

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES AS A DEVICE FOR CHARACTERIZATION IN THE SUBTITLE OF AMERICAN TV SERIES COMEDY ‘THE BIG BANG THEORY’

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ABSTRACT

Using the theory of impoliteness strategies rooted from the view of politeness strategies coined by Brown & Levinson and translation quality assessment proposed by Nababan, the study investigates the reconstruction of impoliteness strategies as a device for characterization in the subtitle of American TV Series The Big Bang Theory as well as the quality of the translation. Impoliteness strategies are used to frame characterization in the film. Therefore, the shift of strategies is deemed to affect the construal of characterization in the subtitle. Two episodes of the first season were selected for the analysis. The shifts found in the film are the shift from swearing positive impoliteness to no FTA and the shift from sarcasm off – record impoliteness to positive impoliteness. The shift caused by the omission of the strategies in the subtitle has a negative impact on the quality of translation. The shift caused by explicitation of the sarcasm off – record impoliteness strategies has a relatively positive effect on the quality, given that the interpretation of the implicature is conducted correctly.

Key words: film comedy, impoliteness strategies shift, characterization, translation quality

The Background of the Study

Films make use verbal conversation for various purposes. The verbal dialogue in film can function as narrative and aesthetics effects (Kozloff, 2000). As the most pivotal role, the narrative function of the dialogue, other than provides narrative mapping of the story, pertains directly to characterization. The characterization is not solely depicted in the visualization. It is also gathered from the dialogue. The way a character speaks reflects his/her personality, social class, emotional state and emotion, and so on (Kozloff, 2000:43 – 47; Phillip, 2000:70 - 71). Furthermore, it is stated that the relation between characterization and speech acts is fundamental (Culpeper & McIntyre, 2010:187). To be more specific, characterization can be unfolded through speech acts, beside his/her action (Downes, 1988:226).

The Big Bang Theory is one of many films that largely benefits from dialogue for framing characterization. It is an American TV Series Comedy (sitcom) that was firstly played on screen in 2007 and is still ongoing up to now. It is distinguished because the proportion of dialogue sketching out for characterization is more dominant than the visual acts. Most of characters in this series are portrayed to resort to impoliteness strategies in the dialogue (Irawan, 2012). Furthermore, one of the impoliteness strategies regularly exploited by the characters is off – records, employing implicature to function as sarcastic comedy (Prananta, 2015b). The sarcasm is applied as one of the dominant tools to achieve the comedy. The agenda is in conjunction with its genre, which is comedy.

The series tells about the relationship between four geniuses (Sheldon, Leonard, Rajesh and Howard) and a beautiful girl who works as a waiter in a cheesecake factory (Penny). Sheldon and Leonard are young physicists who work as researchers in the university. They live together in one apartment next to Penny’s apartment. Rajesh and Howard are their colleague who work at the same university. Among the four geniuses, Sheldon is the most brilliant. He received his doctor degree at the age of 15. Currently, the Texas-born boy is 27 and already got 2 doctor degrees and many international achievements. After him, Leonard and Rajesh are in order for brilliance. Howard is the only genius who has not yet got his doctor degree. Therefore, it makes him an object of bully by his peers. While, Penny is a beautiful girl who has not had a

degree at all. She has not even gone to college. She becomes Sheldon's object of bully for her dull-witted-ness. Nevertheless, she is the centre of attention for Leonard, Howard and Rajesh for her alluring look.

Such a background for characterization influences the tendency of the utilization of impoliteness strategies used by each character (Irawan, 2012). The phenomenon of impoliteness strategies here is viewed from the theory of politeness coined by Brown & Levinson (1987). Firstly, Sheldon is the cynosure in the story and in the heart of the viewers of this series for his peculiar character. He is illustrated to be the most sarcastic of all characters. Given his framework and upbringing as an educated and well – raised, if not strictly – raised boy from an orthodox family in Texas, he is portrayed to be the character who resorts to Off – Record impoliteness strategy benefitting a lot from sarcasms. He is rarely seen to be using Bald on Record or Positive impoliteness strategy. His three colleagues are also depicted to be as similar quality with him in dialogue. Even though, they are still sometimes seen to be conversing using Bald on Record or Positive Impoliteness strategy. On the other hand, Penny is described as a girl who frequently chooses Bald on Records or Positive Impoliteness strategy in the conversation. As a girl raised in Nebraska, her characterization is solidified with her regular use of swearing in her saying. That is how characters are construed through their tendency of using impoliteness strategies in film dialogue.

