



# Common Problems and Overt Errors in Translating Idioms in The Film Maleficent

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## Abstract

Overt and Covert errors are categorized as translation assessments that focus on functional match of lexical items. This study investigates functional equivalence (overt error) in translating idioms in the American fantasy film Maleficent. This study aims to explore the common problems in translating idioms because of non-equivalence and to describe the overt errors. The study used a mixed (qualitative and quantitative) research design, with random sampling technique used for data collection. The data of this study comprised twenty idioms from the film Maleficent, with the objective to examine the problem of non-equivalence in translating idioms. Baker's Functional Target Language Equivalence theory of translation and House' Model of Translation Quality Assessment were used to figure out overt errors. The study found out eight common translation problems including complexity of source-language words; difference in expressive meaning; source-language concept not lexicalized in the target language; source and target languages make different distinctions in meaning; target language lacks superordinate, cultural-specific concepts and specific terms. In addition, the study also discovered some overt errors in translating idioms due to breach of language system; change in meaning; cultural filtering, and distortion of meaning. This study was confined to only those idioms which have common non-equivalence problems; hence generalization of findings is not emphasized.

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**Keywords:** Idioms; Translation Evaluation; Overt Error; Maleficent.

## Introduction

Translation is an interesting subject as it requires translators to be creative in order to translate aspects of linguistics and culture. The quality of translation depends upon the evaluation of linguistic, semantic, and stylistic attributes of the two texts in the source and target languages. A translated text can be evaluated as accurate if both the source and target texts are equivalent from cultural and linguistic points of view. Ehsani & Zohrabi (2014) argue that equivalence is important in situational dimensions and linguistic materials, since linguistics diversity makes the process of translation complex (Padbidri et al., 2023), and it often necessitates

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to eliminate semantic ambiguity to achieve the accuracy of translation (Acciarino, 2017).

Several recent studies have investigated the strategies used in translating idioms of Arabic-English (Yousef, 2024). Sinambela (2023) analyzes the translation strategy of idioms translated by senior students; Trantescu & Reiss (2022) investigate idiom translation strategy with a cognitive linguistics approach; and Baziotis (2023) has evaluated the translation of idioms through neuro-machine-translation (NMT) method. Although these studies accept that situation plays a capital role in translating idioms; it is not clear the exact problem and covert error that the translators experience in translating idioms.

There are four kinds of idioms: pure idiom, figurative idiom, semi-idiom, and open collocation (Yousef, 2024). A pure idiom is a perfect idiom in constant use; a figurative idiom is invariable and pure; a semi-idiom is a combination of two words that have a figurative sense; and an open collocation is a flexible combination of words with invariable sense and form. Cucchiaroni, Hubers, & Strik (2022) classified idioms as (a) identical in form and meaning, (b) different in meaning, but identical in form; and (c) existing in L2 only. Longman dictionary divides idioms into twelve types, involving traditional idioms, allusions, saying, and similes. Several other experts have also defined idioms into several types.

The problems in translating idioms are typological and genetical (Vychodilova, 2013). A typological problem is a semantic feature, structure and verb form. It indicates the basic problem of translating idioms into semantic contrast, structure and verb forms. Genetic problems lead to correspondence of meaning between source to target language (Croft, 2023). Indo-European languages correspond to genetic problems substantively. It can be concluded that Indo-English have similar properties such as language system but meaning correspondence of idiom becomes a complex problem.

A second major problem is of non-equivalence in translating idioms from source language to target language (Alekseyeva, 2021). Non-equivalence is although mainly due to the difference of language and culture. The translator can apply a large corpus belonging to a different time to solve the problem of non-equivalence for translating idioms. Idioms (Su, 2021) and culture (Alaa & Al Sawi, 2023; Marsheva et al., 2019) are the most problematic areas in translation. It is not easy to translate idioms since not all source idioms have equivalents to target idioms due to cultural differences (Chen, 2020). Culture-specific idioms pose problems in literary translations which are unacceptable to the target readers (Ndlovu, 2000). As a result, translators face challenges in translating idioms with utmost linguistic and cultural competence. In other words, the translator must have overall competence before translating source idiom to target idiom (Naidj & Motahari, 2019).

