

# Assessing Translation of Humor in The English Subtitles of *Goodbye Mr. Loser*

Zheng Xiaorui<sup>1</sup>, Amin Amirdabbaghian<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University Malaya, Malaysia

Article information	Abstract
DOI : 10.25077/jds.1.2.75-91.2024 Correspondence : <a href="mailto:amirdabbaghian@um.edu.my">amirdabbaghian@um.edu.my</a>	Humor is primarily influenced by both the source and target language cultures, which poses significant challenges for translators. Given the continuous emergence of comedy movies, humor plays a crucial role in cultural expression. However, research on the assessment of translation quality of humor in movie subtitles in China remains limited. This study aims to categorize the translation techniques using Pedersen’s typology (2005, 2011) and assess the translation quality of the humorous content in the English subtitles of the Chinese comedy movie <i>Goodbye, Mr. Loser</i> (2015). <i>Goodbye, Mr. Loser</i> is one of the most successful comedy movies in China in recent years, selling 1.441 billion yuan at the box office and winning an award at the China New Era International Film Festival, while also gaining a lot of attention overseas. This study analyzes the accuracy of the English subtitles based on Newmark’s (1988) framework. In his model, Newmark (1988) assesses the accuracy by looking at the accurate reflection of the semantic, contextual, register and style of the ST in TT. Additionally, it adopts a questionnaire for non-Chinese speakers following Nababan, Nuraeni and Sumardiono’s (2012) approach to assess the acceptability and readability of the English subtitles. The significance of this study lies in its potential to enhance the quality of Chinese audiovisual products, reduce language barriers, foster effective cross-culture communication, and provide a valuable reference for the humor translation in Chinese comedy movies in the future.
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## INTRODUCTION

Human communication and relationships involve a sense of humor. It can even be seen in individuals from very early on in life. Humor’s subjectivity enables readers to perceive and embrace it through diverse viewpoints (Mulyati & Nugroho, 2023). Humor is ubiquitous in people’s daily lives and plays an integral role in media products. It is becoming increasingly international in the diverse entertainment media landscape as traditional media products and on-demand platforms proliferate (Dore, 2019). With the rapid development of film and television, the field of subtitle translation has gradually flourished. The accelerated process of globalization, the advancement of technology, and the demands of multilingual and multicultural society have jointly promoted the research of subtitle translation, making it a hot research topic in recent years (Chaume, 2020). Since humor also transcends cultural, gender, and social boundaries, playing a vital role across diverse cultures and languages, translating humor can pose challenges due to the diversity across cultures and languages (Qin et al., 2019). Due to the specific features of audiovisual products, the translation of audiovisual products can be a challenge. Hence, this issue is worth noticing (Mulyati & Nugroho, 2023). In addition, the study of humor is still limited in China. The study of humor in China appeared relatively late in comparison to Western studies. One of the reasons that humor studies in China relative to those in the West is that the Chinese people only developed a strong interest in watching films after the reformation or so called opening up in China. It is also since humor is not taken seriously enough in China. The dominant Chinese philosophy, Confucianism, regards humor as a self-defeating activity and prescribes self-restraint and seriousness of attitude (Jiang et al., 2019; Shen &

Wang, 2019). Moreover, with the continuous development of China's film and television industry, as well as the increasing export of Chinese films, subtitling has become a key part of film, and good subtitling can improve the quality of cross-cultural communication and reduce the risk of cross-cultural conflict (Shen & Wang, 2019). However, studies focusing on the evaluation of translation quality are still limited (Liu, 2022).

Audiovisual Translation (AVT) is the translation of the verbal elements of the video. At the same time, its main characteristic is that the verbal part and the non-verbal part achieve synchronization. In audiovisual translation, the translator has to deal with the text and different parts of the video, such as sound effects and images. According to Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014), there are two main forms of AVT, namely, revoicing and subtitling. Revoicing indicates that the original audio track is substituted for a new version in the target language. Re-voicing refers to the AVT method in which the text of the target language completely or partially covers the text of the original work. Subtitles are textualizations of movies and television work that are often displayed at the bottom of the screen (Jia & Cheng, 2023). Therefore, as one of the new research directions of audiovisual translation, movie subtitle translation is becoming increasingly important in the digital field (Zhang, 2018).

Compared with the mature development of Western subtitle translation, the research on subtitle translation in China is still in the initial stage (Haikuo, 2015; Jia & Cheng, 2023). China pays far less attention to film translation than to the translation of written literary works. Moreover, there are more practical film translation studies. In recent years, many scholars have researched film translation strategies, principles, and constraints (Haikuo, 2015).

Subtitle translation, a new discipline in translation, has progressively prospered alongside the rapid development of the movie and television industries. The rapid progress of globalization, the growing demands of multilingual communities, and technological innovation have all combined to propel subtitle translation research, which has emerged as a popular research topic in the past few decades (Chaume, 2020; Jorge Díaz Cintas, 2009).

In the past, translation was only known as a linguistic activity. However, with the gradual penetration of cultural influence on a global scale and the deepening of value recognition among people, the focus of translators and scholars began to shift from language to culture (Gao, 2016). With the development of science and technology, nowadays, individuals can access film and television content with no effort from various countries via the Internet at any time. Consequently, scholars have gradually paid more and more attention to movie and television subtitles. As for the research on movie and television subtitles, many scholars have studied the research on culture-specific language in film subtitles of different languages. In these studies, many of them adopt different translation strategies to study their native language subtitles and English subtitles. Subtitling has also been categorized as Intralingual Subtitling and Interlingual Subtitling. Intralingual Subtitling refers to the translation of dialogue into text subtitles in the same language (Haider & Hussein, 2022). Additionally, Intralingual Subtitling is that subtitles must be transferred or translated between different languages (Liu, 2014).

