

## **An Analysis of Compensation Techniques for Translation Loss and Captioning Guidelines in *Merantau* Subtitle**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on the translation and captioning techniques which are applied in the English Subtitle of *Merantau* film. Drawing on Hervey and Higgins' (1992) concept of compensation techniques and Karamitroglou's (1998) captioning guidelines, the study finds that the translator mostly uses Compensation in Kind technique to compensate for the translation loss. This choice may be due to the translator's ability to find the equal expression in target language that is more acceptable. It is also found that the translated script has fulfilled the standards of captioning.

**Keywords:** *Compensation Techniques, Translation Loss, Captioning, Equal Expression*

## INTRODUCTION

Compensation is a technique that is commonly used in translation to compensate for the loss of meaning in the translation process. Baker (1998) describes it as a technique which involves making up for the loss of a source text effect by creating a similar effect in the target text through means that are specific to the target language and/or text. In addition, Newmark (1988; p.90) defines that “compensation is said to occur when loss of meaning, sound-effect, metaphor or pragmatic effect in one part of a sentence is compensated in another part, or in a contiguous sentence”. To compensate for translation loss, roughly defined as loss of meaning that occurs when something is translated into another language and sometimes translated back into the original language, Hervey & Higgins (1992) distinguish four different aspects of compensation, namely Compensation in Kind; Compensation by Merging; Compensation by Splitting; and Compensation in Place.

First of all, Compensation in Kind refers to making up for one

type of textual effect in the ST by another type in the TT. Secondly, Compensation by Merging is a technique used to condense ST features carried over a relatively long stretch of a text (such as complex phrase) into a relatively short stretch of the TT (such as single word or a simple phrase). Third, Compensation by Splitting is a technique which may be resorted in cases where there is no single TL word that covers the same range of meaning as a given ST word. Finally, Compensation in Place is a technique aimed at making up for the loss of a particular effect found at a given place in the ST by re-creating a corresponding effect at an earlier or later place in the TT.

Another important aspect related to the quality of subtitle is captioning. Karamitroglou's (1998) argues that there are three important aspects to consider for a good quality captioning. The first aspect is the position on the screen. The second aspect is the number of lines: a maximum of two lines of subtitles should be presented at a time. The third aspect is text positioning: the

subtitled text should be presented on the center of its allocated line(s). The last aspect is the number of characters per line. For this aspect, each subtitle line should allow around 35 characters in order to be able to accommodate a satisfactory portion of the (translated) spoken text and minimize the need for original text reduction and omissions.

This study was conducted to investigate Hervey's & Higgins' (1992) concept of compensation techniques applied in *Merantau* film subtitle and its fulfillment of captioning standards using Karamitroglou's (1998) aspects of captioning. It is expected that this study will expand students' knowledge in translation study. It is also expected that this study will bring some benefits to the students who are interested in translation in film industry.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed qualitative and descriptive method. This study aimed at exploring and identifying the data to get the actual explanation. Berg asserts that "qualitative research thus

refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbol and description of things" (2007; p.3). In conducting qualitative study, the data were taken from the actual settings.

In the process of qualitative research method, diving into the subject deeply is necessary. In the final step of the study, the collected data or information are interpreted to establish the meaningful perspective. This 'meaningful perspective' is essential in qualitative research. However, whatever the result from the derived data, this study would not do any attempt to control its subjects.

The object of this study is the English subtitled script of *Merantau*. *Merantau*, released in 2009, is an Indonesian action drama film which is directed by Gareth Evans. The film also received awards as the honorable mention and best action film at the 2009 Fantastic Festival and 2010 Action Festival. The subtitle was translated into more than 5 languages, including English.