The film industry currently has adopted several translation projects, which have resulted in high production values for films (Giráldez-Cru et al., 2024). In addition to that Chilakamarri (2023) states that there is an instructional value in using popular and controversial films to discuss ethics in business-related settings. Locher (2020) states that subtitlers must be creative to produce a polite translation version culturally and linguistically, especially in translating awards films which have high viewers (Setyawan, Prasetyowati, & Kurniasih, 2020). Every dialogue in a film contains idioms, which enhance the glory of language (Mishra, Chakrawarti, & Bansal, 2019).

This study investigates the problems of functional equivalence by examining two types of errors, overt errors and covert errors, in translating idioms in the American fantasy film *Maleficent*. The overt error of idioms can be seen by comparing the translation of idioms in both source and target languages. The covert errors in translation can be seen when a translator attempts to re-create dimensional situation in both source and target languages. To avoid such errors, the translators have to create similar profiles or dimensions of language like field, tenor, mode, genre and function of the text. Recent studies (Mondal et al., 2023) declare that evaluation approaches play an important role in producing high-quality translations. For this study, the evaluation of overt and covert errors was based on Baker's (2018) Functional Target Language Equivalence theory of translation and House's (2014) Model of Translation Quality Assessment. This study is significant as it laid down methods to achieve high-quality translation (Baziotis, 2023) and to describe translation problems and overt errors with respect to translating of idioms in the film *Maleficent*. This study widely contributes to language learning, especially in teaching translation for linguistics (idiom) competence. This study shows how to reduce overt errors and produce high translation quality by knowing translators' problems in translating idioms.

## Literature Review

### *Translation Evaluation*

Translation evaluation is very important to achieve accurate translation. Asscher & Glikson (2023) state that the key concept for evaluation is on linguistic, semantic, and stylistic attributes of the two texts, and often make claims about the accuracy and reliability of a translation using formal comparison with its source. The product of translation can be said accurate if the source and target texts are equivalent from cultural and linguistic points of view. Ehsani & Zohrabi (2014) state that equivalence is important in situational dimensions and linguistic materials. Padbidri et al. (2023) argues that linguistics diversity makes the process of translation complex. Acciarino (2017) believe that semantic ambiguity needs to be eliminated to achieve the accuracy of translation.

Zakraoui et al. (2020) states that human translation is very costly and steady. Nababan & Nuraeni (2012) suggest using a minimum of three inter-raters to measure the translation quality, accuracy, acceptability, and readability. This model is costly to do, however, some linguistic engineers try to develop a machine translation model for evaluating the translation product. Sipayung et al. (2021) declare that the weakness of machine translation is disability to evaluate extralinguistic situations. It means that even machine translation cannot give a satisfying result for this purpose. Several alternatives are given for solutions to evaluate the translation, some of which are based on Baker's (2018). Functional Target Language Equivalence theory of translation and House's (2014) Model of Translation Quality Assessment.

There are several concepts of evaluation in translation. Martin & White (2005) describe evaluation of translation in terms of different components of an author's attitude towards people and phenomena mentioned in the text, the intensity of that attitude (graduation), and the ways the author aligns himself/herself with the sources of attitude (engagement). Munday, Pinto, & Blakesley (2022) declare that evaluation of the so-called 'critical points' in a text requires interpretation and in some cases substantive intervention from the translator. House (2014) used a different term on evaluation to achieve translation quality assessment, and pointed out three issues in translation evaluation. The first is the relationship between source and target (language/text); the second is the relationship between text and receivers of text; (Register: field, tenor, and mode), and finally the relationship between target text and source text (genre).

### Problems in Translation

Translating a text from the source language to the target language encounters complicated problems (van Doorslaer & Tähepõld-Tammert, 2022), which translators have to solve by various strategies. Translation is a complex activity that requires diverse knowledge and skills as well. Obeidat & Mahadi (2020) states that it is difficult to derive the real meanings of idioms from their literal meaning. Hussein & Ilhami (2023) state that the problems of translation arise from cultural and linguistic factors. One of the strategies to solve this problem is to relate cultural knowledge to reading and understanding by the translator (Lu & Han, 2024). By having a good understanding of the culture as well, the translator can easily complete a translation. In other words, to achieve accurate translation translators have to consider the implications of culture as well. Getta (2021) states that culture is "the soul" of literary text and it is also an important factor in translation.

Translation errors can occur because of the translator's lack of linguistic competence. The unfamiliar source language term leads to the translator's difficulty in revealing the equivalence (Nurrahmawati & Sudirman, 2021). House (2014) divides errors into two, namely overtly erroneous errors and covertly erroneous errors. Faryad et al. (2021) introduce seven categories of overtly erroneous errors which pertain to scenarios like: not translated, slight changes in meanings, significant change in meanings, distortion of meanings, breach of the source language system, creative translation, and cultural filtering.

