



## AN ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN THE FILM ELEMENTAL: FORCE OF NATURE

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to explore the types of idiomatic expressions and the strategies used to translate them in the subtitles of the movie Elemental: Force of Nature. Employing a descriptive qualitative research design, the analysis focused on fifteen idioms identified in the film's subtitles. The idioms were categorized according to McCarthy and O'Dell's (2011) typology, while Baker's (1992) framework was used to analyze the translation strategies. The findings reveal five idiom categories: prepositional phrases, verb + object combinations, compound idioms, similes, and full clauses or sentences, with prepositional phrases being the most prevalent; binomials and trinomials were not observed. Four translation strategies were identified: using idioms with similar meaning and form, idioms with similar meaning but different forms, paraphrasing, and omission. The study underscores the nuanced approach required in translating idiomatic expressions and offers insights into effective translation strategies for audiovisual content. These findings contribute to the broader field of translation studies by informing best practices for subtitling culturally bound language, ultimately enhancing cross-cultural communication in global media.*

**Keywords:** *Idiomatic Expression, Types of idioms, Translation strategies.*

### INTRODUCTION

Translation involves crafting a version of a message in the target language that preserves the original's meaning and style. This process aims to produce a natural and accessible translation for readers or audiences in the target language. Nida and Taber (1969) define translation as reproducing the message from the source language while maintaining content and form. Larson (1984) further categorizes translation into two primary types: literal and idiomatic. Literal translation closely follows the source language's structure, whereas idiomatic translation prioritizes conveying the intended meaning through natural expressions in the target language.

Understanding idioms is crucial in translation because idioms pose significant challenges due to their fixed, non-literal meanings. According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, idioms are expressions whose meanings cannot be derived from individual

words. Baker (1992) emphasizes that idioms are often culturally bound, resistant to structural modification, and rarely have direct equivalents in the target language. McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) highlight the widespread use of idioms across various forms of English communication, from literature and media to everyday conversation. Thus, Translating idioms requires nuanced strategies, such as using equivalent idioms, paraphrasing, or omitting (Baker, 1992, p. 72). For example, the idiom *kicks the bucket* ("to die") cannot be translated literally, hence paraphrased as *meninggal dunia* in Indonesian to preserve meaning and tone.

This complexity has inspired numerous studies. Sentong (2007) examined idiomatic expressions in *Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson, revealing a range of phrasal verbs and idiom structures. Fachrizal (2018) investigated idiom translation strategies in the subtitles of *The Infiltrator* using Nida and Taber's model, identifying strategies such as equivalence, paraphrasing, and omission. While insightful, these studies predominantly focus on written literary texts or realistic dramas and emphasize structural categorization or general translation strategies.

However, a clear gap remains in research that addresses the subtitling of idioms within animated, metaphorically rich, and culturally coded narratives—especially those like *Elemental: Force of Nature*, which blend fantasy, socio-cultural commentary, and emotionally charged dialogue. Animated films often use stylized language, character-specific idioms, and fast-paced dialogue, intensifying the challenge of maintaining idiomatic integrity in subtitles. Prior studies also commonly rely solely on Baker's taxonomy without incorporating more contemporary or pedagogically structured idiom frameworks such as that of McCarthy and O'Dell (2010), which offers a broader categorization beneficial for subtitle analysis.

This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing idiomatic expressions and their translations in the subtitles of *Elemental: Force of Nature*, an American animated fantasy directed by Peter Sohn. The film, released on June 16, 2023, presents a vibrant narrative interwoven with themes of immigration, identity, and emotional resilience. The English subtitles were sourced from [scrapfromtheloft.com](https://www.scrapfromtheloft.com), while the Indonesian translation was obtained from Disney+ Hotstar. Guided by McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) idiom classification and Baker's (1992) translation strategy framework, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What idiomatic expressions are found in the *Elemental: Force of Nature* movie?
2. What translation strategies render these idiomatic expressions in the Indonesian subtitles?

The objectives are to identify the types of idiomatic expressions in the movie, analyze the strategies used to translate them and assess how effectively these strategies convey the intended meaning and cultural nuances. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of idiom translation in audiovisual contexts and offers practical insights for translators working with dynamic and culturally complex media content.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Research on the translation strategies of idiomatic expressions in animated films has highlighted various challenges and approaches in maintaining meaning across languages and cultures. Translation strategies are particularly crucial for recent animated films like *Elemental: Force of Nature*, where idioms may carry unique cultural and narrative implications. Zhang and Wang (2021) analyzed idiom translation in Disney's *Frozen*, illustrating the complexities translators face in preserving idiomatic meaning in the target language. While their study offers valuable insights into maintaining semantic equivalence, it primarily focuses on a single, older Disney title. It lacks engagement with more recent animated films, leaving a gap concerning newer releases like *Elemental*.

