

## MEANING ACCURACIES AND INACCURACIES IN TITANIC'S INDONESIAN SUBTITLES

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**Abstract:** *Nowadays, there are more and more chances for movie maniacs to satisfy their great interest to watch over different kinds of film genre every time and everywhere. They can easily get them at Video rental and watch them at home or go to Cineplex as they wish. From the foreign film screen, they see subtitles. Usually the film audiences watch it without thinking seriously about the accurate or inaccurate subtitles. In fact, subtitle is the key to understand the meaning of the contents in foreign languages. However, it is impossible to deny that film translators are not always professional ones. They sometimes make unnecessary inaccurate meanings in film subtitling as likely found in several foreign movies shown in Indonesia. This article will guide the readership to find out that in such a world-class and famous movie like Titanic, accuracy and inaccuracy of its subtitles are surprisingly found.*

**Keywords:** subtitles, accurate, inaccurate, film audience, contextual meaning

This article is not intended to judge how translators work to produce film subtitles but rather to let film audiences notice how effective it will be if any foreign language learner among the audiences makes use of film subtitles to improve his mastery of the language used in the film. In analyzing the data, I am not referring to any theory of producing film subtitles but more likely using the theories of meaning in translation to my understanding. The accuracies and inaccuracies of Indonesian subtitles found in any film here are mostly based on my point of view about how the two of them occur. Therefore, I believe there will be some insightful comments from everyone reading this article for the sake of its perfection.

Let me start the discussion by remembering a piece of philosophical advice from a professor of mine in college. In his Philosophy class, once he claimed to have experienced a better way of winning someone's heart to be his soul mate. In a case of a boy who was in love and crazy about a girl, the professor would obviously advise the boy to forget about the adorable and sweet things of the girl. And instead of forgetting them, the boy should have known better about her bad things rather than the good ones. By doing this, the boy would never regret if he finally embraced her charms and sweet love. He could win her heart by tolerating those bad things whatsoever. This unthinkable advice had been in my mind for years until then I knew that it is relatively unfair to judge people only from one particular side. It means that to gain an intimate and harmonious quality of human relationship in the future,

he must only care for her bad sides and put aside her good ones. To be frank, he absolutely needs more than that. Good and bad sides of someone at heart should be considered equally well together. And if he does so, his life will be wonderful ever after.

The above illustration is more or less similar to learning a new language of which all aspects in the new language have no exception to be taken care of. Today quite a few popular ways of improving new language mastery are gained through listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating skills. To achieve a good mastery of a new language, watching films could be one of the best 'remedies' for language learners. By watching foreign films, one will manage to escape gradually from his poor auditory comprehension, poor speaking mastery, as well as poor translation skill of a foreign language. For the language learners in Indonesia, translation in film dialogs is believed to contribute better evidence towards their remarkable achievement in maintaining what they have learnt through films. Recently multi media use in language learning or teaching has been proved effective in the successive efforts of memorizing things. Needless to say, new words and expressions from the films we just watch, for instance, would remain longer in our brains for a life time. This reminds me of being a freshman in the local college. Due to the lack of my vocabulary and limited auditory comprehension ability, I frequently failed in predicting the accurate translation that would appear on any Indonesian subtitles of foreign film series on TV. In 'Hunter', a very popular TV film series among young generation in 1980s, for example, there is one particular scene that I never forget. In a crowded traffic somewhere in the city, the man named Hunter in his speeding car was pursuing a suspect of drunken driving. The officer on duty usually would overtake any vehicles around including the traffic lights. As his speeding car was approaching the suspect's in an intersection, suddenly a lady in her old car from another direction was coming towards him but Hunter managed to escape from the terrible crash and stopped the car right next to the lady's car. Then he got out of his car and went toward the lady by saying 'Wow, that was pretty close, mam! I'm sorry'. The Indonesian subtitle is 'Hampir saja, bu! Maaf ya.' I never knew before that the word *close* would be best rendered into *hampir* in that context. I was thinking of the word *dekat* or *tutup* for its equivalent as I managed to hear the original text and I was wrong. However, I came to know that the word *hampir* was the most accurate meaning for the word *close* in that context of situation. Then about 8 years ago, I watched "Pearl Harbor" film in a cinema. In the battleship of aircrafts, a pilot who had just been shot shouted at his fellow American pilot 'Uhh, I'm hit'. To my surprise, the Indonesian subtitle or the translation was 'Aku kena'. I thought that the meaning appearing on the film screen would be 'Saya tertembak' or 'Saya dipukul' as I heard over the original text. Another example is from a scene in a film on TV. In a classroom, a teacher entering the class found out only fewer students attending a class. Like in our own country, a teacher often comes up with a question 'Mana yang lainnya?' in a typical situation. The same thing found in the subtitle of that film and I had to admit that my

