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Navigating (In)directness: The Translation of Javanese Directive Utterances into English in Film Subtitles

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Abstract

Translating politeness and (in)directness in speech acts presents a considerable challenge in audiovisual translation, where cultural details are frequently lost. This problem becomes much more apparent for languages with a complex politeness system, such as Javanese, when translated into English. This study investigates how the (in)directness and politeness of directive speech acts (DSAs) are translated from Javanese into English in film subtitles, focusing on the strategies employed and their pragmatic implications. A qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach was applied to Javanese-English directive utterances from 20 short films produced by the Provincial Government of the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The results show that the direct translation (59.6%) was far from mere literal translation, as it involved significant modulation to preserve the source text's illocutionary force, while translation shifts (40.4%) demonstrate the translator's effort of pragmatic mediation. Specifically, 58.2% of the shifts toward enhanced directness were aimed at meeting subtitle constraints and improving clarity, while 41.8% of the shifts toward lessened directness were meant to conform to English norms of negative politeness, which occasionally compromise speaker intent. These findings affirm that politeness in translation is a dynamic variable that needs adjusting. In dealing with such an issue, translators act as intercultural mediators who should navigate the spectrum between directness and indirectness in two different cultures.

Keywords: *directive speech act; film-subtitling; (in)directness; Javanese-English translation; politeness*

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Introduction

The search for equivalence and the accurate representation of meaning are enduring concerns in translation studies. Achieving a perfect mirror of the source text (ST) in the target text (TT) is often impossible, as meaning is shaped by context and communicative situation. This challenge is also relevant to the translation of politeness aspects. Linguistic expressions of politeness vary significantly across cultures (Li et al., 2020). This variation is particularly clear in the translation of subtitles, which is essential for conveying cultural aspects in films, making them linguistically accessible to audiences from different language and cultural backgrounds (Guillot, 2010). Unfortunately, politeness features are frequently compromised or inadequately represented in subtitle translations (Hatim & Mason, 2000). This study investigates this issue by examining directive speech acts (DSAs) in 20 short movies produced by *Paniradya Kaistimewan*, the Provincial Government of the Special Region of Yogyakarta.

Directive speech act (DSA), or utterances intended to make the interlocutor perform an action (Searle, 1979), is a subject discussed intensively in pragmatic research, particularly concerning the levels of politeness and the social variables affecting it (Chang & Iunn, 2021). DSAs are an intriguing research subject because they are commonly employed in everyday communication, inherently impose on the interlocutor's freedom (which may lead to conflict), and can be expressed in varied linguistic strategies (Ruytenbeek, 2019).

To analyze these strategies in the Javanese, this study modifies the framework of Pablos-Ortega's (2019) to accommodate the Javanese linguistic elements, conventions, and cultural contexts. Those realization strategies will be categorized into four classifications based on their directness levels: 1) strong direct (imperative forms in *Ngoko* style without an explicit subject), 2) weak direct (performative sentences stating the speaker's need or imperative forms with politeness markers), 3) conventional indirect (non-imperative forms conventionally used to request something, like suggestions or

invitations), 4) non-conventional indirect (hints relying heavily on contextual elements).

This is a pragmatic-in-translation study, as its primary focus is on the results and processes of translation from a pragmatic perspective to understand the process of intercultural or intracultural transfer of linguistic phenomena (Dayter et al., 2023). By applying pragmatic theory and perspectives to address translation issues, this kind of study aims to answer the question "What happens to pragmatic phenomena when translated?"

Within the growing field of pragmatics in audiovisual translation, both in terms of process and product, subtitling has recently caught the interest of pragmatics scholars, but is still underexplored (Desilla, 2019). Several researchers interested in studying audiovisual film translation include Pablos-Ortega (2019), who contrastively analyzed DSA in English and Spanish-language film telenovelas; Locher (2020), who examined the relationship between aspects of Korean politeness and the fictional system of drama and how these aspects are accessible to non-Korean audiences; Yaghoubzadeh (2021), who analyzed request speech acts in English-language films and their Persian subtitles; as well as Napoli and Tantucci (2022), who investigated pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic patterns in question speech acts in English and Italian films. Those studies confirm that politeness is not universal, but is specific to particular cultures. Consequently, translation must also accommodate the politeness conventions of each language, particularly as film serves as a medium for understanding foreign cultures for global audiences.

