

# STRATEGIES IN TRANSLATION OF SLANGS FRENCH TO MALAY IN THE FILM LES INTOUCHABLES (2012)

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## Abstract

Slangs are one of the challenges for translators and subtitlers to convey the most accurate meaning due cultural differences between the source and the target language. Therefore, this research sets out to investigate the strategies used to translate slangs in the French film *Les Intouchables*. The data for this study are from the dialogues in French and their subtitles in Malay. The research uses qualitative method of data analysis by applying the classification of slang by Matiello (2008) to identify the slangs and by adapting translation techniques by Baker (1992). The results found 80 slangs which were classified as 47 general slangs and 33 specific slangs. It was also found that most of the slangs were translated using equivalent expression in the target language. It is hope that this research will attract and boost other translation research involving languages with different cultures such as French and Malay.

**Keywords:** Slangs, French film, Malay subtitles, translation, technique.

## Introduction

Films has been one of the leading mediums to present cultures and languages. The films can be in any language and understood by the audiences with the help of subtitles and voice-over. Translational works on film subtitles allows many cultural elements to be displayed on the silver screen. Therefore, it is vital for the subtitling to be as accurate as possible, in order for the message and the culture depicted in the films to be captured by the audiences.

Culture can be defined in various ways depending on its context, from being the ideology or social behavior to customs practiced by a particular group of people or society. Likewise, it can also signify exhibitions of human intellectual achievements that is regarded collectively. Lederach (1995) mentioned that culture is the shared knowledge and schemes created by a group of people to perceive, interpret, express, and respond to the surrounding of social realities. Another prominent feature of culture is language. Both

culture and language co-exist one another when it takes the form of culture-specific expressions. These are what we define as the untranslatable words or slangs inside the languages.

## Literature review

One of the translation difficulties is to translate culture-specific items. According to Dweik & Suleiman (2013), cultural expression can be found in proverbs, phrasal verbs, collocations and figures of speech such as slangs or idioms. Slangs is a more detailed part of culture-specific expressions that is frequently used in our daily life. Matiello (2008) stated that slangs can be regarded as language that is usually restricted to the members of a group. Therefore, it is a part of culture, but it is constrained in terms of age and influences. It is also a feature that is present in films to give of true-to-life feel to the film itself, particularly if the film depicts a certain race, culture or groups of people. In French for example, slang words that

are used today by the younger generation are 'mec', 'truc' and 'kiffer'. The use of these slangs are fundamental to escape the text-book structure in a French conversation.

As a specification of cultural-specific expressions, slangs play a vital role in daily communication. As mentioned, slangs are often incorporated in film dialogues and portrays the background of the characters' communities such as race, age and people group. Aronoff (1989) mentioned that slangs can be a marker which are frequently used to represent informal usages that are specific by almost any person in the speech community. One of the main features of slang is that it serves as a linguistic variant that is group-marked. The usage of slang as a group language indicates delineation, defiance to the customary and at the same time works as a group-cohesive force (Stolt, 2010).

Thorne (2005) elaborated that the functions of the slangs can be underlined by two methods. First, it can be underlined as a coined word that fill a gap in the existing lexicon. Secondly, it can be replaced by an already existing term which is referred to as "relexicalization". Matiello (2008) further categorized slangs to two categories: specific slangs and general slangs. Specific slangs are used by a particular group for solidarity between group members, while general slangs are used by speakers to avoid seriousness in a conversation. Since slang is rather an attitude, a feeling or an act, slang expressions harbour a much greater emotional tension than ordinary language does (Partridge 2007: 34).

In view of translation, slangs can be considered as a challenge as translators have to find the equivalence which evokes the same meaning and sentiment from the target audience or readers as those from the source language. Translations of slang are tricky as slangs are language and culture bound and never occurs in simple or denotative meanings (Stolt, 2010; Eriksen, 2010). Linder (2000:280) proposes that nonstandard language, in which slang is included, should be rendered into the target language creating an effect on the target reader which is equivalent to that which the original text had on readers in its own culture. Sukmaningrum & Setyorini (2017) added that slang is a psychosocial and cultural occurrence that often pose difficulties for translators to

transfer it from source language to target language.