### Translation Errors: Covert and Overt

Some translation errors show a standard of translation quality, which is why translators have to reduce errors in translation. Du & Saeheaw (2020) states that translation errors are produced by a translator, and classifies errors into lexical errors (formal errors of lexis and semantic errors in lexis) and grammar errors (morphology errors and syntax errors). Pourshahian (2021) states that translation errors may occur at the level of linguistic: lexical and grammar. All these different types of errors are relevant for deciding how serious a translation error is. House (2014) divides translation errors into two types, overt errors and covert errors, categorized ideally to conduct translation evaluation based on functional match. House (2016) calls covert error as an error due to situational dimension or a pragmatic error; while overt error was described as non-dimensional or with a denotative meaning to determine functional evidence. Figure 1 summarizes the two types of translation errors.

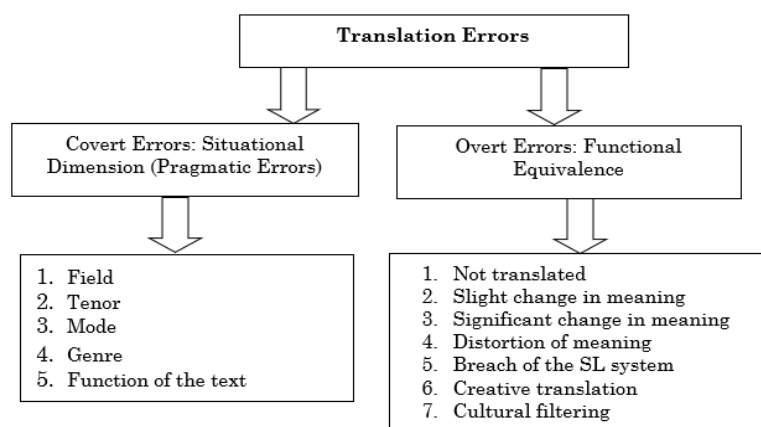


Figure 1: Translation Errors.  
Source: (House (2016)).

Both types of errors can be achieved through individual textual pairs. The seven sub-groups of overt error tend to the meaning element of denotative mismatches. In other words, the mismatch of source text and target text is more important to investigate than translation quality.

A covert translation is a translation that enjoys the status of and original source text in the target culture (Shakernia, 2014). It means that a similar situational dimension from the source to the target plays an important role. Source and target text profiles like field, tenor, mode, genre, and function of the text are the fields of covert error that need to be analyzed in translation evaluation (Lazemi & Barkhordari-Sharifabad, 2023). Covert translation not only depends on the interpretation of the translator or text but also on purposes like marketing, publishing and implied reader. In other words, individual textual functions play an important role in translation.

On the other hand, overt error translations can be made as an alternative way to evaluate the product of the translator (Benko et al., 2024). Overt errors are the result of a mismatch of non-dimensional. In other words, it is contrary to covert error which is produced from a mismatch from one situational dimensional (House, 2014). Overt errors can be divided into seven types: Not translated, Slight change in meaning, Significant change in meaning, Distortion in meaning, Breach of the SL system, Creative translation, and Cultural filtering. Such types are used to fulfill the requirement of a non-dimensional scenario.

## Method

### *Research Design*

A mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) research design was utilized in the current study. This design was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the subject under study. The data of this research were phrases that contained idioms in source text and the target texts in translated version of the American fantasy film *Maleficent*.

### *Sampling and Population*

Random sampling was done to identify twenty-one idioms from the film *Maleficent*. These idioms were identified while watching the film, with sub-titles. Such idioms that experienced problems in translating were sampled based on Baker's categorized eligibility. These criteria were achieved by implementing the theory of Baker (2018). After identifying the problems of translation, the researcher described the percentage of the problems of translation.

### *Data Analysis*

All idioms and their translations were analyzed based on the theory (Baker, 2018) about problems of translation. These problems can be divided into:

1. Culturally specific-concept
2. The source-language concept not lexicalized in the target language
3. The source-language word semantically complex
4. The source and target language making different distinctions in meaning
5. The target language lacking a superordinate
6. The target language lacking a specific term (hyponym)
7. Differences in physical or interpersonal perspective
8. Difference in expressive meaning
9. Difference in form
10. Differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms
11. The use of loan words in the source text

The data was examined to know the overt error in the target text by implementing House's (2014) theory of non-dimensional mismatch divided into seven categories:

1. Not translated
2. Slight change in meaning
3. Significant change in meaning
4. Distortion in meaning
5. Breach of the SL system
6. Creative translation
7. Cultural filtering

These seven sub-categories (non-dimensional) explored the denotative meaning (idiom) to identify errors in the target text. These errors can grade the quality of translation idiom. The more overt errors occur in translation, the worse translation is. However, when minimal overt errors occur in translation, higher translation quality is produced.