Despite this growing interest, there is a gap in the absence of research on directive politeness within local Javanese films and their English translations, particularly the audiovisual translation, concerning the subtitling between a hierarchical, high-context Javanese and the egalitarian, low-context English. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating how directive strategies change, how the subtitle medium constraints influence the translator's decision, and what their implications are.

Methodology

This small-scale case study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017) to investigate the translation of DSA from Javanese to English in audiovisual media. The research design integrated descriptive quantitative analysis to map the distribution of translation strategies with qualitative pragmatic analysis to interpret the motivations and implications of these strategies. The data consisted of Javanese DSA and their English subtitle translations from 20 short films produced by *Paniradya Kaistimewan*, the Provincial Government of the Special Region of Yogyakarta. These films were selected as they represent authentic and contemporary uses of Javanese in various social contexts.

To collect the data, the DSAs in the films were transcribed verbatim along with their corresponding English subtitles. This resulted in a final dataset of 525 directive utterance pairs for analysis. Data analysis was performed in three sequential phases. The first was classifying ST directive strategies according to their levels of (in)directness. The second phase involved categorizing the translation strategies by analyzing each ST utterance in relation to its TT pair. Then, the last was conducting quantitative and qualitative analyses. Quantitative mapping was conducted by counting the instances of the DSA strategy and its translation type to provide an overview of the translational tendencies. Subsequently, qualitative interpretation was performed by analyzing the motivations and implications underlying the quantitative trends. Besides, the qualitative analysis of each utterance was supported by its audiovisual context, not in textual isolation. Taking these non-linguistic factors, like the characters' facial expressions and reactions, as well as their tone and intonation, into consideration was important as subtitling is a form of multimodal translation. To ensure analytical consistency, inter-rater reliability was applied in the classification process. Meanwhile, to strengthen the validity of pragmatic judgments, specifically the claims of the naturalness and acceptability of English translations, verification with the Corpus of

Contemporary American English (COCA) was conducted.

Results and Discussion

Translating speech acts is a complex task, extending beyond the transfer of linguistic form. While context-independent language use involves internal linguistic aspects, Bell (1991) argues that translating speech acts accurately must involve understanding the external aspects of language, specifically its role as a context-dependent communication system. This is particularly important for DSA, where its politeness perception is highly contextual. Aziz (1998) exemplifies that in Arabic culture, direct forms are preferred, for example, "I want some sugar" or "Give me some sugar" rather than the indirect forms "Can I have some sugar?", which are more frequently used in English culture.

In Javanese culture, the choice of directive strategy is influenced by various factors, including the situational context (formal or informal), the relationship between participants, and the sensitivity of the topic being discussed. Translators must carefully consider these elements to achieve equivalent pragmatic meaning, as the illocutionary force of an utterance fundamentally shapes its perceived directness and politeness (Polcz, 2020). Considering the importance of utterance's (in)directness, as failure to navigate these can lead to communication breakdowns, which may result in perceptions of 'rudeness' towards specific cultural groups (Grainger and Mills, 2016). Therefore, translating Javanese directives into English presents a significant pragmatic challenge.

To investigate how this challenge is navigated, the translated utterances in this study were categorized based on the treatment of (in)directness: direct translation and translation shift. Utterances are classified as direct translation if they preserve the (in)directness of the ST. Conversely, a translation shift occurs when the level of directness is modified through syntactic or lexical modulation, which directly impacts the TT politeness (Polcz, 2020). Figure 1 presents the distribution of these two categories within the dataset.