Gottlieb's (1997) typology was widely used in the translation of subtitling studies (Batmanathan et al., 2022; JIN, 2018; Mulyati & Nugroho, 2023; Tee et al., 2022) Gottlieb's typology offers translators an extensive guide that encompasses all the potential subtitling procedures for translating subtitles (Tee et al., 2022). This classification includes expansion, paraphrase, transfer, imitation, transcription, dislocation, condensation, decimation, deletion, and resignation. Koponen (2018) used these strategies in translating the subtitles of the *Real Steel* Movie. Results indicated that Deletion and expansion have been identified as ways for improving readability while maintaining the naturalness of ST translated into TT. In addition, Condensation is regarded as the best subtitling approach since it enables translators to keep the ST content in the TT while shortening the words or phrases. Chai et al. (2022) employed a qualitative approach to discuss the strategies and challenges of AVT in culture-related words of Chinese-English subtitling in

the paper-cutting documentary. To make the translation strategy produce the same connotation as the original text, the translation must carefully consider the target language and culture, and make the subtitle firmly integrate into the target culture (Liu, 2012). This study chose Tomaszewicz's (2010) audiovisual translation strategies, which involved adaptation, direct transfer, definitional extension and periphrasis, equivalence, and omission. In this study, omission, direct transfer, equivalence, and adaptation were the most suitable translation strategies. Souzandehfar and Mehr (2019) conducted a study exploring the translation strategies and strategies for expressions containing cultural-bound items in the movie *Sensitive Floor* in Iranian-English subtitles through Pederson's (2005) typology. This category is often used when dealing with cultural factors in translation. This taxonomy includes Retention, Specification, Explicitation, Addition, Direct Translation, Generalization, Substitution, and Omission, which provides a systematic method for the analysis of subtitles. The results argued that translation strategies such as direct translation and omission could lead the audience to misunderstand the message of the source language.

In addition, Alaa and Sawi (2023) chose the research design to investigate the strategies employed in subtitling cultural references from Egyptian Arabic to English. This design also utilized Pedersen's (2011) typology, including Retention, Specification, Direct translation, Generalization, Substitution, Omission, and Official equivalent. Target-oriented strategies such as substitution, generalization, and omission were widely used. Source-oriented strategies, primarily preserving or directly translating cultural elements in the source language. And target language-oriented strategies that prioritize adaptation or substitution to accommodate the target language and culture. By using these strategies, this study stated that the vast majority of subtitle translation strategies have achieved effective translation. Therefore, these studies demonstrated the applicability of Pederson's (2011) typology in the translation process, which can better taken into account in translating the cultural elements of ST and TT.

Over the decades, many scholars have tried to use different theories to guide these humor translations to achieve an effective result. For instance, theories such as functionalist approaches, relevance theory, and equivalence have been widely used in translation humor. Alnusairat and Jaganathan (2022) suggested that functional equivalence theory appears to be a crucial technique in translating humor in AVT subtitles due to the differences in language and culture. According to Yang (2020), Chinese and English subtitles in the American TV series *Modern Family* were analyzed. This paper examines the humorous translation of subtitles from the unique idioms of different characters. The framework was based on Christian Nord's functionalist humor translation theory. Consequently, the paper indicated that the functionalist approach can be seen as a pragmatic way of directing humor translation in most circumstances. However, the principle might also be compromised because of the intrinsic cultural and linguistic barriers between ST and TT.

For decades, numerous researchers have used different theories and approach to guide the selection of humor translation strategies (Alnusairat & Jaganathan, 2022; Debra & Raphaelson-West, 1989; Vandaele, 2002; Zabalbeascoa, 2012). Due to the continuous challenges in humor, subtitling translations, and the emerging AVT works within the scope of humor, there is an imperious demand that achieving a humorous effect can be a significant part of translating the humor of subtitles (Lacković, 2022). Tee et al. (2022) explored the translation strategies and the translation errors that occurred in the translation process from English to Chinese in the popular series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. The findings imply that the inconsonant quality may be due to the restrictions in linguistic and technical issues, a lack of cultural understanding of the source and target language, and inconsistencies in translation norms, which result in translation problems.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the English subtitles of *Goodbye, Mr. Loser* in-depth and explore the translation techniques and quality of these subtitles. As one of the most successful Chinese comedy movies, *The Goodbye, Mr. Loser* has been a huge success both at home and abroad, and the lines of this movie are still a hot topic of discussion among different age groups today. Therefore, this study chose to examine this movie to provide a valuable reference for humor-subtitling translation in the future

Chinese comedy industry. The research is separated into two main parts. First, Pedersen's classification (2005, 2011) is used to explore translation techniques of English subtitles. Secondly, since the FAR model suggested by Pederson (2017) look only at the semantic errors at the textual level, this study will incorporate Newmark's (1988) dichotomy of Semantic and Communicative Translation to fill in the gap. Therefore, this study complements the insights on communicative translation in Newmark (1988) by discussing the accuracy of these samples. Nababan's (2012) theory of translation quality assessment is also implemented to evaluate their acceptability and readability, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the translation of humor in *Goodbye, Mr. Loser*.

The importance of this study lies in offering a reference for upcoming audiovisual works. Moreover, by addressing the challenges in humor translation, we can improve the quality of Chinese film and television subtitle translation. This improvement will notably contribute to refining the accuracy of Chinese audiovisual subtitle translations. Additionally, this research serves as a valuable reference for future studies in this domain. Furthermore, given that these humor expressions entail rich elements of Chinese culture, this study can significantly advance the global dissemination of Chinese culture and facilitate cross-cultural communication among audiences from diverse nations.

## **METHODS**

### **Data Collection**

This study encompasses two distinct categories of data. The initial segment of data originates from the movie subtitles. The data collection process in this segment followed a structured procedure: Initially, the researchers watched the entire movie, focusing on identifying quotes of humor. Subsequently, 12 samples were meticulously chosen to serve as the data of this research, which encompassing Chinese salutations, wordplay, idiomatic expressions, and traditional Chinese stories reflected in Chinese phrases. Following the selection of these samples, the researcher then analyzed the translation techniques utilized by English subtitles and then evaluated the accuracy and acceptability of these subtitles. The secondary data was collected from a questionnaire that contained 12 close questions that explored the reception of 30 individuals who were non-Chinese and have no knowledge in the Chinese language. They were guided to view both the provided movie clips and the transcript of Chinese-English subtitles that depict humor.

### **Data Analysis**

This section discussed the data analysis procedure of this research. In addition, the analysis of the research data contained two approaches: descriptive analysis and reception study.

