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## **Translating Idiomatic Expressions: An Attempt to Raise the Students' Pragmatic Awareness**

Izzati Gemi Seinsiani\*, Gema Gumika Damar Setyaning Djati

<sup>a</sup> English Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

<sup>\*</sup>Corresponding author: Sekaran, Gunung Pati, Semarang, Jawa Tengah, 50229, Indonesia. E-mail addresses: [izzatiseinsiani@mail.unnes.ac.id](mailto:izzatiseinsiani@mail.unnes.ac.id)

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### **abstract**

This research aimed to analyze the use of idiomatic expression as a translation activity to increase the students' pragmatic awareness. Idiomatic expressions were used as exercise materials since the expressions contain cultural content that needs to be translated appropriately based on context, therefore, the learners have an opportunity to explore the use of the idiomatic expression in its natural situation. This research applied the descriptive qualitative method to analyze the data and describe the findings. The data used were the translation result of 70 English Department Students who took English-Indonesian Translation Course at Universitas Negeri Semarang. They were given two translation exercises containing sentences with idiomatic expressions taken from Crazy Rich Asians Novel. The students had to translate the sentences from English to Indonesian. Then, the results of the students' exercises were compared to comprehending the learners' pragmatic awareness. The result proved that there was an improvement after they were given the activities as well as explicit explanations about the meaning and the appropriate use of idiomatic expressions. It showed that their awareness of idiomatic expressions had increased and as a result, they have a better understanding of the use of idiomatic expressions in everyday life.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In language learning, pragmatic awareness is one of the important parts of communicative competence, and it has become one of the main concerns of academicians and language experts to take the knowledge of pragmatics into account in language teaching (Riddiford and Joe 2010). Timpe-Laughlin et al., (2021) stated that pragmatic knowledge can help the learners to balance the lack of grammatical skill with the cultural knowledge so they can use the language appropriately, this practice is called cultural matching.

The cultural aspect of a language is deeply connected with the language itself. For example, we have to always consider the appropriateness/politeness of the expressions that we use in a particular occasion (Davies 2004). The speaker's ability to match the expressions and the ability to use them based on the context is called pragmatic knowledge. This knowledge is also important in language learning, even though the students are able to master the grammatical skills of the language perfectly, it does not ensure that they have good pragmatic knowledge, even for the advanced students, it could lead the failure of using certain expressions appropriately which could cause misunderstanding or misinterpretation ((Eslami-Rasekh 2005). Moreover, even though the students are aware of the cultural differences between the

two different languages and have high motivation to acquire pragmatic knowledge, it does not mean that they have the necessary language skills to use the language naturally and appropriately (Perdhani 2016). Thus, the knowledge of pragmatic should be taught in language learning explicitly in classroom (Hosseini and Pourghasemian 2019).

Pragmatic competence is a cognitive competence to learn language from cultural point of view (Celce-Murcia 2007). Pragmatic competence can be raised or improved by giving instruction and discussion about cultural gaps to the students. Explicit instructions that contain cross-cultural understanding have a good influence on the teaching-learning process so that the students can get a wider point of view in understanding the language (Alcon and Jorda 2008).

Several pragmatic awareness raising techniques or activities can be used to raise the student's pragmatic awareness such as teacher instruction containing the instructions on pragmatics rules (Cheng 2016). In this case, the teacher needs to give detailed information about the material given to the students because it can help them build their pragmatic awareness ((Eslami-Rasekh 2005). Using authentic materials such as recording, video, or text also has the benefit of raising the students' pragmatic awareness because it provides the students with the natural exposure of the source language and its pragmatic use (Cheng 2016). Audiovisual material containing some important speech acts in conversation such as expressions of gratitude, apology, permission, warning, refusal, etc are often used in language classroom as sources to raise the students' pragmatic awareness.

Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, (2005) proved that the use of videos was effective to measure the student's pragmatic awareness. In this research, 43 students were involved, they were paired and given a task to watch video and then they had to identify the pragmatic mistakes and did a role-play to correct the pragmatic mistakes in the video. The result showed that they were able to correct the mistakes. It showed that the intermediate students generally had already possessed pragmatic competence as a part of their linguistic skill, but explicit instruction helped them improve their pragmatic awareness.