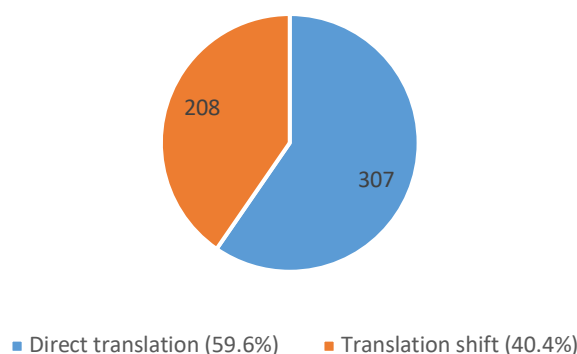


Figure 1. Distribution of translation strategies: Direct translation vs. translation shift

Figure 1 illustrates that most utterances (59.6%) retained their degree of (in)directness, and a substantial portion underwent a modification (40.4%). The high frequency of direct translation suggests the translator's tendency to preserve the ST's directive strategy, possibly due to the acceptability of Javanese directive strategies within the English cultural context. However, this does not necessarily indicate successful translation, as interference may also affect the prevalence of direct translation. On the other hand, despite its 'unfaithful' nature, the utterances that underwent shifts do not necessarily indicate deviations. Instead, these strategic modifications can demonstrate a translator's pragmatic competence in pursuing pragmatic equivalence, ensuring that utterances in the SL evoke similar perceptions of politeness, urgency, and social relations as those in the original text. The following sections provide a detailed explanation of each category.

1. Direct Translation

Direct translation in this study refers to instances where the translator preserves the same DSA strategies and the level of (in)directness in the TL as in the SL. The analysis reveals that this retention mostly occurs in the strong direct strategy. The absence of politeness markers and the explicit illocutionary force in such utterances often facilitates direct translation. Fawcett (2014) supports this by asserting that in non-ritualistic speech acts, a literal translation can often achieve its intended effect. However, as the following extracts show, direct translation

is not the same as literal translation. It includes a range of methods, from word-for-word translation to significant lexical and syntactic modification. All of these are aimed at preserving the core pragmatic strategy. Extract 1 exemplifies a successful literal translation of a strong direct strategy.

Extract 1. ST *Ning eling, iki rahasia.* (223/13)
[But remember, this is a secret.]
TT But remember, this is a secret.

This warning is translated word-for-word. The imperative verb 'remember' and the explicit statement 'this is a secret' make the DSA clear and direct. The informal context and the speaker's high status make this unmitigated command acceptable in English. This indicates that literal translation is not necessarily incorrect and is acceptable, as long as it preserves the original text's pragmatic and referential equivalence (Newmark, 1988).

While Fawcett (2014) claims that literal translation is mostly possible in non-ritualistic speech acts, it does not always work for utterances whose interpretation heavily depends on context. Extract 2 demonstrates this by exemplifying modification through addition.

Extract 2. ST *Baleni!* (33/16)
[Repeat!]
TT Retake the photo!

This data shows that translating is not only about replacing words, but conveying the meaning and intent of the original text. A literal translation of the command '*Baleni!*' [repeat] would be confusing, as its English equivalent

typically needs an object and is inappropriate in the context of taking a photo. By adding the object 'the photo' and selecting the context-specific verb 'retake', the translator clarifies the illocutionary intent and facilitates the audience's interpretation process.

In contrast, extract 3 shows modification through reduction and condensation.



Figure 2. Text condensation in screen translation

The ST expression, characterized by repetitive words, a firm tone and intonation, as well as elevated volume, indicates the speaker's frustration and impatience. In the TT, the translator condenses it into a single and clear prohibition (see Figure 2). It effectively conveys the intent (illocutionary force) and is relatively acceptable in the target culture, even though it loses the speaker's emotional characteristics. Besides minimizing misunderstandings for the international audience, a more concise translation that accurately conveys ST meaning can also effectively address the challenges of screen translation, including character limits, line restrictions, and the duration of subtitle display (Hatim & Mason, 2000).