#### *Descriptive Analysis*

Given that the translation of these humor expressions in the subtitles involves numerous terms associated with Chinese culture, Pedersen's typology (2005, 2011) was used as the framework to examine the translation techniques employed in the 12 chosen official English subtitle samples. To give a comprehensive examination of the samples, both Chinese and English subtitles were placed side by side for thorough analysis. Furthermore, an evaluation of translation quality was conducted, focusing on the accuracy, acceptability, and readability of the Chinese-English humor subtitles. The descriptive analysis was adopted to evaluate the accuracy and acceptability of these subtitles. The analysis of the accuracy of these subtitles was guided by Pederson (2017) to detect the translation error in each sample, which included semantic error and stylistic error. However, it is important to ensure effective communication across cultures at the contextual and social level. Newmark (1988) provided insights on communicative translation in his analysis. Moreover, Mulyati and Nugroho (2023) provided the assessment criterion that was adapted from Nababan's (2012) model to analyze the acceptability of these samples. The evaluation criteria are as follows: Acceptable – the translation is acceptable as humor; Less acceptable – the translation is accepted as humor but requires re-reading or rethinking; Unacceptable – the translation cannot be understood as humor at all (Mulyati & Nugroho, 2023).

## Reception Analysis

The second set of data analysis employed a reception research approach. This research evaluated the translation quality of these subtitles based on the questionnaire's results from the participants. This questionnaire comprised 12 closed questions, used to determine the average scores for the readability of the English subtitles. The criteria were adapted from Nababan's (2012) model, which was Readable (3 points): Word, technical terms, clauses, sentences, or text of English subtitles are clear and can be understood. Somewhat readable (2 points): Word, technical terms, clauses, sentences, or text of English subtitles are not so clear; the background color is bright so not so readable; the subtitles are shown fast so that you cannot read and finish. Not readable (1 point): the English subtitles are difficult to understand and cannot even be read.

### Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with full attention to ethical principles and considerations. The movie *Goodbye, Mr. loser* is publicly available on YouTube. Before data collection, participation was completely voluntary, and participants were not subjected to any form of coercion or undue influence. Each participant willingly provided informed consent, receiving comprehensive details about the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks involved, and the unreserved right to withdraw at any stage. The confidentiality of participants' information was ensured, and all data collected were anonymous and stored securely. Any trace of identifiable information was expunged from the records to further ensure privacy protection. This comprehensive approach reflected the commitment to upholding ethical standards throughout the study.

In this section, the study aimed to discern the subtitling techniques and scrutinize the translation quality in 12 humor subtitles within the movie *Goodbye Mr. Loser*. The translation techniques were delineated and explicated based on the model articulated by Pedersen (2005, 2011). This taxonomy includes Retention, Specification, Explication, Addition, Direct Translation, Generalization, Substitution, and Omission. Subsequently, both Chinese and English subtitles were juxtaposed for comprehensive analysis. For these samples, functional equivalence in Pederson's FAR model is first used to explore the translation errors in these samples, including semantic and stylistic errors. Since the focus of study is on the meaning in context, this research, as mentioned before, incorporated the dichotomy of Semantic and Communicative Translation suggested by Newmark (1988) to solve the problem of shortcoming at the semantic errors domain in the FAR model. Therefore, this study complements the insights on communicative translation in Newmark (1988) by discussing the accuracy of these samples. Mulyati and Nugroho's (2023) assessment criterion that was adapted from Nababan's (2012) was employed to analyze the acceptability of the humor subtitles. Ultimately, the participants' reception analysis was based on the results of the questionnaire which also derived from the criterion of Nababan's (2012) translation quality assessment model, specifically focusing on the readability parameters.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### Direct Translation

In Pederson (2005, 2011), direct translation means that the semantic content of the cultural references in the source text remains constant, with no additions or omissions. There is a deliberate absence of attempts to convey connotations or direct the target text audience in any manner. The following two examples both use the translation technique of direct translation.

**Table 1: Example of the Direct Translation**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
马冬梅：恭喜啊伯父！	Ma Dongmei: congratulation, <b>uncle!</b>	Ma Dongmei: Congratulations <b>uncle!</b>
秋雅：这是我老公。	Qiu Ya: This is my husband.	Qiu Ya: He is my husband.
马冬梅：对不起啊，对不起啊叔叔。	Ma Dongmei: I'm sorry, I'm sorry, <b>uncle.</b>	Ma Dongmei: Oh! I'm sorry! I'm sorry <b>uncle.</b>

In this sample, the humor in the ST primarily revolves around two Chinese terms of address. According to the Xinhua Dictionary, 伯父 (bo fu, refers to a man of the same generation and older than the father or a blood-related elder brother of one's father) and 叔叔 (shu shu, a man of the same generation and younger than the father or a blood-related younger brother of one's father) both carry several meanings. In English, "uncle", as the meaning in the Oxford Dictionary, often indicates a sibling of one's parent, typically suggesting a blood relation. According to Pedersen (2017) and Newmark (1988), this translation results in conflicts with the context and carries a semantic error.

This translation may not be accurate. In the ST, 伯父 (bo fu, a man older than the father without blood relation), and 叔叔 (shu shu, a man younger than the father without blood relation) as considered to be the salutation of a male without blood relation. However, in the English translation, it's directly interpreted as a term related to blood.

In this subtitle translation, the humorous effect is greatly weakened or even disappeared in the translation of the target text. The two expressions 伯父 (bo fu) and 叔叔 (shu shu) in Chinese are both addressed to people who are not blood-related, but they are translated into the English blood-related "uncle". According to the plot of the movie, Ma Dongmei went to Qiu Ya's wedding. Because Qiu Ya's husband looked old, Ma Dongmei mistakenly assumed he was Qiu Ya's father, so call her husband "uncle". The "uncle" here is the first "uncle" in the TT, the Chinese meaning is to call a man of the same generation as one's father but older, Ma Dongmei uses this address here as a respectful address for this man. When Qiu Ya explained that the man who looked older was actually her husband, Ma Dongmei called the man "uncle" again. The second "uncle" in this sample means a younger man of the same generation as one's father, that is to say, although Ma Dongmei already knew that this man was not Qiu Ya's father, she still wanted to satirize his old age and classify this man into the older generation. However, in the TT, the audience may totally miss this humor. Therefore, according to Mulyati and Nugroho's (2023) criterion, the translation of humor here is unacceptable, and this translation cannot be considered humorous by the target audience.