The use of audio-visual as the learning media helped the students to improve the students' pragmatic awareness, however, not all classrooms were supported by the audio-visual facilities. Therefore, it could become a challenge for the teachers to employ audio-visual based activities in the classroom (Rahmawati and Dafit 2022). Another problem that could pose a problem was the lack of teacher experience in using audio-visual materials without the support from the technology team (Bao 2020). Therefore, translation exercises can be utilized as an alternative classroom activity to raise the students' pragmatic awareness. In recent years, translation has been seen not only as a tool to transfer meaning but also as an exercise in language classroom that can be used as tool to learn the difference of language use based on the context so it will increase the student's pragmatic awareness (Lertola and Mariotti 2017).

House (2008) also said that translation can bridge the differences between two different languages and cultures, moreover, it is no longer viewed only as linguistics process but also as an alternative medium to learn culture. Therefore, using translation as exercise to raise their pragmatic awareness will give them an opportunity to explore the pragmatic differences between L1 and L2 as well as will give them the natural exposure of the language use no less than the audiovisual materials that are usually used to raise the student pragmatic awareness. Language exercise using translation will give the students a chance to have real-word

experience in the teaching-learning process, therefore, automatically it can improve their communicative competence (Ishihara 2007).

(Valdeón 2015) found that translation could be used as an exercise to raise the Spanish student's awareness in translating taboo lexis. By using translation, the students tried to soften the translation of the taboo lexis which showed that they were aware of the cultural difference between English and Spanish. While Rafieyan (2016) found that translation process could be used as an exercise to bridge the pragmatic gap by translating cultural bound text. The results of the students' translation showed that they were aware of the pragmatic gap between the two languages after being given translation exercises.

This study aimed to analyze the use of translating idiomatic expressions in a novel as an exercise to improve the learners' pragmatic awareness. The use of idiomatic expressions in literary texts and daily conversation were quite common because the expressions contained underlying meaning and comprise culturally specific items, belief, and ideology of the people who use it, it could cause problems in translation for the students who were not equipped with pragmatic awareness (Van Thao and Herman 2021). Therefore, besides being used as a new technique to teach translation, translating idiomatic expression could also be used as medium to raise the students' pragmatic translation (Shojaei 2012). Moreover, Language classroom using translation can offer the students an opportunity to explore the language phenomena between the compared languages which will help the students understand the language better. The activity involving translation to raise pragmatic awareness should be given to at least intermediate to advance students because they already have basic linguistic knowledge of the source and target language.

## **METHOD**

This research used descriptive-qualitative design. Descriptive qualitative research was research in which the researcher explains and elaborates a complex picture from words, detailed report of the respondents' point of view and observes a particular phenomenon in its natural setting (Croker 2009). This research design allows the researcher to explain the data obtained using descriptive method.

The participants were 70 students of the 3rd semester at the English Department, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang who took translation courses. Participants were selected through a random sampling method to ensure that the participants have the same level of idiomatic expression knowledge.

To collect the data, there researcher used two sets of exercise, exercise 1 and exercise 2, each exercise contained 10 sentences which contained the idiomatic expressions taken from the novel "Crazy Rich Asian". The students were asked to translate the idioms in the sentences from English to Bahasa Indonesia. The accuracy and naturalness of the students' translation of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> exercise were analyzed. The students' improvement in translating the idiomatic expressions were used to measure the students' pragmatic awareness.

In addition, between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> exercise, the students were given an explicit explanation about the use and meaning of the idioms as well as the pragmatic difference between the idioms in English and Indonesian and how the idioms should be translated. This step was done to raise their pragmatic awareness when translating the idiomatic expression in the 2<sup>nd</sup> exercise.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Translating Idiomatic Expressions to Raise the Students' Pragmatic Awareness

Translating idiomatic expression was an effective way to be used as an activity to raise the student pragmatic awareness. It is effective because translating idiomatic expressions contained cultural gap so the students could develop their recognition on how to use the expression appropriately in context (Eslami-Rasekh 2005). In choosing the idiomatic expressions, cliché and euphemism, were chosen for the exercises given to the students. The two types of the idiom were chosen because those types were commonly used in daily communication, hence, it would be more useful for the students. The following were the list of sentences used in Exercise 1 and Exercise 2.