Consequently, in order to maintain the characterization, the translation of the utterances that carry the weight of impoliteness strategies in the film dialogue should be equivalent with the original text. The shift of strategies may therefore affect the construction of characters in the film. For viewers who have the access to the source language, it might not be a critical issue. However, for viewers who perceive subtitle as text substitute (main meaning – making source of verbal codes due to the absence of access to the source language), it is a serious problem (Goettlieb, 2005:5). It could lead them to construe a whole different character based on the translation given in the film. Moreover, it occurs in the film environment in which the meaning making resource is the verbal mode. In other words, the non verbal modes only serves as supporting or complementary meaning making resource. As a result, it is necessary to study how the impoliteness strategies employed by characters in the tv series 'The Big Bang Theory' is reconstructed in the subtitle.

Theoretical Framework and Method

The theoretical lens adopted in viewing the phenomenon of impoliteness strategies in the dialogue of the film is rooted from the theory of politeness proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987). Viewing impoliteness strategies from the starting point of politeness perspective is justified and also carried out by some experts (Culpeper, 1996; Leech, 2014). In this model, as politeness strategies, impoliteness strategies are categorized into four super strategies, namely Bald on Record, Positive, Negative and Off - Record. Bald on Record strategy is upheld when Face Threatening Act (FTA) is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimized. Positive strategy takes place when an utterance damages the addressee's positive face wants. Next, negative strategy is manifested when an utterance damages addressee's negative face wants. Last but not least, off-record strategy is when FTA is performed by means of implicature or sarcasm but in such a way that one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others.

Furthermore, in the department of measuring the quality of the translation, the model of translation quality proposed by Nababan, dkk (2012) is used. This model measures the quality of translation from holistic aspect. First, it examines the accuracy of the message delivered in the translation. Second, it concerns with the suitability of the language used with the culture and the norm of the target language. In the end, it investigates the response of the target readers on the translation. It is compulsory because translation, in its very own nature, is made for them.

Even though this study puts the weight of analysis on the shift of the impoliteness strategies and how it is reconstructed in the translation, to some extent it does not put aside the

discussion on the non-verbal codes accompanying the events of dialogue. Goettlieb’s model (2005) for the interaction between verbal and non - verbal code in film is adopted. In addition to that, Desilla’s model (2012) for the interpretation of implicature in multimodal texts is resourced.

The study was conducted using qualitative – case study approach. Two episodes of The Big Bang Theory from Season 1 aired in 2007 were chosen as data source. The data are in the form of all utterances that realize impoliteness strategies in the film. The data were taken by purposive sampling. The method of data collection is observation which is done by watching the film and jotting down the data (the source text and the subtitle). The data in source text and subtitle were then analyzed by using Brown & Levinson’s perspective to classify them into their respective categories of impoliteness strategies. After that, they were compared to locate the shift of strategies. The quality of the data subtitle were then investigated based on Nababan’s translation quality model.

Results and Discussion

There were found 79 utterances realizing impoliteness strategies in the two episodes of the tv series. In source text, the configuration of the impoliteness strategies realized by the speech acts exploited is as follows: 40 utterances manifesting positive impoliteness realized by 7 mocking speech acts, 15 swearing speech acts, 6 commenting speech acts, 4 disagreeing speech acts, 2 belittling speech acts, 2 scorning speech acts, 2 being disinterested speech acts, 1 daring speech act and 1 doubting speech act; 20 utterances manifesting off – record impoliteness realized by 20 sarcasms; 11 bald on record impoliteness strategy realized by 9 commanding speech acts, 1 refusing speech and 1 prohibiting speech act; 8 negative politeness realized by 6 requesting speech act, 1 suggesting speech act and 1 condescending speech act.

As of the translation, the reconstruction of impoliteness strategies in the translation is as follows: 36 positive impoliteness construed in 12 mocking speech acts, 2 swearing speech acts, 9 commenting speech acts, 4 disagreeing speech acts, 2 belittling speech acts, 3 scorning speech acts, 2 being disinterested speech acts, 1 daring speech act and 1 doubting speech act; 12 off – record impoliteness construed in 12 sarcasms; 11 bald on record impoliteness construed in 9 commanding speech acts, 1 refusing speech and 1 prohibiting speech act; 8 negative politeness construed in 6 requesting speech act, 1 suggesting speech act and 1 condescending speech act.