In the final analysis, 54.8% of participants deemed the translation to be readable, with 32.3% finding it somewhat readable and 12.9% declaring it not readable. An examination of participants' assessments of this sample's readability using Nababan's (2012) criteria yielded an average readability score of 2.41. This shows that this humor translation is only somewhat readable.

**Table 2: Example of the Direct Translation**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
夏洛这孩子从小没爸爸。夏洛一出生，他爸爸就下落不明了。	Xia Luo this kid from little no father, Xia Luo once born, he father was whereabouts no clear.	Xia Luo doesn't know his father at all. As soon as Xia Luo was born, his father disappeared.
我特别能理解你，我们家也是这种情况，我爸爸的名字叫马东，我一落地我的爸爸就没了，所以我叫马冬梅。	I particularly understand you, we home also this kind situation, my father's name is <b>Ma Dong</b> , I once landed my father be gone, so I am <b>Madong Mei</b> .	I totally understand you. My famliy had the same experience. My dad's name is <b>Ma Dong</b> , he left when I was born. That's why my name is <b>Madong Mei</b> .

The Chinese idiom 下落不明 (xia lu bu ming, disappearance) in Xinhua Dictionary implies uncertainty about someone's location or disappearance. The translated text directly conveys the implied meaning of this idiom, helping the target audience to grasp the idiom in the Chinese subtitles. According to Pedersen (2017) and Newmark (1988), though the bold words in TT accurately conveyed the meaning of the ST, it failed to retain the humor element of the ST.

However, the puns in ST were not translated, resulting in a loss of its humor. In this example, the presentation of humor in this translation is unacceptable. The character's name, "Xia Luo," phonetically matches the first two characters in the Chinese idiom, 下落不明 (xia lu bu ming, whereabouts unknown). The term 不明 (bu ming) means "unknown" according to the Xinhua Dictionary's explanation of this

idiom. This sentence combines the character's name to create a pun, which sets the stage for another pun. In the second sentence of the ST, Ma Dongmei mentioned her father's name was "Ma Dong", and after her birth, he passed away. In Chinese, when someone dies, it can be said that the person 没 (mei) which means someone died. In the ST, the name Ma Dongmei was the combination of "Ma Dong"(her father's name) and "mei" (someone died). Hence, she said the reason why her name was Madong mei. As a result, according to Mulyati and Nugroho's (2023) criterion, the translation of humor in this situation might not be seen as acceptable, making it challenging for the intended audience to recognize it as humor.

For the assessment of the readability part, participants' responses indicated that 45.2% found the translation readable, 48.4% found it somewhat readable, and 6.5% found it not readable. By using the Nababan's (2012) criteria of readability, the score of this sample is 2.38. Therefore, this translation is categorized as somewhat readable.

### Substitution

Substitution includes the elimination of the source text cultural reference and substituting it with alternate terms in the target text or a form of rephrasing that may not necessarily incorporate an extralinguistic culture-bound reference (Pederson, 2005, 2011). The bolded content in the following example uses the technique of substitution.

**Table 3: Example of the Substitution**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
冬梅啊，你知道什是东施效颦吗？	Dongmei, you know what is <b>Dongshi imitate frown?</b>	Dongmei, do you know the story of the <b>frog copying the princess?</b>
东施是谁，她为什么尿频。	Dongshi is who, she <b>why urinating so often.</b>	Who's the princess? And <b>why did the frog copy her?</b>

The Chinese idiom 东施效颦 (dong shi xiao pin, Dongshi imitate frown) is replaced with the English phrase "frog copying the princess." In ancient China, there was a famous beauty named 西施 (xi shi, someone's name), who often held her chest and frowned due to heartache. An ugly woman nearby saw this and thought Xi Shi's posture was beautiful, so she imitated her, but it made her look even uglier. Later, this ugly woman was referred to a name as 东施 (dong shi, someone's name). The idiom 东施效颦 (dong shi xiao pin, Dongshi imitate frown) in Xinhua Dictionary metaphorically signified imitating others poorly, ending up looking worse rather than better. In the target text, "frog" and "the princess" are commonly used words and were characters in the fairy tale "The Princess and the Frog." Using "frog copying the princess" as a replacement for the Chinese idiom 东施效颦 (dong shi xiao pin, Dongshi imitate frown) to make the target audience become more familiar with these foreign terms. However, there's a clear inaccuracy in this translation according to Pedersen (2017) and Newmark (1988). Using alternatives like "princess" and "frog" instead of the original idiom could potentially confuse the target audience. The concept of "a frog copying the princess" is not a familiar story within the target culture, thus failing to connect effectively with the audience.

Due to the involvement of a traditional Chinese story, the translator omitted parts of the Chinese sentence, so that the humorous effect here is completely lost when translated into the target text. According to the plot of the movie, Qiu Ya is recognized as the most beautiful girl in school, and the clothes she wears are usually elegant and lovely style. Ma Dongmei often wore gym suits. When Ma Dongmei found out that Xia Luo had fallen in love with Qiu Ya, she deliberately put on a cute dress and high heels to school. She also walked in a strange way because she had not worn high heels before. At school, Qiu Ya encountered Ma Dongmei, who was mimicking her style of makeup and dressing. In response, she used the idiom 东施效颦 (dong shi xiao pin, Dongshi imitate frown) to mock her. However, at that time, Ma Dongmei did not understand the idiom, and she only caught the last two words 效颦 (xiao pin, imitate frown) and then misheard them as 尿频 (niao pin, urinating so often). Both words share the same pronunciation, "pin", yet their meanings are vastly different. One represented the latter part of the idiom,

which Xinhua Dictionary explained as a person imitating another person frowning, while the other refers to frequent urination, creating a humorous effect through the homophony in the idiom. Unfortunately, in the English subtitles, the translator directly omitted the Chinese word, resulting in the failure to convey the humorous effect from Chinese to the audience. Hence, based on Mulyati and Nugroho's (2023) criterion, the English subtitles lacks acceptability, and it is hard for the target audience to perceive it as humor.