Table 1. Sentences for Exercise 1 and Exercise 2

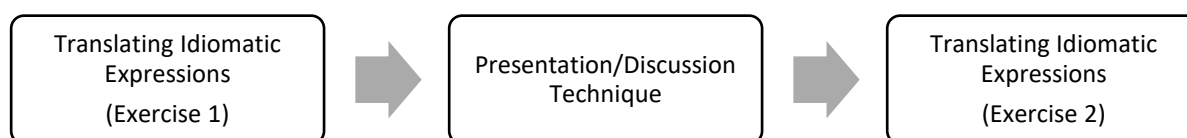
No	Exercise 1	Exercise 2
1.	“Well, these are ultra-special limousines with features like Jacuzzis, secret compartments, and James Bond ejector seats,” Eddie said, <b>bouncing up</b> from the settee so suddenly... (Kwan, 2013)	“You know how notorious those Taiwanese girls can be. They <b>swoop in</b> unexpectedly, the men <b>fall head over-heels</b> , and before you know it they are gone.. (Kwan, 2013).
2.	...he <b>knocked the glass out</b> of Nick’s hand (Kwan, 2013).	For a few seconds, <b>the room went absolutely still</b> (Kwan, 2013)
3.	Alexandra rushed over, <b>shaking a finger in dismay</b> (Kwan, 2013).	You could almost <b>hear the wheels in each woman’s head whirling into overdrive</b> (Kwan, 2013)
4.	“But it’s your glass, and you <b>hit it out of my hand!</b> ” Nick defended himself (Kwan, 2013).	“Guess who just <b>closed the deal</b> on the big house on Laurel Glen Drive?” Kerry Chu boasted excitedly in Mandarin as soon as she picked up the phone (Kwan, 2013).
5.	Ormsby approached Felicity and Eleanor. “I’m afraid I’m going to have to <b>ask you to leave the premises.</b> ” (Kwan, 2013)	She knew her mother meant well, but as usual she had <b>managed to stress her out</b> about details Rachel never would have imagined (Kwan, 2013).
6.	the group <b>huddled under</b> a green-and-white-striped awning on Brook Street (Kwan, 2013).	Astrid’s voice was suddenly <b>drowned out</b> by the staccato scream of a police siren.
7.	You are always too polite—these service people need to <b>be put in their place</b> (Kwan, 2013).	“You’re such <b>a creature of habit</b> . It would be supereasy to assassinate you.” (Kwan, 2013)
8.	We need to find someplace for tonight before your daughter <b>catches her death of cold</b> (Kwan, 2013).	Nick remained silent. He was <b>taking in everything Astrid had to say</b> , but <b>his mind was already made up</b> . He was ready (Kwan, 2013).
9.	“All the more reason. Rachel, you’re going to love it, and I just know you’re going to <b>flip out</b> over the food! You do realize Singapore is the most food-obsessed country on the planet?” (Kwan, 2013).	“Don’t worry about me. I always enjoy <b>catching up</b> with your husband, and it will be a treat to sit next to Louis—I just saw his new I’m the other day.” (Kwan, 2013).
10.	“But it’s your glass, and you <b>hit it out of my hand!</b> ” Nick defended himself (Kwan, 2013).	“Guess who just <b>closed the deal</b> on the big house on Laurel Glen Drive?” Kerry Chu boasted excitedly in Mandarin as soon as she picked up the phone (Kwan, 2013).

Using the two exercises above, the level of the students' pragmatic awareness was measured based on the level accuracy and naturalness of their translation of the idiomatic expression. If the students were able to translate more than 5 sentences in the exercises accurately, it meant they were able to recognize the correct use of the idioms within the context which indicate the students' awareness of the pragmatic aspect/cultural gap between English and Indonesian.