While direct translation for the previous strong direct DSAs is largely unproblematic, translating the weak direct strategies, which contain mitigating devices, is more challenging. Here, direct translation often involves compensatory adjustments to maintain the strategy while ensuring its

Extract 3. ST *Minggir.. minggir.. minggir.. minggir. Isa dha minggir ora iki? Dolanan dha neng tengah ndalan. Ayo minggir. (1/4)*
[Move.. move.. move.. move.
Can you all move? Why are you playing in the middle of the road?
Come on, move.]
TT Don't play in the middle of the road.

naturalness. Extract 4 illustrates the omission of culturally specific particles.

Extract 4. ST *Alah Yang, mbok aja kaya cah cilik ngono kuwi lho, Yang. (37/16)*
[Oh dear, please don't act like a child, dear.]
TT Don't be childish, please.

The TT's translation omits the begging expression and the term of endearment '*Alah, Yang*', resulting in a more concise and effective command that remains natural within English-speaking culture. Furthermore, selecting the English adjective 'childish' is more appropriate than the literal translation 'like a child.' While sacrificing the softening tone of the ST, this method effectively conveys the speech's message and intent. Moreover, the marker 'please' is added, which may help to retain the basic politeness.

The next data sample also shows that politeness strategies can still be maintained despite changes in the utterance's function and emphasis.

Extract 5. ST *Helmmu ki kudu tuku anyar, Yang.*
(43/16)
[Your helmet should be replaced
with a new one, Honey.]
TT I think you should buy a new
helmet, Babe.

The ST's utterance implies a necessity or obligation, as seen in the use of the term '*kudu*' [must]. In the TT, the statement is rephrased as a personal suggestion or advice, which reduces imposition and enhances politeness. This is contextually appropriate because a literal translation would sound unnatural in English. While the ST's sense of urgency is lost, the TT expression effectively communicates the intended meaning using vernacular appropriate for the participants' relationship. The hedging 'I think' and the locutionary derivative 'you should' align with common English strategies in giving advice (Iragui, 1996).

Not only in the direct DSA, direct translation strategy also occurs frequently in the conventional indirect strategies due to cross-cultural similarities. The dominance of question forms in the Javanese data and the common use of preparatory phrases, like 'Can you...?' or 'Could you...?' in English (Iragui, 1996), are among the factors. One example is shown in extract 6.

Extract 6. ST *Piye nek takon Pak Radji wae?*
(233/13)
[How about asking Mr. Radji?]
TT What if we just ask Pak Radji?

This translation maintains the interrogative form and the collaborative intent present in the ST. It even preserves the term '*Pak*,' which signifies the relationship and attitude towards the interlocutor (Clyne et al., 2009). This retention highlights a persistent challenge in translating culture-specific address terms that encode the cultural values, hierarchy, and social norms (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Renna, 2023).

Unlike previous data, Extract 7 shows that when conventional indirectness is realized in declarative form, greater intervention is required to convey a similar function.

Extract 7. ST *Loro karone ngono lho, Yang.*
(29/16)
[Both of them, Honey.]
TT Everything should be seen.

Here, to explain the DSA in ST, which heavily depends on context, the translator sacrifices the literal meaning and the intimate endearment '*Yang*' [Honey]. Consequently, while retaining the DSA strategy, this translation no longer reflects the ST's specificity and interpersonal tone.

The most challenging category for direct translation is the non-conventional indirect strategy, due to its high context dependency. Extract 8 exemplifies this.

Extract 8. ST *Kuwi ki bantuan ben diurus sing
oleh bantuan. (163/1)*
[That assistance should be taken
care of by those who receive it.]
TT That social assistance is the
business of those who are
entitled to receive it.

The ST's indirect strategy, perceived as advice, is meant to politely stop the interlocutor from further discussing social assistance. However, in the TT, it is translated as a factual statement that appears to be an affirmation rather than a suggestion. While it is more effective in conveying the intent, this harsh affirmation is overly direct and lacks the characteristic of a friend's advice.