Table 1: Comparison of the composition of impoliteness strategies and the acts in source text and target text

Source Text		Target Text	
Type of Strategy	Type of Act	Type of Strategy	Type of Act
Positive (40)	Mocking (7)	Positive (36)	Mocking (12)
	Swearing (15)		Swearing (2)
	Commenting (6)		Commenting (9)
	Disagreeing (4)		Disagreeing (4)
	Belittling (2)		Belittling (2)
	Scorning (2)		Scorning (3)
	Being disinterested (2)		Being disinterested (2)
	Daring (1)		Daring (1)
Off – Records (20)	Doubting (1)	No FTA (12)	Doubting (1)
	Sarcasm (20)	Off – Records (12)	Sarcasm (12)
Bald on Record (11)	Commanding (9)	Bald on Record (11)	Commanding (9)
	Refusing (1)		Refusing (1)
	Prohibiting (1)		Prohibiting (1)

Negative (8)	Requesting (6)		Requesting (6)
	Suggesting (1)	Negative (8)	Suggesting (1)
	Condescending (1)		Condescending (1)

From the configuration of the impoliteness strategies in the source text and target text, some shifts are mapped. 1 speech act mocking is translated into scorning speech act, which does not shift the strategy but only the type of speech act. 6 of the rest is translated with original attribute. Then, 12 swearing speech acts are omitted in the translation, which makes the impoliteness strategy shift from positive politeness to no FTA strategy. 1 swearing speech act is translated into commenting speech act, making a change merely on the speech act type not in the category of impoliteness strategy. Only 2 swearing acts are preserved as they are in the source text. After then, from 20 sarcasm carrying the property of off-record impoliteness, 6 of them are translated into direct speech act mocking, which shifts the strategy from off-record to positive impoliteness. 2 of them are translated by changing the type of the speech acts into direct speech act commenting. While, the rest 12 sarcasms are maintained as sarcasm in the translation. The other strategies, negative and bald of record, denoting the respective speech acts are all are conserved in the translation with the same attribute as in the source text.

From the elaboration, it can be seen that the shift happens in two super strategies: positive and off record. The cardinal shift occurs in the case of swearing speech acts realizing positive impoliteness and sarcasms construing off-record impoliteness. First, the 12 swearing acts omitted in the translation are all of Penny's utterance. Also, 1 swearing translated into commenting act is also of her saying. As mentioned in the background of the study, swearing is utilized to characterize Penny as a rude girl born and raised in Nebraska (a state in the USA in which violence frequently occurs). The omission of the swearing positive impoliteness in the translation therefore affects the construction of Penny as a new character in the translation. On the other hand, the rest 2 acts of swearing that are preserved as the same quality with the original texts are of Leonard and Sheldon's utterance. Below are a swearing act of Penny that is omitted in the translation and a swearing act of Sheldon that is rendered in the translation:

ST

Penny: "*Son of a bitch!* Why would you get into my room when I was sleeping?"

Leonard: I'm sorry. Sheldon made me do that.

TT

Penny: "Kenapa kau masuk ke kamarku ketika aku sedang tidur?"

Leonard: Maaf. Sheldon menyuruhku.

ST

Leonard: come here and help me pull it

....

Sheldon: *ou gravity, thou art heartless bitch*

TT

Leonard: naik kesini dan Bantu aku menariknya

....

Sheldon: *oh gravitasi, kau jalang tak berhati nurani*

The two data presented above (the italicized) have something in common but also differ in a way. They are of the same speech act, swearing. However, from the choice of words, they are apart. Penny's use of words is direct and taboo. On the other hand, Sheldon's choice of words is some way artsy and old. The choice of words in Sheldon's case shows the quality of Sheldon as an educated man. It is understood that even when swearing, he resorts to a more lavish language. It is in an exact opposite with Penny's choice of words, which describes her attitude and her background of education. In this case, the non verbal codes at the given data have a little to do with the measure of omission or rendition of swearing words since the visual

code gives the same state of quality: the shot of Sheldon and Penny from medium range showing half of their body without background music.

Such an omission, viewed as if it were for the perspective of femininity and masculinity, still carries a huge gap of justification. Translator might have had a thought that since Penny is a woman. It is not of a habit that woman speaks rude language. Therefore the measure of omission was conducted. As of for all the rude language swearing said by Leonard and Sheldon, translator might have thought that it is of casualty that boys, or men, speak rude language. Culturally, it is acceptable. However, such a thought hinders the bigger agenda. It goes against the established notion of characterization based on the impoliteness strategies exploited by characters. With the omission, Penny's depiction as a rude girl speaking bad language from Nebraska is lost.

Next, in case of the explicitation of sarcasm of off – record strategy into direct speech acts, there is a justification for this decision. The 8 data that were explicated are all of the same attribute in which they occur in the non verbal environment that functions only as accompanying mode for the dialogue, instead of functioning as the main source for meaning making. In addition to that, the premise for interpreting the implicature is implicit premise, which requires viewers to understand the story, characters, as a whole from within text or intertextually (Desilla, 2012; Prananta, 2015a). Nevertheless, this explicitation takes the function of comedy away (Prananta, 2015b). It goes against Nida & Taber's principle about preserving style of the language enveloping the message carried (1969). As for the remaining 12 data of sarcasm that are maintained as sarcasms in the translation, they occur in the non verbal environment that functions as the main meaning – making resource. Therefore, viewers are expected to unfold the implied meaning based on the visual code, too. Also, the premise for the interpretation of the implicature does not require the knowledge of whole characters and stories either within text or intertextually (Desilla, 2012; Prananta, 2015a).

