the utterance means that the listener is going to be finished or killed by the speaker. Therefore, the more appropriate choice of words would be *tamatlah kau*.

The last two categories are translations that are natural and accurate and also could be more natural and accurate. Both categories of translation fulfills the criteria for naturalness and accuracy in translation; that the translation reads naturally; that it is written in ordinary language, the common grammar, idioms and words that meet that kind of situation (Newmark, 1991) and also both pragmatically and referentially accurate. However, translations that could be more natural and accurate means that they are essentially natural and accurate, but according to the researcher can be improved even better to make them feel more natural. Below is an example of natural and accurate translation:

Utterance: How many times have we **been around this block**?

Translation: *Berapa kali kita sudah membicarakan ini?*

In this utterance, the term **been around the block** indicates that the person has experienced a thing for so many times that there is no need to talk about the matter again and again, which is translated appropriately using the TL form as seen above.

Here is an example of a translation that could be more natural and accurate

Utterance: Oh, Tessa, you are so wrong.

Translation: *Oh, Tessa, kau salah sekali*

Suggested Translation: *Oh, Tessa, kamu salah besar.*

Here, the word *kau* is used rather than *kamu*, which makes the translation feel less natural because *kau* is more of a dialect from several regions in Indonesia, whereas *kamu* is more generally used across Indonesia. Another thing to note is how the translator translates the term **so wrong** into TL, in which it is translated into *salah sekali*, which is natural enough as the translator can instead translate it into *sangat salah* or *sangat keliru*, etc which can make the translation even more unnatural to the TL audience. Therefore, the translation *salah sekali* is natural enough, but can be improved even more by replacing the word *sekali* with *besar*, so that the translation feels even more appropriate and natural.

Based on the analysis of the data using Newmark's theories on translation accuracy and naturalness, the translation can be categorized into several types, which are **natural and accurate, unnatural and inaccurate, unnatural but accurate, and could be more natural but**

accurate. Natural and accurate translations fulfill Newmark's description of accuracy; referential and pragmatical accuracy and also naturalness; idiomatic words, sentence structure, grammar, choice of words, etc, resulting in a translation that reads naturally and smoothly without any change in meaning from SL to TL. Translations that could be more natural but accurate are in essence can be categorized as natural and accurate, in which it is both referentially and pragmatically accurate and also natural, but the researcher thinks as a native Indonesian speaker can be improved further in terms of naturalness. In contrast, unnatural and inaccurate translations do not fulfill requirements for accuracy; referential and pragmatic, and also naturalness because often times these translations have changes in meaning from SL to TL and also there are mistakes in choice of words, grammar, and idioms that makes the translation feels rigid and 'weird' in a sense because it is unnatural, and also its inaccuracy can cause confusion among audience because of the meaning change or that the audience is 'forced' to believe the inaccurate translations as accurate. There are also translations that fulfill its requirements regarding pragmatical and referential accuracy but are unnatural due to several reasons such as poor word choice, incohesive sentences, literal translation of idioms or slang words, etc, which makes the translation understandable but feels too rigid or literal and unnatural.

CONCLUSION

As a result, the overall translation cannot be said as fully accurate or natural, especially after being analyzed using Newmark's theories on naturalness and accuracy in translation as there are still many instances of inaccuracies and unnaturalness in the translation from SL to TL. However, even with those inaccuracies and unnaturalness found in the translation, the audience may still understand the original SL messages that want to be conveyed even though the TL translation contains some inaccuracies and unnaturalness. It is also found that many of the cases of inaccuracy in the translation is because the translations are only referentially accurate but not pragmatically accurate, which probably means that the translator only translates the SL text literally without understanding the context in many cases. Regarding naturalness, many cases of unnaturalness in the translation results from poor word choice that results in translation that feels too rigid and literal.

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