### Presentation and Discussion on the Idiomatic Expressions

To strengthen the students' pragmatic awareness, presentation/ discussion techniques could be used to give explicit explanation about the meaning and the use of the idioms in the sentences. By using presentation/discussion technique, the students were given a more detailed explanation on the importance of contextual meaning in the use of the idiomatic expression from two different languages. The information given in explanation and the discussion will help the students to build their awareness of pragmatic features in both languages. Therefore, explicit explanation on the use of idiomatic expression is necessary to as a part of the steps to raise the student's pragmatic awareness. The following diagram showed the steps implemented by translating the idiomatic expression and explicit explanation to raise the students' pragmatic awareness:

Diagram 1. The Implementation of Translation Exercise



The following table displayed the result of the translation after the translation exercises are implemented:

Table 2. Translation Exercise Result

Type of Test	Number of Less Accurate Translation (< 5)	Number of Accurate Translation (≥ 5)
Exercise 1	63 (90%)	7 (10%)
Exercise 2	20 (28,57 %)	50 (71,43 %)

Based on the result of exercise 1 and exercise 2, it was shown that there was an improvement in the students' accuracy of the translation. In exercise 1, only 10% of the students translated the idiomatic expression accurately and naturally which indicated that at this stage, the students had a lack of knowledge on how to find the equivalent translation for the idiomatic expressions which meant they also had a low awareness of the appropriate translation of the idioms based on context. However, based on the result of Exercise 2, it showed a significant rise in the number of the students who were able to translate the idiomatic expressions accurately which increased to 71,43% students.

The following table presented the students' choice in translating the idiomatic expression in exercise 1. The table displayed the students' word choices in translating the idiomatic expressions into Indonesian, the results had been put together based on the similarities of the translation.

**Sentence:**

*...he knocked the glass out of Nick's hand. (CRAs, P.11)*

The sentence above was translated into the sentences shown in table 3.

Table 3. Data of Exercise 1 (No.2)

Exercise 1	Percentage
...dia <b>menepak</b> gelas yang <b>digenggam</b> oleh Nick	10 %
... dia <b>mengetuk</b> gelas Nick'shand.	5 %
...dia <b>menjatuhkan</b> gelas yang berada di tangannya Nick	35 %
...dia <b>merobohkan gelas</b> dari Nick'shand.	10 %
Dia <b>menghancurkan gelas</b> dari tangan Nick.	40 %

The table above showed that the students translated the idiom “**knock out**” in the sentence into: **(1) menepak; (2) mengetuk; (3) menjatuhkan; (4) merobohkan gelas; (5) menghancurkan gelas**. Based on the context of the sentence, the closest translation of the idiom “knock out” is “menepak” or “menjatuhkan”; even though the translation was not very accurate because it changed the sense of the word in the target language.

The word “**menepak**” had the closest meaning to the word “**knock out**” in the sentence, the two words generally have the same meaning that is to make something fall from someone’s hand. The data showed that only 10% of the students used the word “**menepak**” in their translation which indicated the lack of the students’ pragmatic awareness on the meaning and the usage of the idiomatic expression when they considered the accuracy and naturalness of the translation.

**Sentence:**

*You are always too polite—these service people need to be put in their place. (CRAs, P.35)*

The sentence above was translated into the sentences in table 4.

Table 4. Data of Exercise 1 (No. 7)

Exercise 1	Percentage
Kamu selalu terlalu sopan, pegawai-pegawai ini harus <b>ditempatkan di tempat mereka</b> .	40 %
Kamu selalu saja terlalu sopan (berlebihan) - orang-orang ini ingin <b>diperlakukan sesuai apa yang mereka mau</b> .	10 %

Kamu selalu terlalu sopan—pelayan seperti ini <b>perlu ditempatkan sebagaimana mestinya</b> .	30 %
Kau selalu terlalu sopan—para pekerja itu <b>harus diingatkan tentang posisinya</b> .	15 %
Anda selalu terlalu sopan — orang-orang layanan <b>ini harus lebih sadar diri</b> .	5 %