## Findings and Discussion

The common problem in translating idioms is semantically complex, as exemplified in Table 1, which occurs since the idiom expresses a more complex meaning than the regular meaning. In addition to that, this study describes two kinds of overt errors occurring in translating idioms, namely the 'not translated' type (27,2%); and breach of the language system (27,2%) type, as presented in Table 2. A common problem of translators leads to translation errors in translating idioms in the film *Maleficent*. In other words, semantically complex idioms lead to ambiguous meanings which lead to overt errors of translation.

The next common problem of translators in translating idioms is the concept fully unrecognized in the target culture. Sometimes the concept of idiom in the source text is not concrete (abstract); it occurs because of some factors like social customs, beliefs or it can be called as culture-specific. The idiom in ST is very English, to make the translation difficult to understand. Another problem in translating idioms is of the distinction in meaning between the source text and the target text. The target text cannot perceive the distinction meanings of the source text. In addition to that, perspective plays an important role in translating idioms which leads to common problems (non-equivalence) in translating. Finally, the same proportional meaning however different in expressive meaning leads to a difficult problem to handle. The description of common problems in translating idioms because of non-equivalence can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Frequency and Percentage of Translation Problems.

	Problems of Translation	Frequency	Percentage
1	The source-language word is semantically complex	4	19,04%
2	Cultural-specific concepts	3	14,28%
3	The source and target language make different distinctions in meaning	3	14,28%
4	Differences in physical or interpersonal perspective	3	14,28%
5	Difference in expressive meaning	3	14,28%
6	The source-language concept is not lexicalized in the target language	2	9,52%
7	The target language lacks a specific term (hyponym)	2	9,52%
8	The target language lacks a superordinate	1	4,76%

There are at least eleven problems of translation proposed by Baker (2018); but a translator faces only eight out of eleven, as seen in Table 1. Among all problems, the source-language word being semantically complex is a dominant problem of translation faced by a translator in translating idioms in the film *Maleficent*. This result is supported by Obeidat & Mahadi (2020), who confirms that it is not easy to overcome this problem if the translators are not aware of understanding the message of the idiomatic and cultural dimensions of a second language. Chen (2020) states that the art of cross-cultural communication is another great problem in translating an idiom.

An example of an investigation of idioms that have common problems with culture-specific concepts can be seen below, the target text being in the Indonesian language.

- Source Text (ST): it's a *big day*
- Target Text (TT): *ini hari penting*

The idiom *big day* in the cultural concept of ST is translated as *hari penting*. This idiom is unknown in the target text (Indonesia). The definition of a *big day* means national celebration (social customs). The phrase *hari penting* seems *abstract* in TT. It can be said that the idiom of the *big day* becoming *hari penting* is a common problem of non-equivalence in culture-specific concepts.

Another problem of text not lexicalized in TT can be seen in the following example:

- ST : She's *come bearing* gifts
- TT : Dia *membawa* hadiah

The concept in the idiom of *come bearing* is known in the target culture; however, it is difficult for the translator to express the equivalent meaning or lexicalize it in the TT.

The data with the non-equivalence translation problem in source language idiom being semantically complex can be observed in the following example:

- ST : I'm ready to welcome your fiancé with *open arms*
- TT : Aku siap menyambut tunanganmu *dengan hangat*

The idiom *open arms* express complex meaning in the context of the sentence in ST. The complex concept of the idiom *open arms* is not equivalent to *dengan hangat*. This is a good example of translation pairs of idioms which are semantically non-equivalent.

The problem of translation resulting in distinction in meaning after translating an idiom in both source

and target languages *can* be seen in the given example,

- *ST* : *raised the girl* as her own
- *TT* : *membesarkannya* bagai anak sendiri

The idiom of raised the girl *expresses* ditinggikan but in the translation above is *membesarkannya*, which means the translator makes fewer distinctions in meaning in second language. The phrase *membesarkannya* is not relevant to raised the girl.