prediction was wrong about the original text in English. I heard ‘*Where is everyone?*’ which tends to be the most common expression used in that context of situation not ‘*Where are the others?*’ as I predicted. The accuracy in the translation of film dialogs in the films above has obviously helped me up to learn and produce accurate translations of my own through excessive lessons afterwards. In the beginning of my first effort to gain more English lessons through films, I used to complain about my auditory breakdown. Oftentimes I could not believe in the complexity of translating film dialogs. What appears in the Indonesian subtitles on film screen is frequently beyond my predictions and takes me by surprise until now. That could be the reason why I never take my eyes off the film subtitles and only pay little attention to the pictures. However, I gradually manage to learn many new words and useful expressions after watching more foreign films since then.

The dialogs above are just a sample of accurate translation found in some film subtitles some years ago and the similar accuracy still goes on until today. Most of the private television stations in Indonesia reshow box-office films. Their remarkable attraction to film audiences perhaps is one of the reasons why TV stations play them on again in their prime-time show. It becomes obvious that meaning accuracy still persists as the subtitled films are repeatedly shown on TV. On the other hand, meaning inaccuracy in film subtitles may also take place as film translators are sometimes not really professional in producing the target subtitles. It is proved by some following samples like in the film ‘*Broke-Back Mountain*’ in which one character in that film said more or less like this...*he lives in Broke-Back Mountain* (... ia tinggal di balik gunung). Here the inaccuracy occurs probably due to some possible factors (1) the translator was lack of information about the mountain mentioned where it is actually a mountain name somewhere in Wyoming, USA (2) the translator did not have the subtitle rechecked to look out for the probable inaccuracy in the subtitles. And in ‘*Gothika*’, the lady doctor said to her husband more or less like this ...*Right now, my mind is running on empty* (Sekarang, pikiranku berjalan pada kekosongan) This inaccuracy occurs probably because the translator employed word-for-word translation to the target subtitles and never thought of employing another type of translation to achieve accurate translation. This figures why it results in an unreadable translation to the target audience. From the above samples, meaning accuracy of the word choices in the two films is absent. Such a case would then lead some particular audiences to some confusion in understanding the film’s whole story.

### **Translating film dialogs**

Foreign films have been quite familiar to Indonesian film audiences for decades. They even enjoy watching foreign films more than the local ones for many reasons. Language learning is one of the reasons to some particular audiences. Language learners tend to turn to foreign films for both pleasure and study. Films obviously help language learners improve their mastery of language skills. Translation as one of the language skills is believed to bring

film audiences to a much better understanding of a foreign film. Without subtitled films, foreign film audiences will surely find it difficult to follow the dialogs and difficult to be entertained at the same time.

