

Lost in Translation? Analyzing Semantic Shifts in the English-to-Indonesian Translation of the Webtoon *Flawless*

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Abstract. Translation is a critical process for bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, yet it often involves semantic shifts that alter the original meaning of the text. This study examines semantic shifts in the English-to-Indonesian translation of the webtoon *Flawless*, a popular romance comic that combines textual and visual elements to convey meaning. Using Mujiyanto's framework, this qualitative-descriptive research identifies and categorizes semantic shifts into five types: generalization, specification, substitution, reversal, and deviation. Data were collected from the English and Indonesian versions of *Flawless* on the Webtoon application, with 57 instances of semantic shifts analyzed. The findings reveal 13 substitutions, 2 specifications, 15 generalizations, 3 reversals, and 24 deviations, with deviation being the most frequent shift. These shifts reflect the translator's strategies to adapt culturally specific expressions and idiomatic language to the target audience, often at the expense of the original meaning. While generalization and substitution enhance readability, they may also dilute the original context, whereas deviation introduces significant departures from the source text to improve cultural relevance. This study contributes to translation studies by providing a systematic analysis of semantic shifts in webtoon translation, highlighting the challenges of preserving meaning in multimodal digital content. The findings offer valuable insights for translators, educators, and digital content creators, emphasizing the importance of cultural competence and the need for further research on audience reception and technological solutions in translation.

Keywords: flawless, semantic shift, translation, webtoon

Received: February 12, 2025. Accepted: April 20, 2025.

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INTRODUCTION

Translation is a critical process of converting text from one language to another while preserving meaning, cultural context, and intent (Yaacob, 2022). It serves as a bridge between cultures, enabling the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and artistic expression across linguistic boundaries. However, translation is far from a straightforward task; it involves navigating complex linguistic structures, cultural nuances, and contextual subtleties that often differ significantly between languages (Hardiyanti et al., 2021; Andayani et al., 2023). This complexity is particularly pronounced when translating between languages with vastly different grammatical systems and cultural frameworks, such as English and Indonesian. Translators must not only possess a deep understanding of both the source and target languages but also be adept at interpreting and conveying cultural contexts that may not have direct equivalents in the target language (Andayani et al., 2023). Despite these challenges, translation remains an indispensable tool for global communication, knowledge transfer, and cultural preservation.

The challenges of translation are further amplified when dealing with culturally-specific content, such as religious texts, traditional literature, or idiomatic expressions (Yaacob, 2022; Hardiyanti et al., 2021). For instance, religious texts often contain terms and concepts that are deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual practices of the source language, making them difficult to translate without losing their original meaning or significance (Yaacob, 2022). Similarly, idiomatic expressions, which are frequently used in everyday language, often lack direct equivalents in the target language, requiring translators to employ creative strategies to convey the intended meaning (Hardiyanti et al., 2021). These challenges highlight the importance of not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural competence in the translation process.

In recent years, the rise of digital media has introduced new dimensions to the field of translation. Webtoons, a popular form of digital comics originating from South Korea, have gained global

popularity, necessitating accurate and culturally-sensitive translations to reach diverse audiences (Nam & Jung, 2022). Unlike traditional texts, webtoons are multimodal, combining visual and textual elements to convey meaning. This multimodal nature presents unique challenges for translators, who must consider not only the linguistic content but also the visual context in which it is embedded (Gyogi & Lee, 2022). For example, the size, color, and placement of text within a webtoon panel can significantly influence its interpretation, requiring translators to adopt a holistic approach that integrates both linguistic and visual elements (Gyogi & Lee, 2022). Furthermore, webtoons often contain cultural references, slang, and idiomatic expressions that may not have direct equivalents in the target language, further complicating the translation process (Nam & Jung, 2022).

