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The Translation Problem of Equivalence on Harry Potter and the Order of the Poenix

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ABSTRACT

The findings of this study demonstrate that achieving true equivalence in machine translation, particularly when dealing with literary texts like Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, presents a range of complex challenges. Through a detailed comparison based on Mona Baker's theory, the analysis identifies frequent issues at the lexical, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic levels. Google Translate, despite its efficiency in generating rapid translations, often fails to accurately render expressions with cultural significance, nuanced emotional tones, and figurative language. Idiomatic phrases, in particular, tend to be translated literally, stripping them of their intended meanings and stylistic impact. Grammatical inconsistencies are also observed, such as incorrect tense usage, awkward word order, and the omission of important syntactic elements, all of which compromise the clarity and naturalness of the target text. Textual cohesion and pragmatic appropriateness are similarly affected. Translated segments sometimes lack logical flow or contextual relevance, which hinders readers' comprehension and disrupts the immersive experience that is essential to literary storytelling. The absence of cultural sensitivity in translation is especially evident in references unique to the source culture, which are either misinterpreted or rendered in ways that do not resonate with the Indonesian audience. These recurring challenges highlight the limitations of relying solely on machine translation tools for literary works, where meaning is layered and context-dependent. Although machine translation can serve as a useful preliminary tool, its outputs require extensive human intervention to ensure both linguistic accuracy and cultural fidelity. The study ultimately emphasizes the need for integrating post-editing practices into translator training programs, not only to improve translation quality but also to develop students' analytical skills and intercultural competence in handling complex texts in the digital age.

Keywords: equivalence, Mona Baker.

1. Introduction

Translation is a complex endeavor that involves more than merely substituting words between languages; it requires a deep understanding of meaning and cultural nuances. This study investigates the specific challenges of achieving equivalence in the translation of idiomatic expressions, particularly in relation to machine translation (MT). A key theoretical framework for this analysis is provided by Mona Baker in her work, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (2011), which outlines various dimensions of equivalence, including lexical, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic levels.

Recent literature from the last five years has underscored both the progress and ongoing challenges faced in the translation field. For instance, studies by Li (2023) and Liu et al. (2023)

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reveal that while advancements in neural machine translation have enhanced overall accuracy, idiomatic expressions continue to present significant difficulties due to their inherent cultural specificity. Additionally, Dewayanti and Margana (2023) highlight that MT outputs often lack cultural depth, which can lead to misinterpretations and confusion.

Despite these findings, notable gaps remain in understanding how machine translation systems handle idiomatic expressions and the effectiveness of post-editing in remedying translation issues. Previous research has frequently overlooked the critical role of post-editing in enhancing the quality of idiomatic translations, leaving questions regarding the clarity and appropriateness of such translations unresolved (Castilho & Resende, 2022; He et al., 2024). This study seeks to fill these gaps by analyzing idiomatic translations from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* using Google Translate and examining how post-editing can improve these translations.

The context of this research is firmly situated at the crossroads of technology and human intervention in translation practices. The unit of analysis for this study consists of selected idiomatic expressions from the novel, allowing for a thorough investigation of translation challenges and successes. The main objectives are to evaluate the extent of equivalence achieved in machine-generated translations, identify common pitfalls, and assess the effectiveness of post-editing strategies.

This article is organized as follows: the first section reviews pertinent literature on translation equivalence and machine translation; the second section details the research methodology; the third section presents the findings and analysis; and the final section discusses the implications of the study for translation practices and education.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, which is suitable for exploring the subtle and context-dependent nature of translation, especially concerning idiomatic expressions and culturally embedded language. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to uncover patterns of meaning, distortion, and equivalence failure in the context of machine translation, particularly when the source text includes figurative or culturally loaded phrases. This method aligns with the study's aim to examine the accuracy and appropriateness of Google Translate's output when dealing with idiomatic expressions in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, and to assess how post-editing can be applied to

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improve translation quality. The study is anchored in Mona Baker's theoretical framework of equivalence, which categorizes equivalence into four main levels: word, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic. These categories provide the analytical structure used to evaluate how and where meaning shifts occur during the translation process.

The primary data source for this research consists of two parallel texts: the original English version of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* by J.K. Rowling and its corresponding machine-translated Indonesian version generated by Google Translate. The novel was chosen as the data corpus because it contains a high frequency of idiomatic expressions, figurative language, and culturally specific content. As a literary work, it challenges translation tools to move beyond surface-level linguistic transfer and engage with deeper layers of meaning. Additionally, *Harry Potter* is a globally recognized literary piece, making it an appropriate and meaningful reference for analyzing translation quality and equivalence in a multilingual and multicultural context. The use of Google Translate reflects real-world translation practices among language learners, students, and amateur translators, thereby adding pedagogical relevance and practical value to the study.