There are two main reasons why translating foreign films is crucial in Indonesia. Firstly, a great majority of Indonesian film audiences understands merely their mother tongue or their lingua franca, Indonesian language; only a few film audiences understand the languages (English in most cases) used in foreign films. It shows that their mastery of English is yet insufficient. In order to understand the dialogs in a foreign film, many viewers still rely much on the Indonesian subtitles frame by frame or otherwise they might lose the flow of its story. Secondly, a large number of highly qualified films are foreign films. It is proved, in comparison to local films, by the greater number of viewers who eagerly get themselves in a long queue to buy the tickets when they are on. Film producers and directors would totally be responsible for fulfilling the expectations of film audiences such as the accuracy and clarity of the translated materials. Meaning faithfulness is very crucial in this work too. They realize this constraint and then provide every film with its subtitles in order for film audiences to be really entertained. In fact, film audiences especially language learners see subtitled films as a means to progress in a foreign language which in most cases is English, as well as to enjoy the film.

Every kind of translation works involves not only the languages but also culture in the countries where the languages are spoken. Translation is not only changing writings from one language to another, words by words, sentences by sentences but also interpretation of cultural differences. To be a professional translator, one definitely requires a lot of enormous efforts and experiences. Translation in film dialogs, however, is another means of getting a better awareness to the new language he/she learns. Speaking of translating film dialogs, there are two kinds of translating films dialogs. They are subtitling and dubbing (Hoed, 2003: 6). In Indonesia, every foreign film in theaters is always provided with Indonesian subtitles but not with dubbing. Dubbing is only found on television film series such as cartoon films for children like 'Sponge Bob and Square Pants' and Mexican film series (better known as Telenovela).

Subtitling – as a means of overcoming linguistic barriers between the nations – will come to play its critical role. Accurate subtitles will help the audiences of a foreign film enjoy any of it more easily since there are no longer linguistic barriers for them. However, adding to the complexity of the usual translation, Matsumoto says that translation for film subtitles involves very unique and interesting procedures which do not exist in other works of translation (2003:100). There are basically two stages to make subtitles ready for film audiences to enjoy. Stage 1: Translating materials from the source language to the target one, and Stage 2: Making subtitles from the translated materials. Although the work of subtitling needs to consider some guidelines for production and layout of film subtitles in regard to the subtitling standards, this article however will not discuss further about the production and technical appearances of subtitles in a foreign film.

### Accuracy and Inaccuracy in film subtitles

Subtitles of a foreign film are produced to gain maximum appreciation and attraction of film audiences. In this regard, film translators have of course given their best efforts to produce film subtitles along with their accuracy in meaning. If accuracy in meaning is not achieved, the audiences will find it difficult to be entertained. Along with it, there are things that have to be taken into account when subtitling becomes subject to discuss. To most film audiences in Indonesia, accuracy and inaccuracy of Indonesian subtitles in a foreign film are not their main concern to come to a movie theater. In general, they tend to ignore them both and seem to tolerate the inaccuracies even if they come across them. But perhaps for a few audiences, the accuracy and inaccuracy of film subtitles become an interesting lesson to learn as soon as they walk out of the theater. The writer of this article is one of those few audiences. In almost every occasion to watch a film, I always pay more attention to the translated text or subtitles and the original texts in the dialogs of the source language than the desired story. Sometimes I failed to retell the story of that film to others just because my attention was too much absorbed in that activity. Honestly, I never worry about it since I have got ‘what I want’ already. Here are some accuracies and inaccuracies of film dialogs that have absorbed my attention in two different film titles for the past three years.

| Film title   | Accurate subtitle   | Comment   |
|--------------|---|---|
| The Terminal | <p><b>Source Language (SL):</b><br/>Everything he does comes back to me!</p> <p><b>Target Language (TL):</b><br/><b>Semua perlakuannya harus dilaporkan padaku.</b></p> | <p>The context of situation is the man in charge of the airport ordered his man to give a report of any single move the suspicious man makes in the airport. So if the translator ignores the context of situation in the scene, the probable translation would be <b>Semua yang dia kerjakan kembali padaku.</b> This may be interpreted as if the suspicious man works for him and so the word choices and the sentence type change into a passive one preserving the accuracy in meaning of the target language.</p> |