The translation of webtoons also involves a phenomenon known as transcreation, where fans translate and recreate webtoons to make them more accessible to global audiences (Nam & Jung, 2022). Transcreation goes beyond literal translation, requiring translators to adapt the content to the cultural and linguistic context of the target audience. This process often involves significant semantic shifts, where the meaning of the original text is altered to better resonate with the target audience (Nam & Jung, 2022). While transcreation has played a vital role in the global spread of webtoons, it also raises questions about the accuracy and fidelity of the translated content, particularly in terms of preserving the original meaning and intent of the source text.

Recent research has highlighted the importance of understanding semantic shifts in translation, particularly in the context of digital media. Semantic shifts refer to changes in meaning that occur during the translation process, often as a result of linguistic, cultural, or pragmatic differences between the source and target languages (Tarawneh & Al-Momani, 2022). These shifts can take various forms, including generalization, specification, substitution, deviation, and reversal, each of which has distinct implications for the accuracy and cultural relevance of the translated text (Mujiyanto, 2001). For example, generalization involves broadening the meaning of a term to make it more applicable in the target language, while specification narrows the meaning to provide greater precision (Tarawneh & Al-Momani, 2022). Substitution, on the other hand, involves replacing a term or phrase with a different one that conveys a similar meaning, while deviation refers to significant departures from the original meaning, often to adapt the content to the cultural context of the target audience (Alshahrani et al., 2023).

The study of semantic shifts is particularly relevant in the context of English-Indonesian translation, where linguistic and cultural differences often necessitate significant adjustments to the source text (Susini et al., 2023). For example, a study on the translation of public signs in Bali found that re-contextualization was often necessary to achieve pragmatic equivalence between the source and target texts (Susini et al., 2023). Similarly, research on the translation of annual reports in Indonesia revealed patterns of explicitation and implicitation, where additional information was either added or omitted to clarify the meaning of the text (Octoveria & Munandar, 2024). These findings underscore the complexity of semantic shifts in translation and highlight the need for a systematic framework to analyze and categorize these shifts.

Despite the growing body of research on semantic shifts in translation, there remains a significant gap in the literature, particularly in the context of digital media and English-Indonesian translations. While studies have explored semantic shifts in legal, literary, and religious texts, there is limited research on how these shifts manifest in the translation of webtoons (Tarawneh & Al-Momani, 2022; Alshahrani et al., 2023). This gap is particularly concerning given the growing popularity of webtoons as a global medium for entertainment, education, and cultural exchange (Candraningrum & Yansari, 2023; Kim, 2022). Furthermore, while transcreation has been widely studied in the context of fan translations, there is a lack of research on how semantic shifts impact the accuracy and cultural relevance of professionally translated webtoons (Nam & Jung, 2022).

This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing semantic shifts in the English-to-Indonesian translation of the webtoon *Flawless*, a popular romance genre comic with a unique narrative and cultural context. *Flawless* tells the story of Sarah, a tough and independent girl who meets Elios, a mysterious blind man, and explores themes of love, identity, and perception (Shinshinhye, 2022). The webtoon's multimodal nature, combining text and visual elements, presents unique challenges for translation, particularly in terms of preserving the original meaning and cultural context of the source text. By applying Mujiyanto's semantic shift theory—categorizing shifts into generalization, specification, substitution, deviation, and reversal—this study aims to provide a systematic framework for analyzing semantic shifts in the translation of webtoons.

The findings of this study have important implications for both translation theory and practice. By identifying and categorizing semantic shifts in the translation of *Flawless*, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how meaning is preserved or altered in the translation process. This understanding is particularly relevant in the context of digital media, where the multimodal nature of webtoons requires translators to adopt a holistic approach that integrates both linguistic and visual elements (Gyogi & Lee, 2022). Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of cultural competence in translation, particularly in the context of English-Indonesian translations, where linguistic and cultural differences often necessitate significant adjustments to the source text (Susini et al., 2023).

In addition to its theoretical contributions, this study also has practical implications for translators, educators, and digital content creators. By providing a systematic framework for analyzing semantic shifts, this research offers valuable insights into the challenges of translating multimodal content like webtoons. These insights can inform the development of translation training programs, helping aspiring translators to develop the skills and competencies needed to navigate the complexities of digital media (Jabu et al., 2021). Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of accurate translations in the digital age, where webtoons serve as a powerful tool for global communication and cultural exchange (Candraningrum & Yansari, 2023; Kim, 2022).