Glewwe (2012) carried out research to study the English translation of slangs in four French novels. The result revealed the most used technique is compensation, why uses standard English to compensate the French slangs used. Similarly, Mashhady & Pourgalavi (2013) carried a comparative study to investigate the effectiveness of the translation of slang from English to Persian in "The Catcher in the Rye" rendered by two Persians, Najafi (2010) and Karimi (2010). The researchers selected 40 slangs randomly and compared and analysed them using the model proposed by Venuti (1995). With regards to preserving slang items in the translation of the dialogues, the results showed that both translators frequently utilized domestication strategy in their translations.

Nasrum & Sari (2016) conducted a study on Indonesian and English equivalence of slangs in the film 22 Jump Street. The objectives of their research are to categorise the translation used in slangs, and to analyse the meaning equivalence between translated text and the original text in English language. The research used descriptive qualitative method by adapting Newmark's (1995), Partidge's (1950), and Palmer's (1976) theories. The findings indicated that the film uses semantic translation and communicative translation for its subtitles. Furthermore, it was found that jargons, argots and colloquial were used in the translated language. Based on the results, the researchers concluded that in 22 Jump Street, the source language (SL) and target language (TL) is not equivalent. This is due to the fact the translator took into account the cultural differences between the two languages, and modified the translated version that resulted the slangs to have softer impact that in the SL.

### Research objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To identify slangs in the film *Les Intouchables*.
2. To discuss the translation techniques used to translate French slangs to Malay in the film *Les Intouchables*

## Methodology

This study uses descriptive qualitative research method as it is designed to classify and analyze the types of slang expressions and translation strategies applied in the film *Les Intouchables*. The data in this study are the slang words and expressions found in the English version of the film *Les Intouchables*. In order to analyse the data, the researcher identified and categorized the slang words and expressions using the classification by Matiello (2008). Secondly, the translation techniques from French to Malay of the slangs were analysed based on Baker's Translation Strategies (1992) which outline these techniques:

- a. Translation by target language slang expression.
- b. Translation by equivalent target language expression.
- c. Translation by a more neutral or less expressive related word
- d. Translation by loan words or loan words with an explanation
- e. Translation by paraphrasing using related words
- f. Translation by omission

### Synopsis of the film

*Les Intouchables* is a French film, released in 2000. It is a story of Driss, a resilient young man who secures a job helping a quadriplegic, the aristocratic millionaire Philippe. Driss moves into the Philippe's mansion, changing the monotonous lives of Philippe and his employees. While they have little in common, the longer Philippe and Driss spend their time together, the stronger their bond grows. Philippe then finds the courage to let go of his late wife and build the confidence to start dating again; and Driss in the later part of the film, gains his respectability and learn facing his responsibilities.

## Analysis and Discussion

This section is divided into two subsections: the first section will identify the slangs in the film and the second section will focus on the

discussion on the translation techniques used to translate these slangs to Malay language.

### Translation techniques used to translate slangs in *Les Intouchables*

This research adopts Baker's (1992) translation techniques, in which 80 slangs were identified, which accounts to 47 general slangs and 33 specific slangs. These techniques were elaborated through excerpts of the dialogues with the corresponding subtitles with some context from the film to comprehend the slangs and their translations. The details of the slangs are as follows:

Translation by target language slang expression.	3
Translation by equivalent target language expression.	49
Translation by a more neutral or less expressive related word	12
Translation by paraphrasing using related words	11
Translation by loan words or loan words with an explanation	1
Translation by omission	4

As mentioned by Matiello (2008), the general slangs are used by speakers to avoid seriousness in their expressions. In this film, most of the general slangs used are French swear words such as *merde*, *putain*, *bordel*, and *conard*. As for the specific slangs, in this research, they are spoken mostly by the main character, Driss, who is a black man originated from Senegal, and who lives in the lower part of Paris. Other than that, they were uttered by the teenage daughter of the main character, Phillippe. This supports Matiello (2008)'s claim that specific slangs are used by a particular group to emphasize the speakers' social status, age, identity and demographic belonging. We can see in this film, the use of the specific slangs by Driss is a way of the director to emphasis the social status and demographic background of the main character, and the age contrast through the utterances by Philippe. Some of the specific slangs are *vanne*, *baratin*, *marrant*.

