

Table Of Content

Journal Cover 2
Author[s] Statement 3
Editorial Team 4
Article information 5
 Check this article update (crossmark) 5
 Check this article impact 5
 Cite this article 5
Title page 6
 Article Title 6
 Author information 6
 Abstract 6
Article content 8

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By Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo

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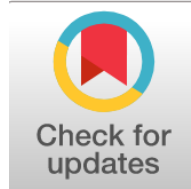
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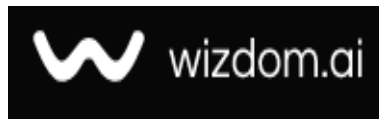
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Pragmatic Aspects of Politeness and Translation Techniques in Wicked 2024 Subtitles

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Abstract

General Background: Politeness strategies are essential in shaping social interaction and maintaining harmony, particularly in audiovisual translation where linguistic and cultural nuances must be preserved. **Specific Background:** In the 2024 film *Wicked*, English dialogues rich in politeness markers are rendered into Indonesian subtitles, facing constraints of space, time, and cultural divergence. **Knowledge Gap:** While prior studies address politeness strategies or subtitle translation techniques separately, few explore their interplay in Indonesian subtitles for contemporary films. **Aims:** This study investigates the types of politeness strategies in *Wicked*'s dialogues and examines the translation techniques applied in their Indonesian subtitles, evaluating their impact on pragmatic meaning. **Results:** Using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and Molina and Albir's translation taxonomy, findings show positive politeness as the most frequent strategy and literal translation as the most applied technique, though modulation better preserved pragmatic force. Subtitling constraints sometimes altered politeness nuances. **Novelty:** This research uniquely maps the relationship between politeness strategies and translation techniques in Indonesian subtitles, providing a nuanced understanding of pragmatic preservation in film translation. **Implications:** The study underscores the need for pragmatic awareness in subtitle translation, advocating for techniques sensitive to both linguistic accuracy and cultural context to enhance cross-cultural communication in audiovisual media.

Highlights:

- Positive politeness dominates *Wicked*'s dialogues, while modulation better preserves pragmatic force than literal translation.
- Subtitling constraints can reduce or alter politeness nuances, affecting cross-cultural meaning.
- Pragmatic awareness is essential for translators to balance linguistic accuracy with cultural sensitivity.

Keywords: Politeness Strategy, Translation Technique, Wicked 2024, Subtitle, Pragmatics

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Introduction

Language is a dynamic social tool that shapes, reflects, and negotiates relationships between people and groups; it is not just a means of conveying information. Considering not only the literal content of utterances but also the intentions, presumptions, and social dynamics that underpin communication, pragmatics has become an important area of study in linguistics for comprehending how meaning is created and interpreted in context [6]. The theory of politeness, as put forth by Brown and Levinson, is one of the most influential frameworks in pragmatics. It examines how speakers use a variety of communicative techniques to manage face-threatening acts (FTAs) and preserve social harmony [6]. In addition to being common in daily interactions, these strategies—bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record—can also be used as a lens to examine language use in literary and audiovisual texts.

Scholarly interest in the nexus of pragmatics and translation studies has grown, especially in the context of audiovisual translation (AVT), where cultural differences and multimodal constraints complicate meaning transfer [7], [12]. As a popular form of AVT, subtitles pose special difficulties since translators have to distill spoken language into brief written compositions, frequently with tight temporal and spatial constraints, while attempting to maintain the conversation's interpersonal subtleties and pragmatic force [7]. When translating between languages like English and Indonesian, which have different politeness systems and cultural norms, the task becomes even more difficult. According to Guillot, subtitles serve as a bridge between cultures, but in the process, the indicators of politeness—like honorifics, indirectness, or displays of deference—may be changed, omitted, or modified, potentially changing the pragmatic effect that was intended [12].

There is still a significant lack of studies that systematically look at how politeness strategies and translation techniques interact in the context of subtitling, despite the growing body of research on these two topics separately. Prior studies have shed important light on each topic. Fitri, for instance, looked into how politeness techniques were used in the movie "Mulan," and found that positive politeness was more common, particularly in family settings [10]. Similar to this, Wafa and Amalia examined translation methods in media with subtitles and found that literal translation, modulation, and adaptation were common approaches [15]. However, little research has been done on how particular translation techniques in subtitles render, alter, or even eliminate politeness strategies.