In contrast, extract 9 presents a direct translation of a non-conventional indirect strategy that preserves the pragmatic aspects while effectively bridging cultural differences.

Extract 9. ST *Ibu pengen momong putu.*
(461/18)
[Mother wants to take care of
grandchildren]
TT I want to have grandchildren
soon.

The culture-specific concept of '*momong putu*' [to care for grandchildren] is modified to 'have grandchildren soon' in the TT. In Javanese, it is common for married couples to reside with their parents after marriage, seeking assistance in childcare due to their work. This contrasts with Western culture, where

individuals typically live independently after reaching adulthood. This translation is pragmatically accurate as it maintains the indirect strategy and politeness aspects while conveying an implicit command to urge marriage.

The high frequency of direct translation (59.6%) suggests that the translator tends to maintain the ST's pragmatic strategies in the TT. This finding is similar to some other studies investigating DSA subtitling strategies in various languages (Fadhilla & Basari, 2022; Irianti & Anis, 2025; Shabrina & Wibowo, 2022; Yaghoubzadeh, 2021) This conforms to Pedersen's statement (2011) that retention, or keeping the ST elements in the TT, is the most common strategy for rendering cultural references, including politeness. However, the analyzed extracts demonstrate that successful direct translation is rarely a simple word-for-word transfer, and the viability of direct translation is strategy-dependent.

The strong direct strategy, with its clear imperatives, is particularly suited to the direct translation approach because in television and film dialogues, the use of direct strategies is more prevalent, and interpersonal features, like hedging and politeness markers, are rarely employed (Bednarek, 2010; Napoli, 2021; Pablos-Ortega, 2019; Quaglio, 2009). The conventional indirect strategy, due to its cross-cultural similarities in question and declarative forms (Iragui, 1996; Sukarno, 2018), also shows high retention, although careful adjustments for context and characterization are needed. In contrast, the weak direct and non-conventional indirect strategies pose greater challenges due to their

politeness devices and contextual dependence (Ackermann, 2023; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Brown & Levinson, 1987). These results suggest that translating DSA strategies for subtitles is complex. In this field, direct translation is not literal translation as it indicates a practical process where the translator actively negotiates between formal correspondence and functional equivalence, often within the strict limits of the audiovisual medium.

2. Translation Shift

Following the analysis of direct translation, this section examines translation shifts, which constitute a significant portion of the data (40.4%), where the translator intentionally modified the degree of (in)directness present in the ST. Such shifts are necessary when a direct translation fails to provide adequate or appropriate functional pragmatic equivalence. As Catford (2000) and Polcz (2020) suggest, language contact in translation frequently requires strategic adjustments to align with the divergent socio-cultural norms and communicative preferences between source and target cultures. In this study, these strategic adjustments are divided into two types: those that enhance directness and those that lessen directness.

Quantitatively, the data reveal a tendency toward pragmatic explicitation, where most shifts occur through an increase in directness. Among the 208 shifted strategies, 58.2% (121 utterances) are more direct, whereas 41.8% (87 utterances) are less direct.

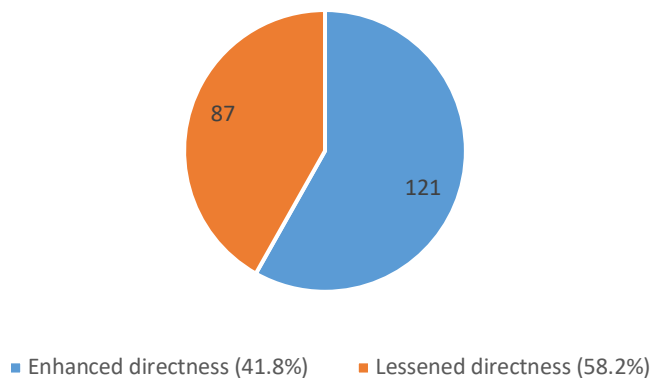


Figure 3. Distribution of translation shifts: Enhanced directness vs. lessened directness