Translation by target language slang expression.

Using this technique, the translator translated the slang of the source words to the equivalent slang in the target text (TT) which conveys the same or the closest meaning to the target texts. In this research, only this technique was used three times as illustrated in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 1:

**ST** *Prends ton plumeau et va faire un tour!*  
**Back translation:** Take your mop-head for a walk.

**TT** *Berambus, bawa sekali bulu ayam tu!*

(taken from the 312th dialogue of ST and 325th TT translation)

The slang ‘va faire un tour’ translated literally means to go for a ride. In the context of the dialogue, the character said to drive the character away. In this case, the Malay translation ‘Berambus’ is used by the translator which is an expression rudely used to chase away the people in a negative context. The more standard expression would be “Pergi!” or “Pergi kamu dari sini”.

Excerpt 2:

**ST** - *Il doit être pris en charge, sinon il clamse. Mais te press pas!*  
 - *Vas-y réfléchis, il va clamser*  
**Back translation:**  
 - He must be taken care of, or else he’ll be dead. But take your time...  
 - Go on, think, he’ll be a goner.

**TT** - *Kalau dia tak sampai di hospital dalam 5 minit, habislah.*  
 - *Fikirlah cepat. Dia dah nazak!*

(taken from the 46th & 47th dialogue of ST and 40th and 41th of TT translation)

In Excerpt 2, we can see the subtitler used the Malay expression “habislah” and ‘dia dah nazak’ as an expression to translate “clamser” in French, which is an argot term to indicate someone is dying. In this example, the Malay translations are found to be appropriately used as they are equivalent context-wise as an argot in Malay.

Excerpt 3:

**ST** *Quelle porcherie !*

**Back translation:** What a pigsty!

**TT** *Bilik ni macam tongkang pecah.*

(taken from the 330th dialogue of ST and 346th TT translation)

Translation by equivalent target language expression

The translation by equivalent target language expression is a technique when the translator uses a word or phrase in the TT which is not a slang, at the same time still conveys the same or the closest meaning of the slang in the ST. In this study, this is the most used technique with 46 data found. Some of the examples are as follows:

Excerpt 4:

**ST** *C’est dégueulasse, ça !*

**Back translation:** Shit!

**TT** *Menjijikkan!*

(taken from the 46th dialogue of ST and 41th TT translation)

In this film, Philippe pretends to have seizure and purposely drools to help Driss escapes the police after being stopped due to reckless driving and speeding. The slang ‘degueulasse’ is an argot form which means ‘gross’ in English. In the TT, the expression ‘menjijikkan’ is equivalent in meaning as the ST.

Excerpt 5:

**ST** *Essaie dans tes veuchs.*

**Back translation:** Try on your hair

**TT** *Cuba cari dalam rambut awak*

(taken from the 310th dialogue of ST and 323rd TT translation)

The slang ‘veuchs’ is the verlan form of cheveux which is shorten to ch’veux. Verlan is a form which existed in France, and became widely used by youth from the banlieues in the 1970s. The word verlan comes from l’envers, (l’envers = l’en + vers = vers + l’en = verlen = verlan), which is a reversal of standard French

word, and is produced as a new word. In this dialogue, the translation ‘rambut’ is the direct equivalent of the ST as there is no other slang expression in the TT to convey the meaning.