Upon examining participants' readability responses, the translation gathers ratings of 32.3% for readable, 41.9% for somewhat readable, and 25.8% for not readable. In Nababan's (2012) criteria, this sample demonstrated an average readability score of 2.06, indicating it is somewhat readable.

### Paraphrase with sense transfer

This technique involves the exclusion of cultural references from the target text, yet their essence or associated implications are retained by means of paraphrasing (Pederson, 2005, 2011). The following four samples all use the translation technique of Paraphrase with sense transfer.

**Table 4: Example of the Paraphrase with sense transfer**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
把老师说话当放屁你是怎么做到的?	make teacher speak <b>as fart</b> you are what to do.	How dare you ignore me!

放屁 (fang pi, fart) can be considered as slang in Chinese. From the meaning of Xinhua Dictionary, the Chinese term 放屁 (fang pi, fart) meant metaphorically speaking without basis or reason (swear words). Treating someone's words as 放屁 (fang pi, fart) in Chinese means disregarding or treating that person's words as if they were air. In the target text, the translator used the word "ignore" as a replacement. In the Oxford Dictionary, it means "disregard intentionally." According to Pedersen (2017) and Newmark (1988), this translation carries obvious errors, which does not accurately express the meaning of the source text, resulting in serious semantic and stylistic error. The word 放屁 (fang pi, fart) was only used in informal communication, and the register of the ST and TT was biased. Furthermore, the humor effect in the source text was also disrupted. In the movie, Xia Luo accidentally went back to fifteen years ago, so he thought of himself in an incredibly realistic dream. Even when his teacher wanted him to return to his seat and continue the class, he hesitated to comply. In this situation, his teacher said Xia Luo treated his words as air in a slang expression. Chinese subtitles used incongruity to create a humor effect in Chinese by disobeying fundamental formal linguistic standards. However, this effect has totally vanished in the TT. Consequently, based on Mulyati and Nugroho's (2023) criterion, the translation of humor within this context is deemed unacceptable, thus impeding its recognition as humor by the targeted audience.

Regarding the comprehensive readability analysis of this sample, it's notable that 61.3% of participants perceived the translation as readable, 32.2% found it somewhat readable, and 6.5% labeled it as not readable. Consequently, by applying Nababan's (2012) readability criteria, the translation received a score of 2.54 which is readable.

**Table 5: Example of the Paraphrase with sense transfer**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
妈，回头我多给你烧点纸去。	mom, later I more give you <b>burn some money</b> .	Mom, I'll <b>bring you more money</b> later.

According to Pedersen (2017), this example carries a semantic error. This Chinese substitutes 烧纸 (shao zhi, burn paper) from the source language with "money" in the target language represents a form of substitution. In the original context, "burning paper" in Xinhua Dictionary denotes a specific ritualistic act in China, typically involving the living burning symbolic items like paper money, clothing, or paper-made houses for the gods or deceased. Within Chinese culture, fire is believed to facilitate the transmission of possessions to the departed. The translation in the TT aims to replace this concept with "bring money" while the money burn in ST is actually refer to the paper money that cannot use by people

alive. Therefore, the “money” is not the same in this translation.

In addition, this translation eliminates the humor elements in TT. The situation in which humor is produced is sometimes an important factor in the production of humor. According to the movie plot, Xia Luo’s mother passed away after his marriage. When Xia Luo found himself traveling back in time to fifteen years ago in high school, he was astonished to see his mother alive. However, he perceived it all as a dream, unaware that he travel back in time. He even told his mother that after waking up, he would burn some money for her. This statement shocked every listener in this plot, as “burn some money” appeared to be saying something for the deceased. Xia Luo said this to someone who is alive, leading everyone to question his mental health. Therefore, the target audience may fail to catch this information owing to the cultural difference. Thus, based on Mulyati and Nugroho’s (2023) criterion, within this context, the translation of humor fails to elicit recognition by the target audience, rendering it unacceptable.

Following Nababan’s (2012) criteria for readability assessment, the obtained results from the questionnaire revealed that 67.7% for readable, 16.1% for somewhat readable, and 16.1% for not readable. The readability score of 2.51 for this translation, categorizing it as readable.

**Table 6: Example of the Paraphrase with sense transfer**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
更是亲手策划了轰动全亚洲的大型音乐类选秀节目中国好嗓门。	even is personally planned sensationalize all Asian big music talent show program <b>China good voice.</b>	He also produced a TV talent show which was a big hit in Asia, <b>the beautiful throat of China.</b>

In Chinese, 嗓门 (sang men, voice) can signify the volume of a spoken voice in Xinhua Dictionary, 好嗓门 (hao sang men, good voice) contains two kinds of meanings, which means someone has loud voice or someone sings very well. Therefore, in TT, according to Pedersen (2017), the use of “beautiful throat” in English maintains the semantic essence of the source text to make sure the target audience can understand. While the meaning was conveyed accurately, the humor effect was weakened. 中国好声音 (the voice of China) in typically refers to a Chinese music competition show that emphasizes the contestants’ beautiful voices and singing abilities. In contrast, 中国好嗓门 (zhong guo hao sang men, China good voice) is a playful or humorous term emphasizing an extremely loud voice. It could mock someone for having a loud voice without necessarily showcasing exceptional singing abilities. This contrast might render the latter more humorous or amusing as it diverges from expectations in an unconventional manner. Thus, according to Mulyati and Nugroho’s (2023) criterion, the translation of humor in this sample may be unacceptable, which is a challenge for the target audience to grasp this humor.

Subsequent analysis by the researcher indicated that 64.5% of participants regarded the translation as readable, 32.2% deemed it somewhat readable, and only 3.2% considered it not readable. This evaluation led to a readability score of 2.61 based on Nababan’s (2012) scale, which shows that this translation is readable.

**Table 7: Example of the Paraphrase with sense transfer**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
今天本该非常潇洒的我。就这么被我的媳妇削傻了。	Today should very cool me. just this my wife getting <b>cut down foolishly.</b>	I should have been very handsome today. But my wife <b>makes me act like a fool</b>

In this translation, the translator applied the technique of paraphrasing. According to the Xinhua dictionary, the slang term 削 (xiao, cut) in this Chinese sentence implied the use of a knife or physical violence. However, in the movie context, Xia Luo’s wife chased after him with a knife without using it or causing physical harm. Therefore, 削 (xiao, cut) cannot be directly translated as “cut down.” The English translation using “my wife makes me” more accurately conveys the speaker’s intention and reflects the actual semantic meaning. Hence, according to Pedersen (2017), this translation from the source text to the target text is contextually accurate.