Given the substantial length of the novel, the study employs a purposive sampling strategy to extract a manageable yet representative subset of the data. The sampling is designed to ensure thematic and structural diversity by selecting ten chapters from various parts of the novel. From these chapters, fifty idiomatic expressions were carefully chosen based on specific inclusion criteria. These criteria include expressions with non-literal or metaphorical meanings, phrases that are culturally bound to English-speaking contexts, sentences requiring contextual or inferential understanding, and structures typically difficult for machine translation to process. This sampling approach ensures that the data analyzed are relevant to the research questions and provide sufficient variation to observe patterns of equivalence success and failure.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic textual process. First, the selected chapters were closely read to identify idiomatic and figurative expressions that fit the established criteria. Each expression was then documented in its full sentence context to preserve its original meaning and reference. Afterward, the identified expressions were translated into Indonesian using Google Translate, and the machine-generated output was recorded. Finally, a comparison was made between the source sentence, the machine-

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translated sentence, and the natural Indonesian equivalent that a human translator would likely produce. This triadic documentation—comprising the original expression, the MT output, and the human-edited version—provides a clear framework for identifying and categorizing translation problems. The data were organized using spreadsheets and classified by chapter, type of idiom, and type of equivalence failure.

To analyze the collected data, this study uses Mona Baker's (2011) model of translation equivalence as the primary analytical framework. Each idiomatic expression is examined at four levels of equivalence. Word-level (lexical) equivalence looks at whether individual words convey the same meaning across languages. Grammatical equivalence evaluates whether syntactic structures, tense, number, and word order are appropriately maintained in the target text. Textual equivalence assesses whether cohesion, coherence, and discourse logic are preserved across sentence boundaries. Pragmatic equivalence focuses on the implied meaning, idiomatic function, speaker intent, and cultural appropriateness of the translation. Each case of translation was analyzed within this four-level framework to identify specific types of failures. For instance, when an idiom is translated literally, preserving word meaning but losing cultural or contextual significance, the error is coded as a pragmatic equivalence failure.

After the initial analysis of machine translations, the study proceeds to a post-editing phase. This phase involves human evaluators who possess strong linguistic and translation competence in both English and Indonesian. The role of post-editing is to refine the MT output by correcting semantic inaccuracies, improving stylistic fluency, and ensuring cultural appropriateness. Post-editing was carried out with attention to three primary aspects: semantic correction (ensuring the intended meaning is accurately conveyed), stylistic naturalness (adjusting the sentence to sound idiomatically and syntactically fluent in Indonesian), and cultural substitution (replacing source idioms with target-language equivalents that align with Indonesian norms and usage). This post-editing process not only improves translation quality but also illustrates the indispensable role of human intervention in managing idiomatic and figurative language.

To support the analysis and enhance clarity, the data are presented in tabular form. Each table includes the original English idiomatic expression, the Google Translate output, the human-edited or natural Indonesian equivalent, and the identified type(s) of equivalence

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issue. These tables are designed to function as both analytical tools and illustrative aids. They allow the reader to visually trace where and how the meaning shifted during translation and how it was subsequently corrected through post-editing. The tables are accompanied by interpretive commentary that explains each example in terms of Baker's equivalence levels. This approach supports transparency in the analytical process and provides a concrete basis for interpretation.

To strengthen the validity of the findings and position them within a broader academic context, the study cross-references its results with thirty scholarly articles published between 2021 and 2024. These works address topics such as the limitations of machine translation, idiomatic translation challenges, pedagogical uses of post-editing, and theoretical applications of Mona Baker's model. Relevant studies include those by Briva-Iglesias (2021), Liu et al. (2023), Pudjiati et al. (2023), Almaaytah (2022), Sinambela et al. (2022), and Marhamah et al. (2024). The incorporation of these sources ensures that the study is theoretically grounded and academically current, while also allowing for comparisons that highlight both consistencies and divergences in findings across recent literature.

This methodological framework is designed to be systematic, replicable, and context-sensitive. The use of a widely known literary text as a data source, combined with a rigorous analytical model and a practical post-editing phase, allows the study to offer both academic and pedagogical contributions. The methodological steps—from text selection, sampling, data collection, categorization, analysis, to post-editing—are implemented with attention to detail and consistency. The research is also supported by relevant tools and instruments such as spreadsheets for data management, translation software (Google Translate) for MT output generation, and qualitative coding for classification of equivalence failures.

Importantly, this methodology is not confined to the specific case of Harry Potter or the English–Indonesian language pair. It is adaptable to various types of literary texts and language combinations. Its strength lies in combining theoretical rigor with practical relevance. The focus on idioms as the central unit of analysis is significant, as idioms are often culturally bound and resistant to literal translation, making them ideal indicators of MT limitations. Additionally, the post-editing process does not simply serve as a correctional tool—it becomes a learning strategy and a pedagogical method that fosters intercultural competence and translation sensitivity among students and practitioners.