This difference may indicate a trend where translators prioritize clarity and efficiency. This contradicts common expectations regarding politeness and face management, as English speakers, who prioritize negative face, are known to use conventional indirect strategies more frequently in conveying requests (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Brown & Levinson, 1987).

a. Enhanced Directness

When enhancing directness, the translators prioritize clarity and efficiency over indirectness or implicitness. Although this trend seems contradictory to common politeness predictions, it is reasonable within audiovisual translation. Studies indicate that shifts toward greater directness are frequently influenced by medium-specific constraints, such as the limited space and time available for subtitles (Polcz, 2020).

A common method for enhancing directness involves transforming a weak direct strategy (which contains mitigating devices) into a strong direct one by removing those mitigations. Extract 10 illustrates this.

Extract 10. ST *Ati-ati ya, Ndhuk. (82/3)*
[Take care, dear daughter.]
TT Be careful on the road.

This translation shifts a mother's advice from a weak direct to a strong direct strategy. In Javanese, such advice is typically expressed as farewells. In this context, it is mitigated by the confirmation question 'ya' [okay] and the term of endearment 'Ndhuk' [daughter], which shows interpersonal relationships and strengthens the mother's attention and affection. In the TT, the advice is shifted into a serious warning by eliminating the interpersonal mitigations. While 'be careful' in English typically refers to potential danger, this translation loses the original's affectionate nuance, failing to convey equivalent interpersonal meaning. Such a translation may lead to misinterpretation, especially for audiences who only rely on the subtitles. Moreover, the visual context, showing the mother's anxious face, supports this wrong interpretation that there will be dangerous things ahead (see figure 4). This exemplifies one of the constraints in screen translating, which cannot represent speech features, like intonation, of the ST (Hatim & Mason, 2000).

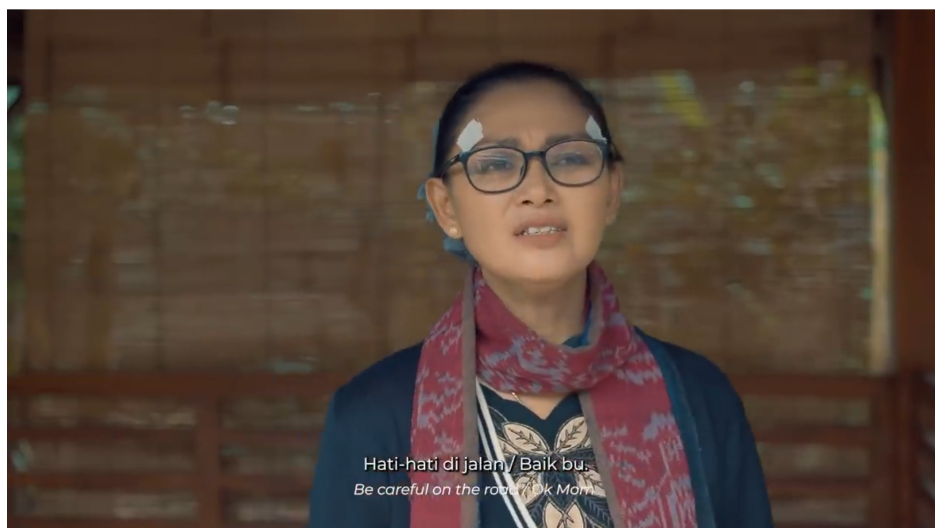


Figure 4. Visual context that supports a wrong interpretation

Extract 11 provides another example of directness enhancement through the omission of mitigating devices.

Extract 11. ST *Mbokya dolan neng omah ta, Mas. (454/18)*
[Please come to my house, Brother.]
TT Come to my house.