Excerpt 6:

**ST** *En général, elles sont **chomes** là-bas*

**Back translation: generally, they are ugly there.**

**TT** *Perempuan dari Utara selalunya hodoh.*

(taken from the 676th dialogue of ST and 721th TT translation)

Another verlan in this film is the word chomes, uttered by Driss to comment on Philippe female friend from Dunkerque, north of France. The slang ‘chomes’ is the verlan form of moche which means ugly in English. In this dialogue, the translation ‘hodoh’ is the direct equivalent though not a slang. The equivalent expression would be ‘buruk’.

Translation by a more neutral or less expressive related word

This technique is used by translators to translate slangs in the ST to words or phrases in the TT which conveys the same meaning in the neutral or less expressive way. In the subtitles, 11 data were translated using this technique. Some of the examples are as follows:

Excerpt 7:

**ST** *Tu fermes ta gueule ! tu poses tes mains ...*

**Back translation: Shut up! Put your hands ...**

**TT** *Diam! Tangan atas ...*

(taken from the 16th dialogue of ST and 16th TT translation)

The excerpt was taken from a scene where a police officer demanded Driss to get out from the car as Driss tried to reason with the officer. The slang fermer sa gueule is a slang used to rudely tell someone to stop talking (to shut up). In the subtitle, the phrase was translated to ‘Diam’, which is a neutral and less rude expression. The more appropriate translation would be ‘tutup mulut kau’ to achieve the same

level of expressiveness and impoliteness as the ST.

Excerpt 8:

**ST** *Ça fait une heure que vous êtes scotché...*

**Back translation: it’s been an hour since you are stuck to ...**

**TT** *Dah sejam awak pandang ...*

(taken from the 384th dialogue of ST and 295th TT translation)

The word scotcher is a slang which means to be glued or stuck. In the dialogue Driss was telling Phillippe that he had been staring transfixed at a painting for an hour. The translation ‘pandang’ which means ‘look’ or ‘watch’ a neutralized version and does not convey the same impact of the ST. The TT could have used the word ‘tilik’ or ‘renung’ to convey the better impact.

Excerpt 9:

**ST** *C’est un truc de ouf !*

**Back translation: it’s a crazy thing**

**TT** *Biar betul!*

(taken from the 319th dialogue of ST and 333th TT translation)

In this excerpt, the slang expression ‘C’est un truc de ouf’ can be literally translated to ‘this is crazy’. The word ‘truc’ is a slang for ‘stuff’ while ‘ouf’ is a verlan form for ‘fou’ which means ‘crazy’. The Malay translation uses the slang ‘biar betul’ can have various meanings such as ‘are you serious?’, ‘is this real?’, or you have to be kidding me’. These are the expressions Malay speakers use to express disbelief or surprise. In the context of this dialogue, the character Driss is surprised by Phillippe’s unresponsiveness to hot water due to him being tetraplegic. The translator matched the surprised or astonished dialogue tone of the source language by using slang in the target language that conveys the same feeling.

Excerpt 10:

**ST** *Merde !*

**Back translation:** Shit!

**TT** *Alamak!*

(taken from the 7th dialogue of ST and 8th TT translation)

The phrase ‘merde’ is a profane slang which is very often used to express displeasure or anger. The translated version ‘alamak’ is a more neutral or not considered as a profanity compared to the ST, even though it is a common slang in the TT. However, the impact of the slang in the TT is slightly lower in profanity as compared to the ST. This supports Ulvydiene & Abramovaite (2012) claim that in the translation, the slang is literally translated but translators often soften the words to make the translation sounds more natural to the readers.