Nevertheless, the puns in the ST were not shown in the TT, resulting in the loss of the humorous element. The former sentence, 今天本该非常潇洒的我 (jin tian ben gai fei chang xiao sa de wo, today should very cool me) means “I should have been very handsome today”. 潇洒 (xiao sa, handsome) means “handsome” in Chinese. The word 削傻 (xiao sha, cut down foolishly) in the latter sentence “就这么被我媳妇削傻了”(jiu zhe me bei wo xi fu xiao sha le, just this my wife getting cut down foolishly) shared the same pronunciation with 潇洒 (xiao sa, very handsome). However, the meanings of these two words were completely different, 削傻 (xiao sha) means “makes me act like a fool”. Therefore, based on the acceptability criterion of Mulyati and Nugroho’s (2023), the TT lost the humorous effect of puns, which makes this translation unacceptable to the intended audience.

The overall assessment based on participants’ readability ratings using Nababan’s (2012) criteria showed that 64.5% considered the translation readable, 25.8% found it somewhat readable, and 9.7% labeled it not readable. With an average readability score of 2.54, it can be concluded that this humorous translation is readable.

### Situational paraphrase

With this technique, every meaning of cultural references in the source text is completely removed and replaced with something appropriate to the situation, rather than the meaning of those words. In addition, this method seems to be frequently employed in puns (Pederson, 2005, 2011). The following translation is a typical example of this technique.

**Table 8: Example of the Situational paraphrase**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
只身赴宴鸡毛装，都是同学装鸡毛。	one attend banquet chicken feather clothes, all are classmates <b>pretend chicken feather.</b>	Attending the banquet dressed in feathers, reuniting with classmates, <b>looking like a chicken.</b>

This is a perfectly rhymed impromptu poem. The first sentence of the verse has been translated literally enough to capture the essence of the original text. However, the latter part contained a slang swear word 装鸡毛 (zhuang ji mao, pretend chicken feather) in Chinese aims to deride and shame an exaggerated attire of a character towards the main character in the movie and also a cursing exclamations. The Chinese phrase carried a derogatory undertone and may be considered offensive. However, this translation lead to a stylistic error based on Pederson (2017). As English lacks a direct equivalent expression, the translation opted paraphrase to aid the target audience in grasping the intended derogatory tone. It employed a description likening someone to a chicken to emphasize the mockery and disparagement, resulting an inaccurate translation.

In this movie plot, Xia Luo deliberately dressed in exaggerated clothes at Qiu Ya’s wedding. He even specifically wore a suit with feathers to grab the attention of his classmates who used to look down on him in high school. His intention was to let them think he would become wealthy after graduation. However, his classmates saw through his attempt to pretend to be rich, and one of them wrote a poem to mock his extravagant suit, causing Xia Luo to feel embarrassed. In the original text, 只身赴宴鸡毛装，都是同学装鸡毛 (zhi shen fu yan ji mao zhuang, dou shi tong xue zhuang ji mao, one attend banquet chicken feather clothes, all are classmates pretend chicken feather) is poetic, suggesting that someone imitates others poorly, resulting in an embarrassing situation. Additionally, 装鸡毛 (zhuang ji mao, pretend chicken feather) in Chinese could also be seen as mocking the main character’s dress, and it carries a derogatory connotation. The original metaphorical and idiomatic meanings seem to have been overlooked in TT. Furthermore, there was a wordplay in the ST to create a humorous effect. The word 鸡毛装 (ji mao zhuang, chicken feather clothes) has a different character order with 装鸡毛 (zhuang ji mao, pretend chicken feather). While the former described the dress of the main character, the latter satirized both the costume and the character. This translation appears to have merely transcribed the surface meaning of the source text, while ignoring its connotation and cultural differences. Therefore,

according to Mulyati and Nugroho's (2023) criterion, this translation is unacceptable and fails to be understood as humor by the audience.

The readability analysis revealed that 45.2% of participants perceived the translation as readable, 41.9% as somewhat readable, and 12.9% as not readable. Consequently, the calculated readability score for this translation, according to Nababan's (2012) criteria, stands at 2.32, indicating a moderate level of readability which is somewhat readable.

### Omission

In Pederson (2005,2011)'s model, omission means that the cultural reference items in the source text are replaced with nothing. This translation technique was used in the following three samples.

**Table 9: Example of the Omission**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
你是我唯一的偶像，我一进歌厅就点你，一进歌厅就点你，点你的歌。	you are my only idol, I once enter the karaoke <b>order you</b> , once enter the karaoke <b>order you</b> , order your songs.	You are my only idol. I choose your songs whenever I go Karaoke, every time. I choose your songs.

Although the Chinese subtitles here were not considered culture-related words, the implications of these words were only understood by specific cultural groups. Given the connotation of the Chinese verb 点 (dian, order) followed by a person's name in an entertainment place implies ordering that person for an inappropriate service or request, for example, sex service, the translation here opted for removing the "order you" in TT. According to Pederson (2017), the deletion of these words resulted in semantic errors in these translations. These words have actual significance and have not been translated, which made this translation inaccurate.

According to the plot of the movie, the main character Xia Luo was experiencing the moment of seeing his idol in person for the first time and feeling extremely nervous. What he wanted to say was actually 点你的歌 (dian ni de ge, order your songs) which means "order your songs" was mistakenly said as 点你 (dian ni, order you) which meant "order you." When Xia Luo mistakenly said 点你 (dian ni, order you) to his favorite female singer at the karaoke, the literal meaning in Chinese was that every time Xia Luo went to the Karaoke, he asked this singer to provide sex service for him. The contrast between his slip of the tongue and the intended meaning created a humorous effect. Through retaining the following terms "choose your songs" in TT, this treatment accurately conveyed the actual meaning of the characters, while it significantly diminished the humorous impact found in the original text. Therefore, according to the acceptability criterion of Mulyati and Nugroho's (2023), this sample is unacceptable as it cannot be interpreted as humorous by the target audience.