This intersection has been the subject of recent research. Anshori et al. looked at how lexical collocations were translated in the animated movie "Elemental," emphasizing the difficult balancing act between cultural sensitivity and linguistic correctness [1]. In subtitling "Becoming Jane," Arbain took a practical approach, illustrating how politeness and other pragmatic meanings are negotiated in translation [2]. Additionally, Arbain examined how fear was expressed and how translation strategies were employed in the "Stranger Things" television series [3], [4], and Arbain et al. examined translation strategies and changes in the book "Assassin's Creed: Renaissance" [5]. All of these studies highlight how crucial it is to take into account both pragmatic and translational aspects of audiovisual content, but they also highlight the need for more thorough analyses that concentrate on the interaction between politeness tactics and translation methods.

An interesting case study for this kind of research is the 2024 movie adaptation of "Wicked," which is based on the popular Broadway musical. The film's focus is on the complicated relationship between Elphaba and Glinda, its two main characters, whose speech patterns vividly reflect their different personalities and social roles. Glinda, who is charming and outgoing, prefers positive politeness, whereas Elphaba, who is independent and assertive, usually uses negative politeness and bald on record tactics. A variety of translation techniques are used to translate their dialogues into Indonesian subtitles, which may alter or maintain the original pragmatic intent. This calls into question how to negotiate cross-linguistic and cross-cultural nuances and manage pragmatic meaning in subtitling.

In light of this, the current study intends to determine the kinds of politeness strategies utilized in the English dialogues of "Wicked" (2024) and to investigate the methods of translation utilized in their Indonesian subtitles. This study aims to shed light on the intricate relationship between pragmatics and translation by examining how pragmatic meaning is expressed, altered, or possibly lost during the subtitling process. It is anticipated that the results will improve subtitling techniques, deepen our knowledge of cross-cultural communication in movies, and have useful ramifications for pragmatics and translation studies scholars, educators, and translators.

Overall, by combining concepts and approaches from pragmatics and translation studies, this study fills a major vacuum in the literature. Through its focus on the subtitling of "Wicked" (2024), it advances scholarly discourse on the pragmatics of audiovisual translation by providing a nuanced perspective on how politeness strategies are managed across languages and cultures [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [7], [12].

Method

In order to examine politeness tactics and translation methods in the 2024 movie *Wicked*, this study used a descriptive qualitative design with a content analysis approach. Since linguistic forms and pragmatic meanings are

closely entwined in audiovisual media, a qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a thorough investigation of language use in its natural context [8].

Two primary theoretical frameworks served as the foundation for the analysis: Molina and Hurtado Albir's classification of translation techniques [14] and Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness [6]. The researcher was able to examine how politeness is conveyed in English and how it is translated or perhaps changed in the Indonesian subtitles by utilizing both frameworks. Interestingly, this study focused on understanding how the pragmatic intent behind each utterance is maintained, modified, or even lost during the subtitling process rather than assessing the translation's quality.

From March to April 2025, information was gathered from two sources: Murphy's Indonesian subtitles and the original English script of *Wicked* (2024), which was sourced from Universal Pictures' official website. The film was selected because of its rich interpersonal communication, particularly between Elphaba and Glinda, the main characters, whose exchanges reveal glaring disparities in personality, communication styles, and social roles.

The study focused on utterances that included aspects of politeness, including commands, apologies, compliments, requests, and softened expressions. Brown and Levinson's framework [6], which takes into account important social factors like power dynamics, social distance, and the degree of imposition, was used to identify these. To guarantee relevance to the theories employed, only utterances with obvious markers of politeness were chosen. Then, using the typology put forth by Molina and Hurtado Albir [14], the corresponding Indonesian subtitles were examined to determine the translation methods employed.

The primary tool for gathering and analyzing data in qualitative research is the researcher [8]. Two more tools were employed in order to facilitate this procedure and guarantee uniformity: (1) a data sheet to document politeness strategy instances, and (2) a checklist table to categorize the translation methods used in each subtitle.

Each pertinent English utterance, the speaker's name, the scene's context, and its classification according to one of Brown and Levinson's four strategies—bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, or off record—were all included in the data sheet [6]. A succinct explanation of the speaker's communication intent and the management of face-threatening acts (FTAs) was provided for each classification.