| Film title   | Inaccurate subtitle   | Comment   |
|--------------|---|---|
| The Terminal | <p><b>Source Language (SL):</b><br/>No, I'll show him the door</p> <p><b>Target Language (TL):</b><br/><b>Tidak. Aku akan tunjukkan pintu.</b></p>              | <p>The context of situation is almost exactly the same. The man in charge of the airport was talking to his man and so eager to show the suspicious man the exit door of the airport. By doing this, he could arrest the man for breaking free without any warning from the local authority in the airport to the land of Dreams, United States of America. Seemingly the translator ignores the context of situation in the scene and so he came up with word-for-word translation in the TL. The suggested translation would be more or less like this. <b>Jangan. Aku saja yang tunjukkan dia pintu keluarnya.</b></p> |
| Film title   | Accurate subtitle   | Comment   |
| Gothika      | <p><b>Source Language (SL):</b><br/>Maybe, they're just too medicated!</p> <p><b>Target Language (TL):</b><br/><b>Mungkin dia terlalu banyak minum obat</b></p> | <p>The context of situation is when a lady doctor in her husband's office is reporting to him after visiting a patient named Chloe who likes embellishing her rape stories at present days. Her husband suggests that she should give the patient time. Not only time she gives but also a number of medicine names. That's why she thinks that the patient is just too medicated. The translation that appears</p>   |

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|  |  | <p>on the screen is very accurate and readable to Indonesian audience. The translator replaces the grammatical pattern in the SL to suit the one in the TL to gain this accuracy in meaning. If the grammatical pattern in the SL is preserved in the TL, and then the translation would be approximately like this: <b>Mungkin, dia hanya terlalu diobati.</b> If translated this way, so the TL text would sound unreadable and strange to the target audience.</p> |
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| Film title | Inaccurate subtitle  | Comment   |
|------------|--|---|
| Gothika    | <p><b>Source Language (SL):</b><br/>No, no, no, let me circumcise it for you</p> <p><b>Target Language (TL):</b><br/><b>Tidak. Ijinkan aku. Disunat untukmu.</b></p> | <p>The context of situation is when the lady doctor's husband is about to leave his office and he stops off by the door to offer his wife's colleague a cigar. He also takes out his cigar cutter and asks to do the cutting for him before he lights it on. The possibilities of the inaccuracy are (1) the translator seems to leave the scene unseen (2) the translator ignores the context of situation in the scene and then comes up with the literal meaning of the word <b>circumcise</b> and the suggested translation is <b>Jangan. Biar aku saja yang potongkan.</b></p> |

### **Accuracies and inaccuracies in Titanic's Indonesian subtitles**

A film as an art work is produced to meet human needs. Quite often, film stories are inspired by real life stories around us. Many film audiences come to see a movie for many reasons and one of them is because the movie is made based on a true story. And this typical film is the one that everybody is frequently looking out for.

Since it is an art, a film is necessarily to be enjoyed. However, the audiences will enjoy a film more when they speak the same language as the one in the film or they have the ability to understand the language used in it. In order to head off some of the dissatisfaction which can arise from the audiences' ability of not knowing the language used in a film, subtitles are provided to help them out.

The subtitles in foreign films are aimed to provide maximum appreciation and comprehension of the target film as a whole by maximizing the readability of the inserted subtitled text. However, to gain a judgment to the quality of a translation work as a whole, there are various aspects to count on such as accuracy, naturalness, and readability and they should also be taken into account thoroughly. According to Larson (1984: 6), the best translation is identified through several things like (1) making use of natural target language, (2) conveying as many equivalences as possible to the speakers of target language as understood clearly by the speakers of source language, (3) maintaining the dynamic rhythm of source language texts. Meanwhile, Soemarno (1988: 5) suggests that good translation reflects (1) the accuracy in meaning of both original and target texts, (2) the message of original text is transferred correctly into target text, (3) the naturalness of target text is preserved as in original text.

