Journal of Authentic Research
https://journal-center.litpam.com/index.php/jar/index

November 2026 Vol. 5 , No. 4
e-ISSN: 2828-3724
pp. 7801-7807

Translation Strategies of Idiomatic Expressions in the Subtitles of Enola Holmes Movie

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Received: September 2026; Revised: October 2026; Published: November 2026

Abstract

Idiomatic expressions are common in film dialogue, yet their figurative and cultural meanings often complicate audiovisual translation. Previous studies have examined idioms in various films, but their findings vary because of differences in theoretical frameworks, genres, and language pairs; little attention has been given to *Enola Holmes* using Seidl and McMordie's typology and Baker's translation strategies. This study therefore identifies the types of idiomatic expressions and the translation strategies used in the English–Indonesian subtitles of *Enola Holmes* and determines the dominant type and strategy. A descriptive qualitative method was employed. The data were English idiomatic expressions and their Indonesian subtitle equivalents, collected by downloading and aligning the subtitle files, watching the film repeatedly, and recording subtitle pairs in an observation sheet. Idioms were classified using Seidl and McMordie's typology, and translation strategies were analyzed using Baker's framework. The analysis identified 142 idiomatic expressions. Verbal idioms were the dominant type, followed by phrasal verb idioms, idioms with nouns, idioms with prepositions, and three categories with minimal occurrences: idiomatic pairs, idioms with adjectives, and special category idioms. Two translation strategies were used: using similar meaning and translation by paraphrase. Using similar meaning was the dominant strategy. Thus, verbal idioms were the dominant type, while using similar meaning was the dominant translation strategy. The translator prioritized semantic equivalence, naturalness, and readability. This study contributes a context-specific reference for idiom translation in audiovisual media and recommends further research on cultural nuance and subtitle constraints.

Keywords: Enola Holmes, idiomatic expressions, Seidl and McMordie, subtitles, Mona Baker, translation strategies.

How to Cite: Salfinarti, A. A., Amrullah., & Putera, L. J. (2026). Translation Strategies of Idiomatic Expressions in the Subtitles of Enola Holmes Movie. *Journal of Authentic Research*, *5*(4), 7801–7807. https://doi.org/10.36312/jar.v5i4.7203

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INTRODUCTION

Translation is commonly understood as the transfer of meaning from a source language (SL) into a target language (TL), but it also involves maintaining function, style, and naturalness in the target text (Newmark, 1988; Nida & Taber, 1969). As a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural activity, translation does not merely replace words; it also mediates values, realities, and communicative purposes across different backgrounds (Hatim & Mason, 1997; Munday, 2016). These concerns become more complex when the source text contains idiomatic expressions because their meanings cannot always be inferred from the individual words that form them.

In audiovisual media, translation often takes the form of subtitling, which converts spoken dialogue into written text displayed at the bottom of the screen (González, 2009). Subtitling is a specialized form of audiovisual translation subject to strict technical constraints, such as limitations on time, space, and reading speed, requiring translators to balance accuracy and readability while preserving the tone and style of the original content (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007; Gottlieb, 1994). Because subtitles must be concise and immediately comprehensible, idiomatic expressions pose particular challenges: the translator must decide whether to retain the idiomatic image, replace it with a target-language idiom, paraphrase it, or omit it (Baker, 1992).

Idiomatic expressions are fixed or relatively fixed combinations whose meanings may differ from their literal lexical meanings (Fernando, 1996; Spears, 2005). In this study, idiomatic expressions are operationally defined as multiword expressions found in the English subtitles of *Enola Holmes* whose overall meaning is figurative, conventionalized, or not fully predictable from the literal meaning of their constituent words. They are closely related to everyday communication, culture, and context. In film dialogue, idioms can make characters' speech more natural while expressing actions, emotions, attitudes, and interpersonal relationships.

Translation strategies, in this study, refer to the procedures used by the subtitler to render English idiomatic expressions into Indonesian, particularly the strategies proposed by Baker (1992): using an idiom with similar meaning, using an idiom with similar meaning and form, translation by paraphrase, omission, and compensation. When an idiom has no natural equivalent in the target language, translators may use alternative strategies such as an idiom with a similar meaning, paraphrase, or omission. Baker (1992) emphasizes that the translator's primary concern should be the transfer of idiomatic meaning and communicative effect rather than the mechanical preservation of form.

Enola Holmes (2020) provides a relevant context for examining idiomatic translation because the movie contains extensive conversational dialogue involving investigation, conflict, family relationships, and social interaction. Previous studies have examined idiomatic expressions in different audiovisual and literary materials, but differences in theoretical frameworks and source texts can produce different patterns of idiom types and translation strategies. For example, Pangestu et al. (2022) found paraphrase to be the dominant strategy in *The Shawshank Redemption*, while Ramadhani (2024), using Fernando's framework, reported a dominance of semi-literal idioms in *One Piece Live Action*. These differences indicate that findings on idiom translation are framework- and text-dependent. However, research combining Seidl and McMordie's (1988) grammatical typology with Baker's (1992) translation strategies in the English–Indonesian subtitles of *Enola Holmes* remains limited. This gap is important because *Enola Holmes* features fast-paced conversational dialogue and Netflix subtitle constraints that may produce different patterns from those reported in previous studies.