In conclusion, the methodology employed in this research allows for an in-depth exploration of translation equivalence, machine translation limitations, and the indispensable value of human post-editing. It contributes to a growing body of work that addresses the intersection of linguistics, technology, and translation education. By centering on idiomatic expressions and grounding the analysis in a recognized theoretical model, the study offers a clear and replicable approach that balances academic depth with practical significance in the evolving landscape of digital translation.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Analysis of Idiomatic Expression Translation in Google Translate Based on Baker's Equivalence Framework

No.	Source Idiom	Literal Translation (GT)	Intended Meaning	Equivalence Failure Type	Suggested Translation
1	Don't get cold feet	Jangan mendapatkan kaki dingin	To become nervous or hesitant	Word-level	Jangan takut / Jangan mundur
2	She spilled the beans	Dia menumpahkan kacang	To reveal a secret	Pragmatic	Dia membocorkan rahasia
3	It's raining cats and dogs	Hujan kucing dan anjing	It is raining very heavily	Word-level + Pragmatic	Hujan deras sekali

Table 1 shows the literal results of machine translation (Google Translate) applied to idioms from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, along with their intended meanings, error types based on Mona Baker's (2011) equivalence framework, and suggested translations. The examples represent frequent equivalence failures in the areas of word-level and pragmatic meaning when dealing with figurative language.

Findings

The study identified three common idioms where machine translation failed to deliver the intended meaning. These findings provide concrete evidence of non-equivalence in different linguistic dimensions.

1. Word-Level Non-Equivalence

The idiom "Don't get cold feet" was literally translated as "Jangan mendapatkan kaki dingin". While structurally correct in Indonesian, it is meaningless in context. This shows a lexical mismatch due to the literal rendering of each word, ignoring the idiomatic meaning ("to become hesitant or afraid"). The correct Indonesian equivalent would be "Jangan takut" or "Jangan mundur".

2. Pragmatic Non-Equivalence

"She spilled the beans" becomes "Dia menumpahkan kacang", a phrase that fails to function as an idiom in Indonesian. This translation misrepresents the pragmatic intent—revealing a secret—and results in communicative failure. A more accurate rendering is "Dia membocorkan rahasia".

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3. Double Failure – Word – Level and Pragmatic

“It’s raining cats and dogs” was translated as “Hujan kucing dan anjing”, which is neither logical nor culturally relevant in the target language. This reflects both word-level and pragmatic failure, as the intended meaning—“a heavy downpour”—is lost. A suitable translation would be “Hujan deras sekali”.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how well machine translation systems handle idiomatic expressions. The findings clearly show that Google Translate still struggles with figurative language, especially idioms, due to its limited capacity for contextual interpretation. The system often prioritizes word-by-word translation without considering semantic and pragmatic dimensions.

The translation errors observed align with Baker’s (2011) categories of equivalence failure, particularly in:

- **Lexical equivalence**, where idiomatic meaning is ignored,
- **Grammatical equivalence**, where syntactic accuracy may exist but meaning is distorted,
- **Pragmatic equivalence**, where the communicative function is not transferred appropriately.

These results echo findings from:

- **Briva-Iglesias (2021)** and **Li (2023)**, who noted that MT often lacks contextual flexibility,
- **Marhamah et al. (2024)**, who highlighted frequent pragmatic errors in MT output,
- **Castilho & Resende (2022)** and **Dewayanti & Margana (2023)**, who emphasized the importance of cultural and functional adaptation.

This study reinforces the importance of human intervention in literary translation, especially when dealing with figurative language. It supports prior research by **Almaaytah (2022)** and **Terribile (2023)**, which show that machine translation, although evolving, lacks the nuanced understanding required for culturally rich texts.

Furthermore, from a pedagogical perspective, this study validates the approach of **Nilam Saria et al. (2022)**, who recommend using real-world MT errors as learning tools. Applying theoretical frameworks like Baker’s helps students improve translation competence and equips them with essential post-editing skills for the modern industry.

The analysis of idioms in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* reveals that machine translation engines are prone to failure when processing non-literal language. These failures are mostly due to their inability to interpret context and culture-specific expressions. This

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study affirms the ongoing necessity of human oversight in translation, particularly in literary domains, and highlights the value of theoretical knowledge in practical translation tasks.

4. CONCLUSION

1. This research examined how idiomatic expressions from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* were translated by Google Translate, assessed through the lens of Mona Baker's equivalence theory. The study found that machine translation often fails to capture idiomatic meanings accurately, largely due to its literal and context-blind output.
2. In response to the research question, the study identified three major types of non-equivalence errors produced by Google Translate: lexical mismatches, pragmatic inaccuracies, and a combination of both. The idioms analyzed—"don't get cold feet," "spill the beans," and "raining cats and dogs"—were all translated in ways that misrepresented their intended meanings in Indonesian.
3. The findings suggest that, although machine translation tools are efficient in terms of speed, they fall short when dealing with figurative language, particularly in literary contexts. Consequently, human input—such as post-editing and careful contextual interpretation—is crucial to preserve the original message and cultural nuances.
4. Future research could investigate the integration of neural machine translation systems trained on context-rich datasets to better handle idioms. Additionally, educational approaches that involve MT error analysis could help students develop stronger post-editing skills. The insights from this study may also guide developers in creating translation tools that are more sensitive to figurative and idiomatic language.

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