Accuracy refers to preserving the meaning of the original text. The term accuracy is essentially synonymous with the term faithfulness, but some translation theoreticians differentiate between the two terms. A translation which is accurate is faithful to the intended meaning of the original author ([www.geocities.com/bible\\_translation/glossco.htm](http://www.geocities.com/bible_translation/glossco.htm)). Meaning occurs at many different levels of language, including the levels of the word (lexicon), phrase, clause, sentence and discourse. The best translations have thorough accuracy, that is, accuracy at all levels of language. A translation can be accurate, at least in a commonly used sense of the term, at the word level, but not at higher levels of language. A single word of an idiom is for an example. It may be accurately translated, but if the meaning of the whole idiom is not communicated adequately in the translation, then that translation is not accurate for that idiom

In 1997, *Titanic* meaning 'floating palace' was one of the best-selling films ever made. Directed by James Cameron and produced by Twentieth Century Fox and Paramount Pictures, this 194-minute film won eleven categories of Academy Award including best picture and best director. Meanwhile, at the Golden Globe Awards, *Titanic* took the best dramatic



picture award. Featuring no A-list stars of that time (Leonardo DiCaprio played Jack Dawson and Kate Winslet played Rose Dewitt Bukater), this genuinely great film is an interesting topic for discussion. *Titanic* proved unstoppable for some weeks at the box office ten years ago. Quite recently more and more private Television stations in Indonesia seem to have taken turns playing it over and over again on their primetime film programs. As time passes, it is not surprising by now if film audiences have watched *Titanic* more than once either in cinemas, home videos or on television owing to its breathtaking epic story as well as historical romance at the same time.

Considering the same chances for both meaning accuracy and inaccuracy found in a great film like *Titanic*, the inserted Indonesian subtitles in this film is of great interest to the writer. Below are the data which I gathered based on my perception towards meaning accuracy and inaccuracy in the film **Titanic**. However, only the following data that attracted my attention more are put into the desirable classification according to the theories of meaning in translation such as stylistic, textual, contextual or situational, grammatical, lexical, affective, referential and thematic meanings.

| No | Accurate  | Meaning Preserved | Inaccurate  | Meaning Suggested                                    |
|----|---|-------------------|---|--|
| 1  | Wasn't I a dish, dear?<br><i>Cantik, bukan ?</i><br>The word <b>dish</b> is a slang word meaning adorable | contextual        | ... a week before he sailed on Titanic<br><i>Seminggu sebelum Titanic</i>   | grammatical<br><i>seminggu sebelum naik Titanic</i>  |
| 2  | Have you been through inspection queue?<br><i>Sudah lewat inspeksi?</i>                                   | situational       | Outwardly I was everything a well-brought up girl I should be...inside I was screaming<br><i>Dari luar aku gadis penurut, di dalam hati aku gelisah</i> | textual<br>di dalam hatiku berontak                  |
| 3  | Don't presume to tell me what I will or not do. You don't know me<br><i>Jangan sok tahu</i>               | situational       | Sorry, you just seem like a kind of indoor girl<br><i>Maaf kau tampak seperti wanita dalam rumah</i>  | endocentric<br>maaf, sepertinya kau kurang bergaul   |
| 4  | Let's stretch her legs<br><i>Kita bisa santai sejenak</i>   | referential       | Cal, stop! It was an accident<br><i>Cal hentikan itu kecelakaan</i>   | situational<br>Cal, hentikan! tidak sengaja tadi itu |