Based on the result of the translation, the idiom of “to be put in their place” were translated into several phrases such as (1) *ditempatkan di tempat mereka*; (2) *diperlakukan sesuai apa yang mereka mau*; (3) *perlu ditempatkan sebagaimana mestinya*; (4) *harus diingatkan tentang posisinya*; (5) *harus lebih sadar diri*. The closest translation of the idiom “to be put in their place” was “harus diingatkan tentang posisinya”. There were only 15% of the students translated accurately which showed that the students were still lack of the pragmatic awareness when choosing the accurate translation of the idiom.

Based on the result above, it showed that there were only 10 – 15 % of the students were aware of the cultural differences that needed to be considered when translating the idiomatic expressions. Most of the students did not consider the appropriate use of the idioms in the source language because they were thinking from the perspective of their native language. Even though the translated sentences were grammatically acceptable, the meaning was not very accurate because they did not realize that idiomatic expressions were a part of cultural items that could not be translated literally.

Compared to the translation result in exercise 1, as mentioned above there were significant changes after the students were given the explanation on the cultural difference that needed to be considered when translating idiomatic expressions. The results of the students’ translation will be displayed below:

**Sentence:**

*Astrid’s voice was suddenly **drowned out** by the staccato scream of a police siren. (CRAs, P 117)*

The result of the translation of the above sentence is displayed in table 5.

Table 5. Data of Exercise 2 (No. 6)

Exercise 2	Percentage
Suara Astrid tiba-tiba <b>teredam</b> oleh bunyi stakato dari sirene polisi.	40 %
Suara Astrid tiba tiba <b>hilang</b> karena lengkingan sirene polisi	25 %
Suara Astrid tiba-tiba <b>tengelim</b> oleh raungan sirene polisi.	25 %
Suara Astrid tiba-tiba <b>menghilang</b> oleh teriakan stakato dari sirene polisi.	25 %

Suara Astrid tiba-tiba <b>tidak terdengar</b> oleh teriakan staccato dari sirene polisi.	5 %
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The students' word choices for translating the idiom “**drowned out**” were “*teredam*”, “*hilang*”, “*tenggelam*”, “*menghilang*”, and “*tidak terdengar*”. These words could be considered an accurate and natural translation of the idiom based on the context of the sentence. It showed that 40% of the students translated this word accurately; therefore, it indicated that the students were more aware of the pragmatic aspect when they translated the idiom after being given translation exercises which explicitly explore the cultural gap between the two languages and as a result also increased the students' pragmatic awareness in language use. Other word choices used by the students also could be considered as an accurate translation of the idioms so it could be said that all of the translation result could be considered as accurate which also indicated that the students' pragmatic awareness improved.

**Sentence:**

*You know how notorious those Taiwanese girls can be. They swoop in unexpectedly, the men fall head over-heels, and before you know it they are gone...* (CRAs, P. 216)

The sentence above was one of the sentences that was translated in exercise 2. The result of the translation is displayed in table 6.

Table 6. Post-test result of cliché (No. 1)

Exercise 2	Percentage
“Kau tahu betapa jahatnya gadis-gadis Taiwan itu. Mereka <b>datang dengan tiba-tiba, para pria jatuh cinta</b> , dan sebelum kamu menyadarinya, mereka pergi ..	30 %
Kamu tahu betapa jahatnya gadis gadis Taiwan itu. Mereka <b>mendekat tiba tiba, para lelaki tergila gila</b> , dan sebelum kamu tahu itu mereka sudah menghilang..	15 %
Kau tahu betapa mengerikannya gadis-gadis Taiwan itu. <b>Mereka muncul tiba-tiba lalu membuat pria jatuh cinta pada mereka</b> , dan saat kau tersadar mereka menghilang..	40 %
"Kamu tahu betapa terkenal buruknya wanita-wanita Taiwan itu. Mereka <b>datang tanpa teduga, para pria tergila-gila</b> , dan sebelum kamu mengetahuinya mereka menghilang	15 %

In the table above, the students translated the idiom “**swoop in**” and “**fell head over-heels**” in the sentence “You know how notorious those Taiwanese girls can be. They swoop in unexpectedly, the men fall head over-heels, and before you know it, they are gone...”. The result showed that the students translated the idiom into several similar expression such as “datang



dengan tiba-tiba”, “mendekat tiba tiba”, “muncul tiba-tiba”, “datang tanpa teduga” which all can be considered accurate and equivalent translation of the idiom. These results indicated that the students were aware of the difference of the pragmatic aspect between source language and target language when translating the idiom, so they did not translate the idiom literally.