Therefore, this study identifies the types of idiomatic expressions in the English subtitles of *Enola Holmes* (2020) and the translation strategies used in the Indonesian subtitles. The study has two questions: (1) What types of idiomatic expressions are used in the subtitles of *Enola Holmes* (2020)? and (2) What translation strategies are most frequently used to translate the idiomatic expressions? The study is expected to contribute theoretically to translation studies, particularly research on idioms and

audiovisual translation, and practically to subtitlers, translation teachers, and students by providing a context-specific reference for handling idiomatic expressions under subtitle constraints (Nord, 1997).

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a descriptive qualitative method because it focused on identifying, classifying, and interpreting idiomatic expressions and their translations in context. Qualitative research is intended to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically through descriptions in words and language within a natural context (Moleong, 2017). This method was chosen because it aligns with the research objective of providing an in-depth study of translation strategies used in film subtitles.

Source of Data

The primary source of data was the movie *Enola Holmes*, produced by Legendary Pictures and released by Netflix in 2020, with an approximate duration of 123 minutes. The film is a mystery-adventure period drama with dialogue-rich scenes involving investigation, family conflict, and social interaction. These characteristics make the film suitable for analyzing conversational idiomatic expressions and their Indonesian subtitles. The data consisted of English idiomatic expressions (source text) and their Indonesian translations (target text) extracted from subtitle files downloaded from www.opensubtitles.org. Purposive sampling was used to select subtitle transcripts that contained idiomatic expressions, had Indonesian translations, and could be classified using Seidl and McMordie's (1988) typology and Baker's (1992) framework.

The study was conducted from January to October 2026 at the English Education Program, Language and Arts Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Mataram.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a note-taking technique across several sequential steps. First, the movie *Enola Holmes* (2020) and its English and Indonesian subtitle files were downloaded. Second, the movie was watched intensively and repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the contextual dialogue and its translated subtitles. Third, subtitle pairs containing idiomatic expressions were identified based on Seidl and McMordie's (1988) criteria and the operational definition used in this study. Fourth, the corresponding English and Indonesian subtitle pairs were extracted and systematically organized into an observation sheet detailing the source text, target text, idiom type, and translation strategy.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using an interactive model adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994), comprising three interrelated stages. The first stage was data reduction, which involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing the data by categorizing the identified idioms according to Seidl and McMordie's (1988) typology and classifying their translation strategies based on Baker's (1992) framework, while excluding non-idiomatic data. The second stage was data display, in which the classified data were presented alongside frequency distributions and percentages using tables to highlight the dominant findings clearly. Finally, the conclusion-drawing stage involved summarizing the findings, interpreting the patterns of

translation strategies used, and drawing final conclusions regarding how idiomatic expressions were rendered in the movie.

Trustworthiness of Data

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, a second coder—a lecturer or peer with expertise in translation studies—verified approximately 20% of the classified data. The second coder checked whether the identified expressions met the operational definition of idiomatic expressions and whether their classification and translation strategies were consistent with Seidl and McMordie (1988) and Baker (1992). Disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached. In cases of ambiguity, the researcher considered the grammatical structure, contextual meaning, and dictionary evidence; expressions that remained ambiguous were not included in the final data set. This procedure was intended to reduce subjective bias and improve the consistency of classification.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: What types of idiomatic expressions are used in the subtitles of the Enola Holmes movie?

The analysis identified 142 idiomatic expressions in the English subtitles of Enola Holmes (2020). The expressions were classified into seven types based on Seidl and McMordie (1988). The distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of Idiomatic Expression Types

No.	Idiom Type	Frequency	Percentage
1	Verbal Idiom	98	69.0%
2	Phrasal Verb Idiom	23	16.2%
3	Idiom with Noun	9	6.3%
4	Idiom with Preposition	6	4.2%
5	Idiomatic Pair	2	1.4%
6	Idiom with Adjective	2	1.4%
7	Special Category	2	1.4%
	Total	142	100%

Verbal Idioms were the most frequent type, followed by Phrasal Verb Idioms. The remaining five categories occurred considerably less often. The dominance of verbal idioms suggests that the film dialogue frequently uses idiomatic constructions to express actions, reactions, intentions, and interpersonal interaction.

Several examples illustrate the classification. “She was my whole world” was classified as an idiom with an adjective and noun and translated as “Dia adalah segalanya bagiku,” conveying the figurative meaning that the person was extremely important. “We need to break her and build her up” contained the phrasal verb idiom “build her up,” which was rendered as “Dia harus digoyahkan, lalu dibentuk,” emphasizing character development. “You getting the point?” was categorized as a verbal idiom and translated as “Kau paham?”, which preserves the communicative meaning concisely. The expression “It’s out of my hands” was translated as “Ini di luar kendaliku,” retaining the figurative meaning of lacking control.