Translation by paraphrasing using an unrelated word or phrase

This technique was used by translators to paraphrase slangs into words or expressions that are easier for the target readers to comprehend. In the subtitles, 11 data were translated using this technique. Some of the examples are as follows:

Excerpt 11:

**ST** *Et que malgré mes qualités évident, bref, le baratin habituel...*

**Back translation:** And despite my striking qualities, in short, my usual crap..

**TT** *Awak tulislah, dan walaupun saya seorang yang layak, tau apa-apa saja...*

(taken from the 119th dialogue of ST and 120th TT translation)

The slang le baratin is an expression to say the nonsense or the crap in English. In this film, Driss asked Philippe to write ‘reasons’ as to why he was not selected for the work. He referred to these reasons as ‘the usual crap’. The translated version ‘apa-apa saja’ which means ‘or whatever’ does not bring the equivalent meaning as the ST. The nearest

translation would be ‘dongengan sama’ (the usual tale) to get the same equivalent in the TT.

Excerpt 12:

**ST** *Arrêtez les vannes...*

**Back translation:** Stop the jokes...

**TT** *Jangan kurang ajar, okey?*

(taken from the 284th dialogue of ST and 291th TT translation)

The slang ‘les vannes’, means jokes in English. In this film, Philippe was making fun of Driss as he was forced to put on stockings onto Philippe’s legs. Frustratedly, Driss said ‘stop the jokes’. In Malay, it can be translated as ‘berhenti melawak’ or ‘Sudah-sudahlah dengan lawak tu’. In the subtitle, however, the translator paraphrased the dialogue to ‘jangan kurang ajar’ or ‘don’t be crude’, which is unrelated to the ST, and the translated version is harsher and more offensive.

Excerpt 13:

**ST** *C’est un débat chelou.*

**Back translation:** It’s a shady debat.

**TT** *Keputusan saya muktamad. Saya tak suka.*

(taken from the 299th dialogue of ST and 312th TT translation)

The slang ‘chelou’, is the verlan for the word ‘louche’ which means ‘questionable’ or ‘shady’ in English. In the film, Driss and Yvonne was arguing about Driss’ tasks as a helper to Philippe. Due to Philippe tetraplegic condition, Driss was forced to clean Philippe’s excrements. The translator paraphrased the original phrase in the subtitle to ‘Saya tak suka’ or ‘I don’t like it’, which diminishes the actual meaning into a subtitle that has no correlation with the ST. The equivalent expression would be ‘Ini tidak dapat diterima’ (this cannot be accepted) or ‘ini perbualan yang waswas’ (this debat is doubtful).

Excerpt 14:

**ST** *Ils m’ont chopé avec 30g.*

**Back translation:** They busted me with 30g.

**TT** *Saya cuma ada 30g.*

(taken from the 625th dialogue of ST and 664th TT translation)

The slang 'chopé' means to be caught or busted in English. In the subtitle, the sentence in the ST means the police busted the person with 30g of drugs. This is not equivalent as the TT translation which means 'I only have 30g'. It can be seen here the situational context of the phrase is changed with the change of the subject pronoun ils (they) to the translated version saya ('je' in French).

Excerpt 15:

**ST** *Comment vous le fabriquez, ce truc bizarre ?*

**Back translation:** *How do you produce this weird stuff?*

**TT** *Macam mana awak keluarkan cecair ni...*

(taken from the 511th dialogue of ST and 539th TT translation)

In this film, Driss helped Philippe who was breathing heavily due to phantom pains. As he helped him, he said 'OK' which is a borrowed slang from English 'okay'. It is used to agree that something is alright or doing well. The expression is translated with a loan word in Malay 'Saya okey' (I am okay) which is also from the same English word.

Translation by loan words or loan words with an explanation

In this technique, the translators used or adapt loan words to translate the slangs. In the film, this technique is the least being used with only an instance:

Excerpt 16:

**ST** **OK**

**Back translation: Okay**

**TT** *Awak okey.*

(taken from the 511th dialogue of ST and 539th TT translation)

In the film, Driss helped Philippe who was breathing heavily due to phantom pains. As he helped him, he said 'OK' which is a borrowed

slang from English 'okay'. It is used to agree that something is alright or doing well. The expression is translated with a loan word in Malay 'Saya okey' (I am okay) which is also from the same English word.