Tanaka (2020), in contrast, emphasizes the importance of retaining cultural nuances in English-to-Japanese idiom translation, particularly in Japanese animations. While this cultural lens is critical, the study does not extend its scope to Western animation studios such as Pixar. Ahmed (2022) takes a broader comparative approach, investigating idiom translation across multiple national contexts and identifying cultural differences as a key challenge. However, this macro-level perspective lacks a micro-level focus on specific films, thus overlooking the granular translation decisions required for films like *Elemental: Force of Nature*, which intertwine fantasy with real-world sociocultural themes.

Johnson and Lee (2021) focus on *Moana*, detailing strategies to preserve meaning when translating cultural idioms. Their work is useful for understanding domestication techniques in animation. However, it remains constrained by the specificities of *Moana*'s Polynesian setting and themes, which differ significantly from the urban-immigrant narrative of *Elemental*. Meanwhile, Patel (2023) provides a more structural analysis of cultural adaptation and domestication strategies in idiomatic translation. Unlike Tanaka, who emphasizes cultural fidelity, Patel is more

concerned with formal equivalence and functional translation within subtitle constraints. However, Patel's study remains general and does not provide detailed case analyses of recent Pixar films.

Taken together, these studies contribute valuable but fragmented perspectives. While some prioritize cultural fidelity (Tanaka, Johnson, and Lee), others emphasize comparative scope (Ahmed) or structural strategies (Patel). However, the literature lacks a focused investigation into the idiomatic translation strategies used in *Elemental: Force of Nature*, a film whose hybrid of fantasy and contemporary sociocultural issues presents distinctive challenges. Moreover, much of the scholarship focuses on Disney animations, overlooking Pixar's evolving narrative style and idiomatic complexity. Therefore, further research is needed to examine how idiomatic expressions in *Elemental: Force of Nature* are translated, particularly regarding cultural adaptation, genre-specific idiom usage, and the interplay between visual narrative and linguistic choice in subtitles.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research method is crucial in producing a rigorous and systematic study, as the validity and clarity of research outcomes largely depend on the methodological approach. This study applies several key methodological stages: determining the data source, collecting the data, and analyzing the data. Each of these stages is elaborated below.

The primary data source of this research is the American fantasy film *Elemental: Force of Nature*, directed by Peter Sohn and produced by Denise Ream. The film explores themes of immigration, discrimination, and self-acceptance, presenting a narrative rich in emotional and sociocultural depth. This film was selected not only for its popularity and recent release (2023) but also because it features diverse characters whose dialogues contain numerous idiomatic expressions, making it an appropriate and contemporary source for examining idiom translation in audiovisual media.

The data in this study consist of 15 idiomatic expressions found within the film's English-Indonesian subtitles. Limiting the dataset to 15 idioms is based on purposive sampling. This qualitative sampling method allows for the in-depth analysis of selected cases deemed representative and relevant to the research objectives. These idioms were chosen based on their frequency, contextual relevance, and potential translational complexity. The focus on a manageable number of idioms ensures a detailed and nuanced analysis within the constraints of a qualitative study.

The data were collected using the observation method. This involved watching the film while attentively reading the subtitles to observe the interplay between spoken dialogue and

subtitle translation. The original script was sourced from scrapfromtheloft.com and compared against the English-Indonesian subtitles provided on Disney+ Hotstar. Idiomatic expressions were identified, extracted, and categorized to facilitate systematic analysis.

The identified idioms were organized based on their occurrence and narrative function after data collection. The data were then analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach, described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), which involves interpreting and contextualizing material in its natural setting. The classification of idiomatic expressions followed the framework proposed by McCarthy and O'Dell (2010), while the analysis of translation strategies employed Baker's (1992) model. These theoretical frameworks provide a robust basis for analyzing how idioms are constructed, interpreted, and translated in an audiovisual context, contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges and decisions involved in subtitle translation.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This study analyzes idiomatic expressions and the translation strategies used in the subtitles of the film *Elemental: Forces of Nature*. The analysis is thematically structured into two main parts: (1) the types of idiomatic expressions in the movie and (2) the translation strategies applied.