RQ2: What translation strategies are the most frequently used to translate idiomatic expressions in the subtitles of the movie Enola Holmes?

For the second research question, two translation strategies were identified in the 142 data: Using Similar Meaning and Translation by Paraphrase. No instances of Similar Meaning and Form, Omission, or Compensation were found.

Table 2. Frequency of Translation Strategies

No.	Translation Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Using Similar Meaning	83	58.5%
2	Translation by Paraphrase	59	41.5%
3	Omission	0	0%
4	Similar Form	0	0%
5	Compensation	0	0%
	Total	142	100%

Using Similar Meaning was the dominant strategy. It indicates that the translator generally replaced English idioms with Indonesian expressions that conveyed comparable meanings and communicative functions. Translation by Paraphrase was also used substantially, particularly where a direct idiomatic equivalent was unavailable or a literal rendering would be unnatural.

Types of Idiomatic Expressions

The first objective of this study was to identify the types of idiomatic expressions in the subtitles of Enola Holmes (2020) based on Seidl and McMordie's (1988) typology. The analysis revealed 142 idiomatic expressions, with Verbal Idioms as the dominant category (98 occurrences; 69.0%), followed by Phrasal Verb Idioms (23 occurrences; 16.2%). This indicates that film dialogue is predominantly action-oriented, reflecting characters' actions, reactions, intentions, and interpersonal interactions.

This finding is strongly supported by previous studies. Latifanisa (2022), in her analysis of the Beauty and the Beast movie, similarly found that verb-related idiomatic expressions were the most dominant category. This alignment occurs because films rely heavily on character actions and dynamic interactions. Furthermore, Hidayat (2022) also reported a high frequency of verb-based and phrasal verb idioms in song lyrics, confirming the productivity of verbal idiomatic constructions in everyday spoken and creative English discourse.

However, these findings contrast with the study by Ramadhani et al. (2024) on the One Piece Live Action film, which found semi-literal idioms to be the dominant category using Fernando's (1996) framework. This discrepancy is primarily methodological; Fernando classifies idioms based on semantic transparency, whereas Seidl and McMordie categorize them according to grammatical structure. Consequently, different theoretical lenses yield distinct structural versus semantic distributions even when examining audiovisual texts.

Translation Strategies

The second research question examined the translation strategies applied to render the idioms into Indonesian subtitles based on Mona Baker's (1992) framework. The findings demonstrated that the translator exclusively utilized two strategies: Using Similar Meaning (83 occurrences; 58.5%) and Translation by Paraphrase (59 occurrences; 41.5%), with no instances of omission, similar form, or compensation. The dominance of the "Using Similar Meaning" strategy indicates that the translator prioritized semantic equivalence and naturalness for the target audience. Meanwhile,

paraphrase served as a vital tool to handle idioms lacking direct target-language equivalents within the tight temporal and spatial constraints of audiovisual subtitling (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007; González, 2009).

These findings align with Sari et al. (2022), who investigated the translation of English idioms into Indonesian and concluded that direct or meaning-focused translation strategies are far more effective and predominantly used than formal or literal equivalence to bridge cultural gaps. Their findings corroborate earlier observations by Pasangka (2016) and Putranto (2018), which confirmed the general preference for direct meaning transfer in handling idiomatic expressions.

Conversely, the results show a notable contradiction when compared to Pangestu et al. (2022), who examined The Shawshank Redemption movie subtitles and found that Translation by Paraphrase was the most dominant strategy, accompanied by several instances of omission. This divergence can be attributed to differences in film genres and linguistic properties: Enola Holmes features dynamic conversational idioms where concise Indonesian equivalents are readily available, whereas films with heavier culture-specific or complex dramatic contexts like The Shawshank Redemption necessitate more extensive paraphrasing or omission. Overall, the absence of omission in Enola Holmes reflects a strong commitment by the translator to preserve the narrative content and character development of the original dialogue.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes idiomatic expressions and the strategies employed to translate them in the English-to-Indonesian subtitles of the film *Enola Holmes*. The findings regarding the first research question reveal the presence of seven types of idiomatic expressions, based on the typology established by Seidl and McMordie. Verbal idioms are the most dominant type, followed by verb-phrase idioms, while other categories appear far less frequently. This pattern suggests that the film's dialogue is action-oriented and interactional, with verb-based idiomatic constructions conveying a wide range of actions, reactions, intentions, and interpersonal interactions. Regarding the second research question, the analysis shows that the translator utilized two strategies—"using similar meaning" and "translation by paraphrase"—with the former being the primary approach. Other strategies, such as "similar meaning and form," "omission," and "compensation," were not observed. This indicates that the translator prioritized equivalence of meaning, communicative function, naturalness, and readability over formal equivalence. Overall, the findings suggest that the translation of idiomatic expressions in the film is influenced by the structural nature of the dialogue and the technical constraints of subtitling. However, as this study is limited to a single film and one language pair, the results cannot be generalized to all forms of audiovisual translation. Future research could compare films across different genres, examine how cultural differences affect the preservation of figurative meanings and cultural nuances, or integrate both grammatical and semantic typologies to provide a more comprehensive overview.

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