In conducting the study, some techniques of collecting data were used as follows. First, watching *Merantau* film for several times was

done to get a connection between the actual dialogue and the subtitle. The second phase was searching for the original movie script. The third stage included reading and comparing the original script and the English subtitle. The fourth step involved classifying and analyzing the data. In this step, the data were categorized based on each compensation technique applied in the translation. The last step was observing the text which appeared on the screen.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION COMPENSATION TECHNIQUES IN THE SUBTITLE

The analysis on the subtitle showed 51 occurrences of compensations techniques. From these, it was found that there are only three aspects of compensation techniques used by the translator, namely Compensation in Kind (56.86%); Compensation by Merging and (25.49%); and Compensation by splitting (17.65%) as can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table1. Percentage of Compensation Techniques found in this present study

<b>Compensation Techniques</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Compensation in Kind	56.86%
Compensation by Merging	25.49%
Compensation by Splitting	17.65%

Table1 shows that the most frequent technique that occurs in the subtitle is Compensation in Kind. Compensation in Kind is mostly employed by the translator since the translator might find the equal expression in TT language. Table 2 below presents two examples found in the subtitle.

Table 2. Examples of Compensation in Kind

Mau makan apa, Mas?	May I help you?
Berapa pak semuanya?	Bill please

As indicated in Table 2, the equal expression for the question *Mau makanapa?* in TT language is *May I help you?* Compensation in Kind is adopted to give the similar effect regarding the question. In the target text culture, one common expression used by the waiter when serving guests in ordering

foodsituation is *May I help you?* In addition, one common expression used by guests after having a meal in restaurant is *Bill please*. The translator seems to make the target text more common to read by the foreigner audience. Another example of Compensation in Kind technique is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Example of Compensation in Kind Technique

<b>Kalo enggak, gue udah kayak kebo kali yang dicocok hidungnya di klub sana</b> T	<b>If it wasn't for him, I could still be at the club,</b> being sold like a piece of meat
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The term *kerbau yang dicocokhidungnya* is popular in ST culture. This phrase is translated using another phrase *like a piece of meat*. According to [www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com), the phrase *like a piece of meat* is a kind of expression from a person who is treated as a sexual object by people around who do not consider his or her feelings at all. This example indicates that the translator

uses the applicable expression in the subtitle despite the cultural differences between the source language and the target language.

As indicated in Table 1, the second most frequent compensation technique in the subtitle is Compensation by Merging, where longer words are mostly merged into several shorter words or into one single word. This is illustrated in Tables 4 and 5 below.

Table 4. Example of Compensation by Merging

Gini saran awak...	Listen...
Kamu sadarkanlah kepalamu itu dari mimpi- mimpi belaka	Get rid of those dreams in your head

As can be seen in Tables 4 and 5, in Compensation by Merging the translator reduces the information of the source text in the target text.

The translator might let the audience read the situation from the screen instead of the subtitle.

Table 5. Example of Compensation by Merging

Mampus kita, anak buahnya Johnny pasti nyari kita kemana-mana	What are we going to do now?
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Finally, the last compensation technique found in the subtitle, Compensation by Splitting, is applied when the translator adds some specific items into the target

text. It aims to give the audience a significant idea from the conversation in the film. This is presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Examples of Compensation by Splitting

Pengalaman hidup yang akan <b>membuatnya</b> menjadi lelaki sejati	That soul searching will <b>challenge and transform</b> him into adulthood
<b>Saya merasa</b> kesal	<b>I get</b> frustated and angry
<b>I Bantu amak</b> letakkan <b>ini di</b> <b>meja ya</b>	<b>Now</b> go and set <b>the</b> <b>table</b>

the first example presented in Table 6 above, the word *membuatnya*

is split into two words *challenge* and *transform*. Similarly, the word *kesalis* also translated

as *frustrated* and *angry*. In these cases of Compensation by Splitting, the translator emphasizes the meaning into the target text by adding the interpretation of one single word. In the last example, the word

*letakkan* is also split into two words *go* and *set* which sound more natural and acceptable as an imperative sentence. Another example of Compensation by Splitting is presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Example of Compensation by Splitting

Amak tau anak amak pasti akan <b>berhasil</b>	I know that you'll definitely <b>overcome all hurdles and reap the benefits</b>
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the word *berhasil* translated as *overcome all hurdles and reap the benefits*. The translator significantly adds the interpretation of the word

*berhasil* into the target text sentence. This way, the translator makes the meaning of the word *berhasil* more specific.