### **1. Types of Idiomatic Expressions**

Based on McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) framework, five types of idiomatic expressions were identified from the film:

#### **1.1 Verb + Object Idioms**

These idioms consist of a verb followed by an object or complement, forming a structure with a figurative meaning.

Example 1: "Beaten my time" → "mengalahkan rekorku" — This idiom figuratively means to surpass a previous personal best, and the translation captures this meaning while adapting it to natural Indonesian usage.

Example 2: "Put you out" → "kau padam" — A more complex idiom, meaning to inconvenience someone, is partially retained but requires deeper contextual interpretation to reflect emotional nuance in Indonesian.

#### **1.2 Prepositional Phrases** Prepositional idioms involve a preposition and a noun phrase that collectively form an idiomatic meaning.

Example: "on the house" → "gratis" — This phrase signifies a free offering, often a hospitalist. The translator chose a culturally equivalent expression to ensure comprehension and retain the social tone.

#### **1.3 Compound Idioms** These consist of two or more words used together in a fixed form whose meaning cannot be deduced from the individual words.

Example: "hanky-panky" → "bermesraan" — This informal expression implies romantic or suspicious activity. The Indonesian translation neutralizes its informality but retains the romantic implication.

#### 1.4 Similes Similes use comparative structures like "like" or "as" to draw symbolic parallels.

Example 1: "like oil and water" → "bagaikan minyak dan air" — The metaphor is preserved across languages as the imagery is culturally universal.

Example 2: "Calm as a candle" → "tenang seperti lilin" — This retains the poetic calmness of the original and enhances narrative imagery.

#### 1.5 Whole Clauses and Sentences: Full sentences or rhetorical questions convey non-literal meaning.

Example: "Are your eyes in the back of your head?" → "Apa kau sudah buta?" — The target language idiom simplifies the rhetorical device into a culturally comprehensible expression of disbelief. No binomials or trinomials were detected, which may indicate a deliberate preference by the screenwriters or translators to use more universally understandable idioms in line with the film's family-friendly and multicultural audience.

### 2. Translation Strategies

Following Baker's (1992) taxonomy, four translation strategies were observed:

#### 2.1 Using an Idiom of Similar Meaning and Form This strategy involves selecting an idiom in the target language that preserves meaning and syntactic structure.

Example: "in a hurry" → "terburu-buru" — The expression is equivalent in both languages, maintaining idiomatic integrity.

#### 2.2 Using an Idiom of Similar Meaning but Different Form An idiom is translated using an alternative form with the same meaning but a different linguistic structure.

Example: "Keep an eye on them" → "awasi mereka" — Although not idiomatic in Indonesian, the translation effectively communicates the intended meaning.

#### 2.3 Paraphrasing Applied when a direct equivalent is unavailable, paraphrasing conveys meaning using descriptive language.

Example: "on the house" → "gratis" — Instead of a literal translation, the translator selected a culturally accessible term to retain function.

#### 2.4 Omission Idioms may be omitted when deemed redundant, untranslatable, or when clarity is better served by removing the idiom.

Example: "come on" → "ayo" — The translator omits the idiomatic form "come on," simplifying it to a functional command.

### 3. Interpretation and Implications

Idioms in *Elemental: Forces of Nature* add depth to character interactions and plot. Their successful translation is crucial for preserving narrative tone, humor, and emotional appeal. The translator's tendency to retain idiomatic meaning through substitution and paraphrasing—rather than omission—indicates a fidelity to cultural nuance.

This aligns with Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence theory, which aims to achieve a similar audience response in the target language. The translator's decisions reflect Baker's (1992) emphasis on adaptability in cross-cultural idiom rendering. The absence of binomials and trinomials supports McCarthy and O'Dell's (2010) point that media idioms are often simplified for clarity and accessibility.

Moreover, the film's idiomatic choices and translations underscore the translator's balancing act between faithfulness and fluency—core principles in audiovisual translation (AVT). These findings reinforce the argument that idioms enrich communication (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995) and show that nuanced strategies can retain expressive intent in cross-linguistic contexts.

## CONCLUSION

Beyond its immediate findings, this study has broader implications for translation practice and pedagogy. The successful handling of idioms in subtitle translation underscores the importance of equipping translators with strong cultural and contextual competence, especially when working with audiovisual content. For translation training, the study suggests incorporating idiomatic translation exercises and comparative analysis across genres to develop flexibility in strategy selection. Moreover, by illustrating how idiomatic expressions contribute to narrative tone and viewer engagement, this research offers valuable insights for curriculum design in audiovisual translation courses. It contributes to best practices in translator training.

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