Moreover, the translation of the second idiom in the sentences was “**fall head over-heels**” also solidified the students’ pragmatic awareness when they translated the sentence. This idiom is a fixed expression which means madly in love to someone. The result of the students’ translation showed that they translated the idiom to “*jatuh cinta*” and “*tergila-gila*” which were accurate as the translation of “**fall head over-heels**”.

The data that were shown in Exercise 1 and Exercise 2 above showed a positive result on the improvement of the students’ pragmatic awareness. It proved that translating idiomatic expressions can be explored as a technique to be used to improve the students’ sensitivity to the pragmatic awareness which resulted in a better translation result. It was also easy to implement as the teacher did not need additional audio-visual equipment in the classroom.

### **Challenges of Using Idiomatic Translation to Raise the Students’ Pragmatic Awareness**

There were some challenges faced by students in translating the idiomatic expressions such as student’s inadequate vocabulary mastery and the lack of language exposure in L2 pragmatics. These were reflected in the word choices chosen by the students to translate the idiomatic expressions. For example, the idiom “**knock out**” in the sentence was translated into *mengetuk, merobohkan gelas or menghancurkan gelas* by the students in the 1<sup>st</sup> exercise. Without understanding contextual pragmatic of the meaning of the idiom, the students translated the idiom inaccurately by only considering the literal meaning of the idiom which was not the equal translation of the idiom and could not be used appropriately within the pragmatic context. This supports the finding that was revealed by Adyagarini, Lestari, and Munir (2019); Korkmaz and Karatepe (2023) about the EFL students’ insensitivity in determining the linguistics choice to TL sociocultural values. The students were more concerned about grammatical accuracy than pragmatic appropriateness because they used TL only in classroom.

Another factor that also influenced the students’ inaccurate translation of the idiom is also the lack of TL exposure. In the classroom, the EFL students could only rely on their teacher as the source of TL language. This was also shown in the results of the students’ translation which indicated the lack of TL exposure; thus, the students could not choose the word appropriately as the translation of the idiomatic expressions given in the exercises. This is supported by the research conducted by Nabila and Daulay (2023); Alshraah, Aly, and Nasim (2024) which found that many EFL students failed to comprehend the pragmatic use of the TL because the lack of the cultural awareness as a result of the insufficient exposure of the TL culture and language and it is the obligation of the teacher to guide the students to have better pragmatic awareness in understanding the TL.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the discussion above, translation could be used as a strategy to teach cross-cultural understanding for the purpose of raising the students’ pragmatic awareness. Naturally, students with a high level of pragmatic awareness will translate idiomatic expression as accurate and natural as possible. The comparison of the translation in exercise 1 and exercise 2 showed that the students’ translation results improved after the students were given the exercise and an explicit explanation about cultural information in the L1 and that they should be aware of the

pragmatic differences between the idioms in the L1 and L2. In exercise 1, only 10% of the students translated the idiomatic expressions accurately while in exercise 2, the percentage of the students' accurate translation increased to 71.43 %. It could be said that translating idiomatic expressions can be used to explore the cultural content of the language to raise the students' pragmatic awareness by giving explicit instruction and explanation of the pragmatic gap of two different languages in the process of the translation. In addition, the increase of the students' pragmatic awareness can be helpful in everyday communication. Further research on translating idiomatic expressions with longer period, more idiomatic expressions and participants should be conducted to confirm the effectiveness of the translation exercises in raising the students' pragmatic awareness and also the influence of explicit information on cultural information.

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