Table 8. Examples of Compensation by Splitting

Orangtua kalian?	What happened to your parents?
Indak perlu ia pergi jauh	He didn't need to torture himself by travelling far away
Ngeliat mu seperti ngeliat diri awak 15 tahun yang lalu.	I just feel like I'm sitting next to a younger version of myself

The three utterances in Table 8 above are transformed by the translator into the correct structures of the target text on the right. In rendering those utterances from the source text, the translator attempts to make the translated version in the target language make more

sense and more 'common. Therefore, it would not make the audience confused in conceiving the message of the film dialogue.

As Hervey & Higgins (1992) argue, the translator may feel the need to resort to the compensation techniques to compensate for translation loss. In this study, the loss in translation mostly occurred due to

the reduction of the specific information from the source text. Table 9 below contains the texts which are considered as translation loss and the compensation techniques to compensate for the loss.

Table 9. The occurrence of Translation Loss

<b>Translation Loss</b>		<b>Compensation Technique</b>
<b>Source Text</b>	<b>Target text</b>	
1. Untuk membuktikan pengetahuan dan keandalan di muka dunia	Requiring a deep understanding of the world	Compensation in Kind
2. Membedakan cahaya kebenaran dan cahaya kesalahan	Illuminating the paths between right or wrong	Compensation in Kind
3. Tapi itu kami lakukan karena kami sayang dan kewajiban kami selaku orangtua	We felt that we had to	Compensation by Merging
4. Mampus kita, anak buahnya Johnny pastinya ri kita kemana-mana	What are we going to do now?	Compensation by Merging
5. Ngeliatmu seperti ngeliat diri awak 15 tahun yang lalu.	I just feel like...I'm sitting next to a younger version of myself	Compensation by Splitting
6. Sebaiknyo kamu pergunakan kepandaianmu itu untuk hal lain dan carilah duit di tempat berbeda	Just try to make a living in other ways	Compensation by Merging

The first instance of translation loss and its compensation technique that occurs in the text is presented in Table 10 below.



Table 10. Translation Loss and Compensation Technique1

Untuk membuktikan pengetahuan dan keandalan di muka dunia	Requiring a deep understanding of the world
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In this case, the translator first compensates the word *membuktikan* by *requiring*. Although the meanings of these two words are literally different, Compensation in Kind seems to cover the loss in this translation. Another loss in the above instance is the compensation of the terms *pengetahuan dan keandalan di*

*muka dunia* by *a deep understanding*. The translator might find the efficiency in rendering the phrases and he might also do this as an attempt to make the target text not too peculiar to the target audience.

The second instance of translation loss and its compensation technique is shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Translation Loss and Compensation Technique2

<b>Membedakan cahaya kebenaran dan cahaya kesalahan</b>	<b>illuminating the paths between right or wrong</b>
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The translator also applies the Compensation in Kind in this part. The use of the word *path* in the target text attempts to compensate for the word *cahaya*. Translation loss is found since these two terms are literally different. However, this compensation technique covers the meaning to be delivered to the target audience. The translator also

attempts to transform the target text in a poetical way.

Meanwhile in the next two examples presented in Table 12 below, the translator reduces the information of the situation around the characters. The translator might assume that the information can be delivered through the actual situation on the screen.

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Table 12. Translation Loss and Compensation Technique 3

<b>Tapi itu kami lakukan karena</b> kami sayang dan kewajiban kami selaku orangtua	<b>We felt that</b> we had to
<b>Mampus kita, anak buahnya Johnny pasti nyari kita kemana-mana</b>	<b>What are we going to do now?</b>

Table 13 shows other examples of translation loss due to reduction made by the translator. In the first sentence, the source text mentions *15 tahun yang lalu* which is translated as *a younger version of myself*. The source-text version provides more

specific information of time but the target audience would not get this message. In the second sentence on the other hand, the loss would not create any issues since the target text is made more efficient.