Excerpt 17:

**ST** *Pour communiquer il y a un baby phone.*

**Back translation: Okay**

**TT** *Awak akan berkomunikasi dengannya melalui babyphone.*

(taken from the 266th dialogue of ST and 217th TT translation)

**ST** *C'est comme un talkie.*

**Back translation:** It's like a walkie-talkie

**TT** *Macam walkie-talkie. Dia dengar awak, awak dengar dia.*

(taken from the 267th dialogue of ST and 218th TT translation)

In the above excerpt, term baby phone (from 266th dialogue of ST) and talkie (from 267th dialogue of ST) are loan words from English in the ST which are borrowed as Malay subtitles in the TT. Baby phone is a device which operates as a short-distance phone, normally utilized to monitor sleeping babies or sick people. The same goes for the term talkie in the ST, which is translated using English loan word walkie-talkie in the TT. Talkie here refers to the small radio devices that transmit and encode radio frequency and like baby phone, it functions as a short-distance telephone.

Translation by omission

In this technique, the translators omit the slangs from the ST entirely without translating them. This is due to the fact the translator may deem the slangs are unimportant, unsuited for the TT culture, or are simply untranslatable. In the film, this technique is used 6 instances, and some of the examples are as follows:

Excerpt 19:

**ST** *-Merde ! J'oublie encore.*

*- Putain, pardon !*

**Back translation:**

- Shit, I keep forgetting
- Shit, sorry!

**TT** - *Saya selalu lupa*  
- *Maaf.*

(taken from the 320th & 321st dialogue of ST and 344th & 345th TT translation)

In the ST dialogue, the character Driss used the vulgar slang expressions *merde* and *putain*, (which means ‘fuck’ in English). These words were omitted in the TT by the translator, though it can be translated to ‘sial’ in Malay. The omission of this word, renders the translation neutral, and fails to convey the social milieu from where Driss comes from.

Excerpt 20:

**ST** *Tes mains bordel !*

**Back translation:**

**TT** *Angkat tangan*

(taken from the 14th dialogue of ST and 15th TT translation)

In the dialogue, the main characters were stopped by the police due to Driss driving recklessly and over the speed limit. The police demanded them multiple times to get out of their car and hold their hands up. In the subtitle, the translator omitted the word ‘*bordel*’ which is an offensive slang to express displeasure or to curse, which means ‘shit’ or ‘bollocks’. It can be translated to ‘*setan*’ to express the same context. Again, in this example, the omission of this word, though does not impact the overall meaning of the phrase, renders the translation neutral, and fails to portray the frustration and the anger of the police officer in the scenario.

Excerpt 21:

**ST** *C'est une connerie ça. Moi pour 50 euros...*

**Back translation: That's bullshit. For me, for 50 euros...**

**TT** *Kalau saya ada 50 euros...*

(taken from the 398th dialogue of ST and 409th TT translation)

In the above conversation, Driss and Philippe went to an art gallery and Driss did not agree with the piece of art that Philippe wanted to

purchase due to the fact, for him the painting was overpriced. Thus, in the dialogue, Driss mentioned that it is all ‘*une connerie*’ or ‘*bullshit*’. It is an offensive slang which can be translated to Malay as ‘*mengarut*’ or ‘*gila*’ if it means to be offensive. However, in this subtitle, the translator used to omit the expression. This impacts the context of the expression and rendering it neutral and not vehemently uttered as per the ST.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to identify slangs in the French film, *Les Intouchables*, and to discuss the translation techniques used in the translation of the slangs from English to Malay. As discussed, most of the slangs were translated using the translation by equivalent target language expression. This is mainly due to the ST and TT are different in language and culture. Hence, in order to deliver the appropriate meaning, the translator must adjust to the words or expressions the audience could identify and understand. However, the modification of words and phrases, though achieved in alleviating the vulgarity and the negative connotations of certain slangs, was found to alter the seriousness of the dialogues, thus rendering the socio-context of certain scenarios dissimilar from the original version.

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