Considering participants' responses, 58.1% rated the translation as readable, 38.7% as somewhat readable, and 3.2% as not readable. This resulted in an average readability score of 2.54 according to Nababan's (2012) criteria, indicating that this translation is readable.

**Table 10: Example of the Omission**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
就一个红绿灯给我整的热血沸腾的。	just one red green light <b>makes me hot blood boiling</b> .	It's only one block!

The phrase 热血沸腾 (re xue fei teng, hot blood boiling) in the source text is a Chinese idiom that is used to describe high passion or enthusiasm. However, this Chinese idiom is not translated into the target text. Also, removing this term leads to a loss of meaning. Hence, there's an inaccuracy in this translation.

Furthermore, in this movie, this sentence happened in a specific situation. This sentence was said by the taxi driver. The main character Xia Luo was secretly arranged to meet with the most influential singer in China at a karaoke due to his talent for songwriting. When Xia Luo and Ma Dongmei were walking

in the street, the security almost kidnapped him when they took him away in a car. Concerned for Xia Luo’s safety, his classmate Ma Dongei hailed a taxi to catch up with him. During the chase, the driver became exceedingly enthusiastic anticipating an exhilarating highway chase. At last, he discovered that the chasing time merely covered only a short distance. Much to the disappointment of the driver, he used an exaggerated tone to make fun of the short chase. However, the TT removed this idiom, leading to the loss of its exaggerated effect. Hence, according to the acceptability criterion of Mulyati and Nugroho’s (2023), removing this idiom also renders the humorous translation unacceptable to the target audience.

Finally, in the last evaluation, 77.4% of participants found the translation readable, 12.9% somewhat readable, and 9.7% not readable. The analysis using Nababan’s (2012) scoring scale yielded a readability score of 2.67, confirming the high readability of this translation.

**Table 11: Example of the Omission**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
那小爷我陪你们再多耍会儿。	Then <b>little grandpa</b> I with you guys will play more.	Then let’s have some more fun.

In the source text, a word has been omitted in the target text. From the meaning shown in the Xinhua Dictionary, 爷 (ye, grandpa) means a salutation for an elder or older man and a term for a bureaucrat, a rich man in ancient China. In Chinese, 小爷 (xiao ye, little grandpa) can be used to refer to oneself or to address others. Therefore, this term carries a sense of pride, confidence, or self-respect. It can also be a humorous or playful way to express oneself. In the movie, Xia Luo accidentally went back fifteen years ago. Unaware that he had traveled back in time, he mistook his return to the high school classroom as part of a dream. Consequently, he did all the things he wished to do but hadn’t dared as a student, even fighting with the teacher. Hearing of his bad behavior, the principal of the school rushed to stop him, and he was afraid that the dream would turn into a nightmare, so he tried to force himself to wake up with a tap. Unfortunately, he found that he was still stuck in this “dream”. At this juncture, he decided to persist in his absurd behavior within the dream and said this word 小爷 (xiao ye, little grandpa) in front of both the principal and the teacher.

In this translation, according to Newmark (1988)’s theory, there are some issues. While 小爷 (xiao ye, little grandpa) in the original text can be used as a self-reference, it also conveys a sense of pride from the speaker. Considering the movie context where the main character revisited his high school years and behaves recklessly, thinking it’s all a dream, 小爷 (xiao ye, little grandpa) reflected the character’s arrogant attitude. However, in the target text, 小爷 (xiao ye, little grandpa) is omitted and translated directly as “I”. Though TT conveys the semantic meaning, it caused a discrepancy in register and style between ST and TT, losing the emotional expressions. As such, this translation is perceived as inaccurate. Also, according to the acceptability criterion of Mulyati and Nugroho’s (2023), this translation cannot be understood as humor at all, so it is unacceptable.

In line with participants’ responses, the translation achieved a readability rating of 71% for readability, 22.6% for somewhat readability, and 6.5% for not readable. According to Nababan’s (2012) criteria, the average readability score for this sample was 2.64, indicating a notably high level of readability.

**Generalization**

This technique involves replacing culturally loaded words in the source text with more general content. Typically, this approach entails choosing hyponyms to replace the words in the source text (Pederson, 2005, 2011). The following sample shows an example of Generalization.

**Table 4.12: Example of the Generalization**

ST	Literal Translation	TT
我要在她最重要的日子里灵光乍现。	I want to on her biggest day <b>inspiration light suddenly show up.</b>	I’ll <b>show up</b> on the most important day of her life.

The Chinese idiom 灵光乍现 (ling guang zha xian, inspiration light suddenly show up) metaphorically denotes a sudden enlightenment or revelation at a crucial moment. The phrase in the target text, “I’ll show up on the most important day of her life,” is more direct; “showed up” leans towards the hyponym of 灵光乍现 (ling guang zha xian, inspiration light suddenly show up). According to Pederson (2017), this translation displays a semantic error. 灵光乍现 (ling guang zha xian, inspiration light suddenly show up) shares different meaning with “showed up”. In Chinese, 灵光乍现 (ling guang zha xian, inspiration light suddenly show up) implies an inspiration or a sudden idea showed up, typically not directly related to an individual but rather suggestive of an inspiration. Therefore, this translation is inaccurate.

Considering the movie context, Xia Luo attended the wedding of a woman he once secretly admired. On the wedding day, he brought an expensive gift and dresses conspicuously, aiming to surprise her and leave a lasting impression. So he likened himself to a fleeting inspiration. 灵光乍现 (ling guang zha xian, inspiration light suddenly show up) in the source text described the character’s entrance, intending to create a humorous and playful atmosphere. However, the translated result fails to highlight the humorous style of the original text. In addition, according to the acceptability criterion of Mulyati and Nugroho’s (2023), this translation is unacceptable because it cannot be understood as humor for the target audience.

Based on participants’ feedback, the translation contains a substantial 67.7% rating for readability, with an additional 32.3% considering it somewhat readable. According to Nababan’s (2012) criteria, the readability score is 2.67 for this sample, which means that this sample is readable.