Table 13. Translation Loss and Compensation Technique 4

<b>Ngeliat mu seperti ngeliat diri awak 15 tahun yang lalu.</b>	<b>I just feel like...I'm sitting next to a younger version of myself</b>
<b>Sebaiknyo kamu pergunakan kepandaianmu itu untuk hal lain dan carilah duit di tempat berbeda</b>	<b>Just try to make a living in other ways</b>

Two possibilities can be concluded based on the analysis of the translation losses found in some parts of the subtitle. First, some translation losses are found in the texts which contain Compensation in Kind. The

losses in this case are the result of the translator's decision to use other terms. In general, the use of these terms is intended to create the closest meaning and equal expressions of the source text for the target audience.

However, the Compensation in Kind is used to make the target text more acceptable and natural.

Second, some translation losses occur due to the use of the Compensation by Merging. Compensation by Merging tends to reduce the specific information from the text. The translator might let the target audience get the information through the situation on the screen.

### THE CAPTIONING STANDARDS

The analysis of the captioning in the subtitle of *Merantau* indicates

that Karamitroglou's (1998) aspects of captioning standards are met.

First of all, from the aspect of the positioning on the screen, the subtitle in this film is positioned at the lower part of the screen (see Fig. 1 below). Thus, the texts cover the less important area without decreasing general aesthetic appreciation of the target film. The text positioning in this movie subtitle is presented in the center on its allocated line(s). It eases the viewer to travel a shorter distance to reach the start of the subtitle.



Fig. 1 Subtitle Positioning on the Screen

Secondly, regarding the two lines throughout the film, as can be seen in Figure 2. number of lines, it is found that the subtitle only shows the maximum

That soul searching will challenge  
←  
and transform him into adulthood

Fig. 2 Number of Lines of the Subtitle

The text on the screen consists of two lines and 10 words, 5 on top and 5 on the bottom, at a time. The arrow between lines shows the eye movement while reading the subtitle. This arrangement of putting the lines onto the screen would ease the target audience in reading. The subtitle appears on the screen and the timing is just a glance, then target audience would not see it again. Other examples of putting the lines onto the screen found in the subtitle are presented in Figure 3, while the examples of the number of characters per line are shown in Figures 4 and 5.

Requiring a deep understanding  
←  
of the world

Fig. 3 Number of Lines of the Subtitle

This subtitled text contains 37 characters, 27 on the top and 10 on the bottom and it was adjusted into two lines.

Illuminating the paths  
←  
between right or wrong

Fig. 4 Number of Lines of the Subtitle

This subtitled text consists of top and 19 characters on the bottom.  
39 characters, 20 characters on the

His journey into the realms  
←  
of adulthood

The subtitled text above comprises of two lines and 35 characters. The first line contains 23 characters, and the second line contains 12 characters.

## CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the Hervey & Higgins' (1992) compensation technique applied in *Merantau* subtitle. Based on the analyzed data, the conclusions can be drawn that three aspects of compensation techniques are applied in translating subtitle *Merantau*, namely Compensation in Kind (56.86%); Compensation by Merging and (25.49%); and Compensation by Splitting (17.65%).

The compensation technique that is most frequently applied by the translator is Compensation in Kind. This technique is used despite the possible necessity of having equal and more acceptable expression in the target language by the translator.

Although translation loss is found in the subtitle, the translator has made the best decision by applying his/ her own strategy to remove and add the contents.

Based on the standards of captioning, *Merantau* subtitle has fulfilled the aspects proposed by Karamitroglou (1998). The subtitle in this film is positioned at the lower part of the screen. Thus, the texts cover the area which is less important without decreasing general aesthetic appreciation of the target film. In addition, the number of lines and the number of characters per line used in the subtitle also meet Karamitroglou's (1998) standards of good captioning.

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