ST

Leonard: What makes you think she wouldn't have sex with me? I'm a male and she's a female.

Sheldon: *Yes, but not of the same species.*

TT

Leonard: Apa yang membuatmu berpikir dia tidak akan berhubungan seks denganku?

Sheldon: *Ya, tetapi pendidikan kalian berbeda.*

ST

watching Leonard failed to open the locked doors

Sheldon: *It's such a privilege to see your mind at work*

TT

Sheldon: *Senang sekali bisa melihat cara otakmu bekerja*

The first example is a sarcasm that is explicated in the translation while the second one is a sarcasm that is rendered as sarcasm in the translation. In the first example, the premise for interpreting implicature requires the knowledge of the character of Penny and Leonard. Besides, the visual code given at the time is merely the wide shot of Sheldon and Leonard sitting in the kitchen drinking coffee. It has nothing much to do to help viewers interpret the meaning of the implicature. Thus, the explicitation was carried out. In the second example, the premise for interpreting the implicature does not require the knowledge of any character or a story from intertextuality. In addition to that, the visual code at the time is showing Sheldon watching Leonard trying to open a locked door by force but he fail. The visual code in this case functions as the main meaning making resource. In the base of the two reasons, the preservation of the implicit form is justified. Besides, by preserving the implicit form, translator also preserves the style of the language that functions as sarcastic comedy which marks the genre of the comedy tv series.

Eventually, the measurement of the translation quality is given below:

Table 2: The translation quality of the speech acts (instances of impoliteness strategies)

Type of Strategy	Type of Act	Translation Quality								
		Accuracy			Acceptability			Readability		
		3	2	1	3	2	1	3	2	1
Positive (35)	Mocking (12)	12			12			12		
	Swearing (2)	2			2			2		
	Commenting (9)	9			8		1	8		1
	Disagreeing (4)	4			4			4		
	Belittling (2)	2			2			2		
	Scorning (3)	3			3			3		
	Being disinterested (2)	2			2			2		
	Daring (1)	1			1			1		
	Doubting (1)	1			1			1		
No FTA (12)									12	
Off – Records (12)	Sarcasm (12)	7	5		7	5		7	5	
Bald on Record (11)	Commanding (9)	9			9			9		
	Refusing (1)	1			1			1		
	Prohibiting (1)	1			1			1		
Negative (8)	Requesting (6)	6			6			6		
	Suggesting (1)	1			1			1		
	Condescending (1)	1			1			1		

From the table of translation quality measurement above, most of data are rated of high accuracy (3), of high acceptability (3) and of high readability (3) and some data are measured to have medium accuracy (2), medium acceptability (2), medium readability (2) or even to have low quality (1) for the three categories. All swearing acts that are omitted (No FTA) in the translation are automatically rated inaccurate, unacceptable and having low readability. The deletion of information means a betrayal to the message. In the case of sarcasms, all 8 explicated sarcasm are rated to have all high quality from the three categories. Translator were successful in interpreting their meaning and in bringing it in the translation. As for the 12 sarcasms kept implicit in the translation, 5 of them are rated of medium accuracy, acceptability and readability. This happens because the 5 data are long utterances with many physics references in them. Translator might misunderstand some elements in the utterances and therefore when delivering in the translation, he failed. 1 commenting speech act is rated of high accuracy but with low acceptability and readability. It is because the use of naturalized borrowing translation technique. Overall, it can be deduced that the quality of the translation of the utterances construing impoliteness strategies in the subtitle of tHe Big Bang Theory is good enough.

Conclusion

The impoliteness strategies are used to frame characterization in The Big Bang Theory. Positive impoliteness swearing is used to depict the character of Penny as a rude beautiful girl who was born and raised in Nebraska. On the other hand, sarcasms mark the characterization of Sheldon and his colleagues. The omission of the positive impoliteness strategies realized in swearing act in the subtitle gives a whole new perspective on Penny’s character. Furthermore, the explication of the sarcasms taken by translator in order to help viewers understand the message precipitates the loss of their intended function as comedy. The omission of the swearing act, thus the omission of impoliteness strategies, in the subtitle results in the bad quality of the translation. Then, the explication of the sarcasms, despite nullifying their intended function as comedy, still correspond to a positive effect on translation quality.

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