After analyzing all problems of translation on the idiom, the translation overt errors were evaluated in TT. The types of overt errors in TT are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Overt Error types in TT.

Types of error	Frequency	Percentage
Not translated	6	27.2%
Breach of the language system	6	27.2%
Slight change in meaning	3	13.6%
Creative meaning	2	9%
Cultural filtering	2	9%
Significant change in meaning	2	9%
Distortion of Meaning	1	4.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100%</b>

The two types of error which dominantly occurred in translating idioms in the film *Maleficent* are not translating and breach of the language system. Similar research findings were done by Naidj & Motahari (2019), who found this type of error, breach of the language system dominant in translating 23 pages of text. Ehsani & Zohrabi (2014) also figured out five types of overtly erroneous errors namely, transliteration, literal translation, mistranslation, untranslation, and breach of the target language system. These errors occur when the translator tries to reproduce similar meanings in translation but the complicated psycholinguistics overt error in the target text occurs. In addition to that, Kamyranets (2020) states that language systems dominantly lead to overt errors of translation. Faryad et al. (2021) declare that the translator's lack of competence in linguistics and culture leads to rejection in translating a certain items like idioms, collocation and so on. For this reason, it is difficult to ensure that translation bears equivalency of text and register, genre and individual text functions unless errors in target text is reduced to achieve high translation quality.

The example of data analysis on overt error translation type *not translated* in TT can be seen in the following example:

- *ST* : She's come bearing gifts
- *TT* : Dia membawa hadiah

In this example, the word bearing in ST is not translated into TT. The translator decides not to translate it because of the *translator's* negligence or not being able to translate. Owing to this phenomenon, it is confirmed that the type of error is categorized as not translated.

An example of a breach of the language system can be seen in the given example:

- *ST* : Please, *don't raise your roots* at me, Lief
- *TT* : *Jangan berbicara keras* kepadaku, Lief

In the ST, the *phrase* your roots is categorized as possessive adjective. This grammatical rule does not translate into TT. In other words, the grammatical rule of the target text is categorized as an overt error in the target text. In this case, the translator has to translate it into good Indonesian.

The example of *slight* change in the idiom can be seen in the given example:

- *ST* : I'm ready to welcome your fiancé with open arms
- *TT* : Aku siap menyambut tunanganmu dengan tangan terbuka.

The word arms (plural), in the source text, is translated to become singular in the target. This change leads to a little distortion of meaning. However, the little distortion does not severely impair communication in the film.

The example experiencing *creative meaning* in idiom translation can be seen in the following example:

- *ST* : Well! there are many who *prey on the innocent*
- *TT* : Ada banyak yang *memangsa orang-orang tak bersalah*

The source text of *prey on the innocent* is translated freely by adding extra information in the TT, to become *orang-orang*, added creatively as an explication or extension.

The example of *cultural filtering* meaning in idiom translation can be seen in the following example:

- *ST* : This is no *faire tale*
- *TT* : Ini bukan *dongeng*

The cultural phrase *faire tale* is *untranslatable*. The translator tries to find an alternative that is based on target culture. The term *dongeng* is more familiar to the target reader.

The example of *significant change* in translating idiom meaning can be seen in the given example:

- *ST* : *In your hands*, you hold the power of life and death
- *TT* : *Tanganmu* memegang kekuatan hidup dan mati

The phrase *in your hands* in the source text is a metaphor; however, the translation in the target text is changed to convey the meaning in other words. The translation is not appropriate in meaning in TT.

The example of distortion of meaning in translating idiom can be seen in the following example,

- *ST* : Listen *play in the wind*
- *TT* : Dengarkan *bermain dalam angin*

The translation in TT *bermain dalam angin* *seems* to experience a mistake in other words; hence, there is a little distortion of meaning in TT.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that semantically complex idioms in the film *Maleficent* were problematic for translators. Two major types of overt errors were *not translated* and *breach of the language system* in translation of idioms in target text. However, it is very important to realize the limitation of this research, which focused only on the translation of idioms that pose a problem to the translator. Translators need to analyze the original meaning before translating the idiom. In addition to that, the translator needs to improve their language competence in translating idioms, so that they are able to translate items and produce similar meanings in the TT. As an implication of this research, professional translators can reduce the dominant type of errors and create an alternative solution to translation problems. Similar future research studies are recommended to discover difficulties and strategies, especially in the translation of collocations in the film *Maleficent* and similar other art pieces.

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