## DISCUSSION

This study delved into the translation of humor in Chinese and English subtitles within Chinese comedy movie *Goodbye, Mr. Loser*, examining the techniques and quality of these translations. Pederson’s (2005, 2011) classification was used in this research, including literal translation, substitution, omission, and generalization. Among the samples, substitution emerged as the most prevalent technique, with six out of twelve samples employing these translations. Followed by omission, occurring four times. However, techniques like retention and specification were not observed in these samples. These translation techniques significantly influence the accuracy of English subtitles. Substitution as the SL-oriented technique was commonly observed in this study and yielded precise translations, with four out of five accurate translations. Conversely, the employment of omission noticeably impacted the accuracy of the subtitles, with varying degrees of inaccuracy.

Similarly, the direct translation also manifested inaccuracy. Souzandehfar and Mehr (2019) reached a similar conclusion, emphasizing the frequent use of the omission technique. They highlighted those direct translations and omitting culturally relevant expressions, such as idioms, might render the translation stiff and disconnected from audience resonance, suggesting these approaches should be avoided. The congruence between this study and Souzandehfar and Mehr (2019) was that many Chinese humor expressions involved cultural connotations like Chinese idioms. Especially using omission technique would result in the loss of intended humorous effects. Unlike the present study, Abdelaal (2019) represented all techniques of Pederson’s (2005, 2011) typology in subtitle translation but did not employ the substitution. This might be attributed to differing cultural backgrounds, as Abdelaal (2019) involved numerous taboo Arabic words, leading to a greater reliance on SL-oriented techniques for adapting to the local culture.

For the translation quality of subtitles, by assessing the translation quality of these subtitles, it revealed that only two out of twelve samples are accurate, while the remaining ten exhibited varying degrees of inaccuracy in semantics and context, resulting in an overall lower accuracy of the English subtitles. This finding echoes Saputra and Rini (2021), also using Newmark’s (1988) theory to assess the translation accuracy. Most translation inaccuracies are due to the fact that translators only consider referential accuracy and ignore pragmatical accuracy. This tendency is likely due to most translators

focusing solely on the literal translation of the source text, neglecting context and hindering audience comprehension. Additionally, the study evaluated the readability of English subtitles, where eight samples are deemed readable, with the remaining four also showing basic readability. According to Nababan's (2012) criteria, the readability score for all samples stands at 2.67. This showed that these English subtitles were readable, and the content of the subtitles is easy to understand, which shared the same conclusion that most studies have reached.

It was worth noting that through an analysis of the acceptability of these subtitles, it was found that these translations are unacceptable. In other words, many humorous elements were ignored, and many humorous effects were greatly weakened during the translation process. This finding was inconsistent with the conclusions of previous studies. Mulyati and Nugroho (2023) also studied the acceptability of humorous language and emphasized in their conclusions that the acceptability of these samples was less acceptable. Most humor expressions require the audience to re-think to understand. In this study, all the samples are unacceptable, which may be due to the relatively small number of samples in this study. Secondly, it also has cultural influence, because the humor in the present study all involve traditional expressions and idioms in Chinese, and translation would be more challenging in different cultural groups.

However, the present study faced some limitations. Firstly, solely English subtitles of a Chinese comedy movie *Goodbye Mr. Loser* were selected for analysis, without combining other types or styles of comedy movies. Secondly, the sample size was small, so the coverage of the sample scope and the sample size of participants was insufficient, which hindered the generation of universal conclusions. At the same time, the participants' English proficiency was assessed by the participants themselves and additional tests were required to verify actual English proficiency. Despite adopting Newmark and Nababan's models for descriptive analysis, subjectivity in assessing translation quality called for a broader collaboration to provide more comprehensive and authoritative insights. Lastly, the intricate cultural background of the selected samples posed challenges in evaluating translation quality. The nuances of humor expressions in the movie often influenced by specific cultural elements like homophony, puns, traditional stories, and poems, which brought inevitable complexities to translation evaluation.

In addition, this study formed a foundational exploration into the quality of Chinese and English subtitle translation within Chinese comedy movies. By scrutinizing translation techniques and quality within English subtitles, it offered guidance to enhance the translation quality of Chinese audiovisual productions and held promise for further advancements in translation studies. Furthermore, the findings helped Chinese films to continuously improve subtitle translation and improve the competitiveness of films in the international market. It would foster effective cross-cultural communication while enhancing cultural exchange and linguistic engagement worldwide. To deepen the understanding of subtitle translation in Chinese comedy movies, future research should broaden its scope to encompass diverse genres and styles of these movies, including black humor and region-specific humor. Additionally, forthcoming studies should employ a variety of evaluation methods, combining quantitative analyses with qualitative assessments and more comprehensive questionnaires, in order to obtain more comprehensive and accurate evaluations of translation quality.

## CONCLUSION

To summarize, according to Pederson's (2005, 2011) classification, the most frequent translation technique in humor subtitles was substitution, followed by omission. Two of the techniques, retention, and specification, did not appear. Then, according to Pederson FAR and Newmark's (1988) model, the accuracy of these subtitles was analyzed, and it was concluded that although some of the translations were accurate, there was still room for improvement, and some of the humor translations did not fully and accurately reflect the information in the source language in terms of semantics, context, and style. The samples that used substitution as a translation technique maintained a moderate level of accuracy. However, the use of omission presented challenges in maintaining the accuracy of the translation,

and the use of direct translation for translation also resulted in a degree of inaccuracy. Moreover, the overall translation accuracy of these samples is relatively low. Finally, the acceptability, as well as the readability of the subtitles, were analyzed according to Nababan's (2012) translation quality assessment model. The analysis concluded that the low acceptability of these humorous subtitles, which are difficult to translate literally and perceived as humorous expressions by the audience. Additionally, according to the participants' ratings, the readability score of these subtitles was 2.67, thus these subtitles were highly readable. Based on these findings, this study argues that the translation of humor is not only about translating the original text into the target language but more importantly, it should focus on maintaining these humorous effects in the target language as well as presenting the cultural features of the source language to the target audience. Translators should be more careful about the words they use in translation, to provide a bridge for cultural exchanges between countries. In conclusion, this study provides some potential directions for improvement in the field of humor translation. However, there are still many future studies that need to be further explored to draw more universal conclusions using a richer and larger research sample. Finally, the significance of this study is to provide some references and insights into the humor translation of Chinese audiovisual works, as well as to provide new directions and foundations for future research in related fields.

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