In conclusion, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature by analyzing semantic shifts in the English-to-Indonesian translation of the webtoon *Flawless*. By applying Mujiyanto's semantic shift theory, this research provides a systematic framework for understanding how meaning is preserved or altered in the translation process. The findings of this study have important implications for both translation theory and practice, offering valuable insights into the challenges of translating multimodal content and highlighting the importance of cultural competence in translation. As digital media continues to play an increasingly important role in global communication, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of translation in the digital age.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive research design to analyze semantic shifts in the English-to-Indonesian translation of the webtoon *Flawless* available on the Webtoon application. The qualitative approach emphasizes an exploratory analysis of linguistic and cultural nuances, while the descriptive method provides a contextual and detailed examination of the translation process (Bryman, 2012; Heigham & Crocker, 2009). The primary research instrument is the Webtoon application, which hosts both the English and Indonesian versions of *Flawless*. Data collection involves systematically reading and comparing the two versions to identify semantic differences, focusing on dialogue, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references. Each instance of semantic shift is documented for further analysis.

The data analysis is guided by Mujiyanto's theory of semantic shifts, which categorizes shifts into five types: generalization, specification, substitution, reversal, and deviation (Mujiyanto, 2001). Each identified shift is classified into one of these categories, and its impact on meaning, context, or cultural relevance is explained. The results are organized into tables corresponding to each category, ensuring a structured and systematic presentation of findings. This methodological framework allows for a comprehensive exploration of how meaning is transferred, altered, or preserved in the translation process.

By combining qualitative and descriptive methods with Mujiyanto's theoretical framework, this study provides a robust and replicable approach to analyzing semantic shifts in translation. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and strategies involved in translating multimodal digital content like webtoons, offering valuable insights for translators, educators, and digital content creators.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study identified 57 instances of semantic shifts in the English-to-Indonesian translation of the webtoon *Flawless*, categorized into five types based on Mujiyanto's framework: substitution (13 instances), specification (2 instances), generalization (15 instances), reversal (3 instances), and

deviation (24 instances). Below is a detailed analysis of each category, supported by examples from the data.

1. Substitution (13 Instances)

Substitution occurs when a word or phrase in the source text (ST) is replaced with a different but functionally equivalent term in the target text (TT). This shift often aims to make the translation more natural or culturally appropriate in the target language.

Example 1:

ST: "*Tugas terakhirnya santai aja kali ini ya..*"

TT: "The last task will be easy peasy."

Explanation: The Indonesian word "*santai*" (relaxed) is substituted with "easy peasy" in English, which conveys a similar informal tone and meaning.

Example 2:

ST: "*Aku nggak sadar bilang begitu. Soalnya Ayu enak diajak ngobrol sih.*"

TT: "I didn't realize I said that since Ayu was so fun to talk to."

Explanation: The word "*enak*" (pleasant) is substituted with "fun", which captures the enjoyable nature of the conversation in a more natural English expression.

Substitution was the second most frequent shift, reflecting the translator's effort to adapt idiomatic expressions and informal language to the target audience.

2. Specification (2 Instances)

Specification involves narrowing the meaning of a term or phrase in the TT to provide greater precision or clarity.

Example 1:

ST: "*Yang kedua, orang-orang berduit.*"

TT: "Second, the elites."

Explanation: The general term "*orang-orang berduit*" (wealthy people) is specified as "the elites" in English, emphasizing a specific social group.

Example 2:

ST: "*Nggak mungkin kan kalau aku pura-pura sampai terdaftar di sekolah segala.*"

TT: "I wouldn't go to a special needs school if I was just acting."

Explanation: The general term "*sekolah*" (school) is specified as "special needs school", adding context and clarity to the TT.