The original English utterances and their Indonesian subtitle versions were compared using the checklist table for the translation side. Molina and Hurtado Albir's framework [14] was used to identify the translation techniques that were used, including literal translation, modulation, adaptation, and reduction. The checklist permitted multiple entries for each case, along with explanations of how meaning and politeness were maintained or changed, because a single subtitle could involve multiple techniques.

The three essential steps of the qualitative model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana [13]—data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing—were followed in the data analysis procedure. Selected utterances were filtered and grouped according to the pertinent theories during the reduction phase. They were arranged into a data sheet and a checklist for identifying patterns during the display phase. The last step was analyzing the results to determine how politeness translated between languages and how it works in context. To ensure accuracy and consistency, the data were examined several times.

The study adhered to the criteria put forth by Guba and Lincoln [11] in order to guarantee the reliability of the results: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Peer debriefing and expert validation, which involved discussing the methodology and findings with linguistics and translation scholars to ensure academic rigor and objectivity, were used to maintain credibility [8]. There was also theoretical triangulation, which involved applying two different frameworks for deeper analysis [9].

Results and Discussion

The analysis's findings about the politeness tactics employed in *Wicked* (2024)'s English dialogues and the translation methods used in its Indonesian subtitles are covered in this section. Molina & Hurtado Albir's (2004) framework of translation techniques and Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness are cited in the analysis. Selected data examples are used to illustrate the findings, which are arranged thematically.

No	Indikator	Frequency
1	Bald on Record	68
2	Positive Politeness	267
3	Negative Politeness	94
4	Off Record	90
Total		519

Table 1. *Politeness Strategies Identified in Wicked (2024)*

Among the four strategies, positive politeness was the most frequently used (267 instances). This strategy appeared mostly in Glinda’s speech, reflecting her friendly and outgoing nature. One example can be seen in her cheerful line, “I’m off to the Assembly, dear!” (GT/P.XI/07), where the term “dear” conveys affection and reinforces a sense of closeness between characters.

Negative politeness (94 instances) often emerged in situations that required respect or caution, especially when addressing requests. For instance, in “Do you mind leaving it open? I so enjoy... air!” (GL/P.XXIV/39), the speaker chooses an indirect form to give the listener room to decline without losing face—an approach that reflects social distance and politeness.

Off-record strategies (90 instances) were typically found in ambiguous or figurative expressions. A notable example is the line “Like a froggy, ferny cabbage... green.” (GT & WD/P.XV/09), which uses metaphor to imply discomfort without direct confrontation, relying on the listener to infer the intended meaning.

The least frequent was the bald on record strategy (68 instances), which tended to appear in emotionally charged or high-stakes moments. For example, “Now you’ve made your sister cry!” (GT/P.XVII/13) was delivered with no mitigation, signaling clear authority and emotional tension, particularly in hierarchical interactions.

These patterns reflect not only character dynamics but also how language functions within the film’s narrative to build relationships, assert identity, and move the story forward.

No	Translation Techniques	Frequency
1	Adaptation (A)	29
2	Amplification (Am)	40
3	Borrowing (B)	4
4	Calque (C)	2
5	Compensation (Cp)	2
6	Description (D)	3
7	Discursive Creation (DC)	6
8	Establish Equivalent (EE)	50
9	Generalization (G)	6
10	Literal Translation (LT)	200
11	Modulation (M)	163
12	Reduction (R)	66
13	Transposition (T)	49
14	Particularization (P)	4
15	Linguistic Amplification (LA)	4
16	Linguistic Compression (LC)	9
17	Substitution (S)	0
18	Variation (V)	2
	Total	639

Table 2. Translation Techniques in The Indonesian Subtitles of Wicked (2024)

Literal translation appeared most frequently (200 instances), typically applied to expressions with direct equivalence. For example, “The wickedest witch there ever was” became “Penyihir paling jahat yang pernah ada”, and “The enemy of all of us here in Oz” became “Musuh kita semua di sini di Oz” (TT/2). While this technique maintains structure and vocabulary, it occasionally overlooks cultural and pragmatic subtleties—especially politeness markers.