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| 5  | Is that the going rate for saving the woman you love?<br><i>Hanya itu untuk menyelamatkan wanita yang kau cintai?</i> | grammatical               |  |   |
| 6  | What is this stupid thing you're carrying around?<br><i>Ini apa yang kau bawa?</i>                                    | contextual                | I saw that in a nickelodeon once, and I always wanted to do it<br><i>Aku pernah lihat ini di teater, dan ingin sekali melakukannya</i> | literal<br>Aku pernah lihat ini di nickelodeon<br>..... |
| 7  | It's rather good<br><i>Ini boleh juga</i>   | stylistic                 |  |   |
| 8  | And these were drawn from life?<br><i>Dan ini dari gambar nyata</i>   | grammatical               |  |   |
| 9  | You mean one leg on each side?<br><i>Maksudmu mengangkang?</i>  | grammatical               |  |   |
| 10 | You're about to go into a snake pit<br><i>Kau akan masuk sarang beludak</i>   | affective and grammatical |  |   |
| 11 | I work my way from place to place<br><i>Aku kerja serabutan</i>   | grammatical               |  |   |
| 12 | ...and that name is the only card we have to play<br><i>...nama itu modal kita</i>                                    | contextual                |  |   |
| 13 | Jack, this is impossible. I can't see you<br><i>Jack ini mustahil. Aku tak bisa menemuimu.</i>                        | grammatical               |  |   |
| 14 | Where is everyone?<br><i>Di mana yang lainnya?</i>  | contextual                |  |   |

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| 15 | ...if she goes down<br>by the head<br><i>jika haluan<br/>tenggelam</i>   | referential |  |  |
| 16 | Don't worry. I am a<br>survivor<br><i>Jangan khawatir<br/>aku akan selamat</i>   | grammatical |  |  |
| 17 | I'm sorry I dropped<br>the keys<br><i>Maaf, kuncinya jatuh</i>   | thematic    |  |  |
| 18 | She is the largest<br>moving object ever<br>made by the hand of<br>man in all history<br><i>Kapal ini benda<br/>bergerak terbesar<br/>yang pernah dibuat<br/>manusia</i> | thematic    |  |  |
| 19 | If this is the<br>direction the rats<br>were running, it's<br>good enough for me<br><i>Kita pergi ke mana<br/>arah tikus ini berlari</i>                                 | contextual  |  |  |
| 20 | The pumps buy you<br>time... but minutes<br>only<br><i>Pompa cuma bisa<br/>memberi waktu...Ini<br/>juga dalam hitungan<br/>menit</i>                                     | grammatical |  |  |
| 21 | She is made of iron,<br>sir. I assure you, she<br>can. And she will.<br>.....<br><i>Ini kapal besi, bisa<br/>tenggelam dan ia<br/>akan tenggelam...</i>                  | referential |  |  |
| 22 | I'd rather be his<br>whore than your<br>wife<br><i>Lebih baik daripada<br/>jadi istrimu</i>  | contextual  |  |  |
| 23 | I prefer not to push<br>the engines until  | grammatical |  |  |

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| they've properly run in<br><i>Maaf, rasanya aku tak paksakan mesin sebelum lewat masa inreyen</i> |  |  |  |
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### Conclusion

Translation is indeed a complicated work. There are many aspects translators should rely on. Translating film dialogs is not as simple as it looks. Almost all film audiences never care about how subtitles appear on the screen and how to get them produced or done. To make them accurate on film screen as subtitles, film translators have to work very hard. Furthermore, subtitles are considered as the key to understand meanings of the content in a foreign film. As judging any translation works is relatively complex, it always considers who perceive them and what they are meant for. So, any explanation and judgment over Titanic's Indonesian subtitles are merely of the writer's perception. Personal experiences of the writer over time of viewing films may bring great influences on the findings of data analysis in this article. Due to the writer's immaturity in this interesting field of study, criticisms for the article's perfection are of the writer's best concern. That would be very rewarding to the writer if there were anybody willing to improve it to look much more readable to readership. To the students who are studying Translation, you can learn from both sides of film subtitles. Information on accurate and inaccurate in meaning above will probably help you think of producing your own desirable translation works.

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