Specification was less frequent but highlights the translator's effort to clarify ambiguous or culturally specific terms.

3. Generalization (15 Instances)

Generalization involves broadening the meaning of a term or phrase in the TT to make it more applicable or relatable to the target audience.

Example 1:

ST: "*Tumben siang-siang?!*"

TT: "What's gotten into you today?"

Explanation: The specific time reference "*siang-siang*" (early afternoon) is generalized to "today", which covers a broader time frame.

Example 2:

ST: "*Dia lagi marah ya?*"

TT: "He's not in a good mood, I guess.."

Explanation: The specific emotion "*marah*" (angry) is generalized to "not in a good mood", which encompasses a wider range of negative emotions.

Generalization was the most frequent shift, reflecting the translator's tendency to simplify or broaden terms for easier comprehension in the target language.

4. Reversal (3 Instances)

Reversal occurs when the meaning of a term or phrase is changed to its opposite in the TT.

Example 1:

ST: "*Sarah, rame banget, ada apa?*"

TT: "Sarah, keep it down! What's going on up there?"

Explanation: The phrase "*rame banget*" (very noisy) is reversed to "keep it down" (be quiet), changing the meaning from describing noise to requesting silence.

Example 2:

ST: "*Untung cuma lagi farming.*"

TT: "Thank god it wasn't a ranked match."

Explanation: The neutral activity "farming" is reversed to express relief ("thank god it wasn't"), altering the tone and meaning of the statement.

Reversal was the least frequent shift but demonstrates how translators sometimes alter meaning to adapt to the target audience's expectations or cultural context.

5. Deviation (24 Instances)

Deviation involves significant departures from the original meaning, often to adapt the content to the target culture or context.

Example 1:

ST: "*Cari mbahmu! Kenapa kamu ngeselin banget?!*"

TT: "Go find it, dude! Why are you so obnoxious?!"

Explanation: The culturally specific term "mbahmu" (a slang term expressing annoyance) is replaced with "dude", which loses the original nuance but maintains the informal tone.

Example 2:

ST: "*Duh, aku tuh nggak kuat banget kalau lihat dia! Silau gitu..*"

TT: "Oh my god, seeing him always makes my heart flutter! He seems really warm.."

Explanation: The phrase "*nggak kuat*" (can't handle) and "*silau*" (dazzling) are replaced with "heart flutter" and "warm", adding a romantic nuance not present in the ST.

Deviation was the most frequent shift, highlighting the translator's effort to adapt culturally specific expressions and idiomatic language to the target audience.

The analysis reveals that deviation (24 instances) is the most common semantic shift in the translation of *Flawless*, followed by generalization (15 instances), substitution (13 instances), specification (2 instances), and reversal (3 instances). These shifts reflect the translator's strategies to adapt the text to the target language and culture, often at the expense of the original meaning or nuance. While some shifts enhance readability and cultural relevance, others result in significant departures from the source text, underscoring the complexity of translating multimodal content like webtoons.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal significant semantic shifts in the English-to-Indonesian translation of the webtoon *Flawless*, categorized into substitution, specification, generalization, reversal, and deviation based on Mujiyanto's framework (Mujiyanto, 2001). These shifts align with the challenges of translation highlighted in the literature, particularly in the context of linguistic and cultural differences between English and Indonesian (Hardiyanti et al., 2021; Andayani et al., 2023). However, the findings also highlight unique aspects of translating multimodal digital content like webtoons, which combine textual and visual elements to convey meaning (Nam & Jung, 2022; Gyogi & Lee, 2022). This discussion critically compares and contrasts the findings with the literature, emphasizing the implications for translation theory and practice.