Modulation, with 163 occurrences, emerged as the second most-used technique. It was often used to adapt expressions more naturally in Indonesian. For instance, “It’s good to see me, isn’t it?” was rendered as “Senang melihatku, kan?” (TT/4). This version maintains the speaker’s playful tone while sounding fluent and culturally appropriate. In many cases, modulation proved more effective in conveying the original pragmatic force than literal translation.

Reduction (66) and amplification (40) were also common. Reduction was mostly used to shorten long phrases, often omitting politeness cues due to space limitations in subtitles. On the other hand, amplification sometimes added information to help clarify meaning, particularly when cultural references or emotions were involved.

Interestingly, substitution was not used at all. This may suggest that the subtitler prioritized maintaining the core message of the original text rather than making drastic changes that could disrupt character portrayal or plot

coherence.

In summary, although literal translation was the most frequently applied technique, modulation stood out as the most effective in preserving politeness strategies. These findings highlight that effective subtitle translation involves more than just linguistic accuracy it also requires sensitivity to context, tone, and culture, especially when dealing with pragmatic elements like politeness.

The present study reveals that positive politeness is the most frequently employed strategy in the English dialogues of *Wicked* (2024), particularly in Glinda's speech, while literal translation and modulation are the most common techniques used in the Indonesian subtitles. Although literal translation dominates, modulation proves more effective in preserving the pragmatic force and politeness strategies of the original text. These findings highlight the complex interplay between pragmatic intent and translation technique, demonstrating that successful subtitle translation requires more than linguistic equivalence; it demands sensitivity to context, tone, and cultural nuance.

These results are consistent with previous research that underscores the challenges of conveying politeness across languages and cultures. For example, Mahmoudi and Chirig [16] found that maintaining honorifics and politeness expressions is crucial in translating Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* into Arabic, while D. V [17] highlighted the complexity of transferring politeness formulas in the English translation of Ibn Kathir's *As-Sira an-Nabawiyya*. Shevchenko and Kudrya [18] also emphasized the importance of pragmatic strategies in translating fiction, and Khabarova [19] observed that positive politeness is often downplayed in business correspondence translations to Ukrainian and Russian, favoring more formal, negative politeness strategies. Similarly, Al-Badawi [20] noted that while translations may retain overall authenticity, they can result in the loss of cultural and stylistic features, particularly in the case of euphemistic expressions.

The significance of these findings lies in their contribution to the broader understanding of how pragmatic features, especially politeness, are managed in audiovisual translation. By systematically analyzing both the source dialogues and their subtitles, this study demonstrates that the choice of translation technique can either preserve or diminish the intended social meanings and cultural nuances. This insight is vital for translators, educators, and researchers, as it underscores the need for a nuanced approach that goes beyond word-for-word translation to include pragmatic and cultural considerations. Ultimately, the study advances the field by providing empirical evidence that effective subtitle translation hinges on the translator's ability to balance linguistic accuracy with pragmatic appropriateness.

Despite its strengths, such as the use of established theoretical frameworks and a detailed, context-sensitive analysis, this study is not without limitations. The focus on a single film may limit the generalizability of the findings, and the analysis did not assess the reception of the subtitles by Indonesian audiences. Nevertheless, the study addresses a notable gap in the literature by integrating the analysis of politeness strategies and translation techniques in film subtitles, a relationship that has often been examined separately. Future research could expand on this work by exploring audience perceptions or by comparing multiple films and genres to further illuminate the dynamics of pragmatics in translation.

Conclusions

This study examined the expression of politeness strategies in the English dialogues of *Wicked* (2024) and their rendering in Indonesian subtitles, utilizing the frameworks of Brown and Levinson and Molina and Hurtado Albir. The results indicate that positive politeness predominates, especially in Glinda's interactions, reflecting a focus on rapport and social harmony. In translation, literal translation and modulation were the most common techniques; however, while literal translation often maintained surface accuracy, modulation was more effective in preserving pragmatic and cultural nuances. These findings highlight the crucial role of pragmatic competence in audiovisual translation, emphasizing that subtitlers act as cultural mediators who must balance linguistic fidelity with the interpersonal subtleties of the source text. This research contributes to the fields of translation and pragmatics by demonstrating the importance of integrating linguistic and cultural considerations in subtitle production, offering valuable guidance for translators, educators, and future research.

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