Substitution and Cultural Adaptation

The frequent use of substitution (13 instances) in this study reflects the translator's effort to adapt idiomatic expressions and informal language to the target audience. For example, the substitution of "santai" (relaxed) with "easy peasy" demonstrates how translators often replace culturally specific terms with functionally equivalent expressions in the target language. This aligns with previous research on translation shifts, which emphasizes the inevitability of lexical and structural changes when translating between linguistically and culturally distinct languages (Tarawneh & Al-Momani, 2022; Alshahrani et al., 2023). However, while substitution can enhance readability, it may also result in the loss of cultural nuances, as seen in the replacement of "mbahmu" (a slang term expressing annoyance) with "dude". This finding underscores the tension between preserving cultural authenticity and ensuring accessibility in translation, a challenge that is particularly pronounced in digital media like webtoons (Nam & Jung, 2022).

Generalization and Simplification

The prevalence of generalization (15 instances) in this study highlights the translator's tendency to simplify or broaden terms for easier comprehension in the target language. For example,

the specific time reference "siang-siang" (early afternoon) was generalized to "today", and the emotion "marah" (angry) was broadened to "not in a good mood". This aligns with research on translation shifts in literary and legal texts, which often involve simplification to accommodate the linguistic and cultural norms of the target audience (Tarawneh & Al-Momani, 2022; Alshahrani et al., 2023). However, while generalization can improve readability, it may also dilute the original meaning or context, as seen in the translation of "main bola" (play soccer) to "join the game". This finding highlights the trade-off between clarity and precision in translation, particularly in multimodal content where visual elements provide additional context (Gyogi & Lee, 2022).

Deviation and Cultural Nuances

The most frequent semantic shift in this study was deviation (24 instances), which involves significant departures from the original meaning to adapt the content to the target culture. For example, the phrase "nggak kuat" (can't handle) and "silau" (dazzling) were replaced with "heart flutter" and "warm", adding a romantic nuance not present in the source text. This aligns with research on transcreation, where fans adapt webtoons to resonate with global audiences, often at the expense of the original meaning (Nam & Jung, 2022). However, while deviation can enhance cultural relevance, it may also alter the intended message or tone of the source text, as seen in the translation of "latah" (uncontrolled reaction) to "out of my control". This finding underscores the complexity of translating culturally specific expressions, particularly in digital media where visual and textual elements interact to convey meaning (Gyogi & Lee, 2022).

Specification and Clarity

The limited use of specification (2 instances) in this study reflects the translator's effort to clarify ambiguous or culturally specific terms. For example, the general term "orang-orang berduit" (wealthy people) was specified as "the elites", and "sekolah" (school) was clarified as "special needs school". This aligns with research on translation shifts in public signs and annual reports, which often involve explicitation to achieve pragmatic equivalence (Susini et al., 2023; Octoveria & Munandar, 2024). However, while specification can enhance clarity, it may also introduce unintended connotations, as seen in the translation of "sekolah" to "special needs school". This finding highlights the importance of cultural competence in translation, particularly in contexts where linguistic and cultural differences are pronounced (Andayani et al., 2023).

Reversal and Tone Adaptation

The least frequent semantic shift in this study was reversal (3 instances), which involves changing the meaning of a term or phrase to its opposite. For example, the phrase "rame banget" (very noisy) was reversed to "keep it down" (be quiet), altering the tone and meaning of the statement. This aligns with research on translation shifts in literary texts, which often involve modulation to adapt the tone or style of the source text (Alshahrani et al., 2023). However, while reversal can enhance readability, it may also distort the original meaning, as seen in the translation of "farming" to "thank god it wasn't a ranked match". This finding underscores the challenges of preserving tone and intent in translation, particularly in multimodal content where visual and textual elements interact to convey meaning (Gyogi & Lee, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the complexity of translating multimodal digital content like webtoons, where linguistic, cultural, and visual elements interact to convey meaning. While the translator's strategies—such as substitution, generalization, and deviation—enhance readability and cultural relevance, they also result in significant departures from the original meaning. These findings align with previous research on translation shifts but also highlight unique challenges in the context of digital media. By applying Mujiyanto's framework, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of semantic shifts in translation and offers valuable insights for translators, educators, and digital content creators. Future research could explore the impact of these shifts on audience reception and the role of technology in addressing translation challenges in digital media.

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