Two mitigating devices, the politeness particle '*mbok*' [please] and the kinship address '*Mas*' [brother], are used in ST to lessen the imposition of the request. In Javanese, kinship terms do not solely denote familial relationships but also serve to express respect, affection, or social hierarchy (Widiana, 2023), but a literal translation, such as 'brother' for '*mas*', may appear unnatural or potentially confusing to an English-speaking audience. Consequently, it is excluded in the TT. Furthermore, the particle '*mbok*', functioning as a softener, is not translated as 'please' due to its potential to convey formality, stiffness, or excessive pleading, which would be inappropriate for the casual context of the scene (Murphy & Felice, 2018). Despite its pragmatic impact, the omission of culturally specific items that do not contribute crucially to textual development is a common strategy to maintain TT's fluency (Hardiyanti et al., 2021; Mukminin et al., 2025).

Not translating the politeness markers into TT, as demonstrated by the previous two data, indicates a pragmatic failure, which is mainly caused by the imposition of the social norms of one culture on the communicative behavior of another culture (Thomas, 1983; Zamborlín, 2007). Although they do not capture the interpersonal details of the original text, this more direct translation remains the optimal choice to prevent TT texts from sounding unnatural. In this case, the translators prioritize conveying the core illocutionary force (the directive) and making sure the TL sounds natural, even by sacrificing some politeness aspects.

Enhancing directness also applies to indirect DSA, where the translator makes the intended meaning explicit. Extract 12 exemplifies this.

Extract 12. ST *Heh Pul, tak omongi ya?* (474/19)
[Hey Pul, let me tell you, okay?]
TT *Ipul, listen up!*

The ST's utterance is indirect as it aims to ask the interlocutor to listen without explicitly conveying that intention. The phrase '*tak omongi*' [let me tell you] enhances the politeness, as it conveys a notice rather than a command. The particle '*ya?*' [okay?] serves as

a marker for seeking agreement and functions as a mitigating device, changing a strong command into more collaborative, non-coercive, and optional expressions. However, the TT transforms it into a strong direct command delivered in an imperative without any politeness markers, implying coercion and urgency. This choice may be driven by the weaker and hesitant tone of direct translation, which can lessen the character's seriousness and assertiveness. In Javanese culture, even when expressed indirectly with softening techniques, ST's statement is typically interpreted as a command. It is frequently conveyed by those in positions of greater authority to encourage the listener to pay close attention to the message being communicated. To uphold this assertive tone, the translator clarifies the command further in the TT. This illustrates that the subtitler's role involves not only adjusting politeness but also maintaining characterization dynamics to convey the original scene effectively (Ying, 2024).

Overall, the shift to more direct strategies does not signify a translator's error or negligence regarding politeness. Instead, this pragmatic explicitation makes the TT easier to understand, thereby minimizing the audience's effort to comprehend it (Vermees, 2019). This explicitation is likely influenced by multiple factors. The first is compensation. International audiences might not be able to understand Javanese communication at all since it depends so much on cultural knowledge and contextual details. Therefore, a shift to a more direct strategy would enhance the illocutionary force which may help audience understand the text (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995). The second is a prioritization of clarity and efficiency. Due to the constraints of space and time in subtitles, translators prioritize the momentum and clarity of the scene. An efficient text would facilitate immediate comprehension of characterization and narrative. The third is conformity to the TL pragmatic norms. Javanese speakers frequently express politeness through lexical and social mitigations, including politeness terms like '*mbok*' [please] or kinship references (Errington, 1988; Purnamasari & Zulaeha, 2019). In contrast, English speakers emphasize syntactic structures, such as

utilizing conventional indirect forms (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Thus, translators frequently reorganize utterances by removing culturally specific mitigating devices that may appear unnatural in English to achieve pragmatic suitability.

While aiming at enhancing speech clarity and functionality, the strategy presents several problems. The first is the loss of subtlety and polite characterization. Some Javanese characters in movies who are shown as polite or polished may be interpreted as unpleasant or less polite in the TL because they employ direct and demanding language. The second issue is the loss of subtleties that are typical of Javanese relationships. Many Javanese utterances use address terms that depict relationships of closeness, power, and hierarchy between participants. They are meant to preserve relationships but there are no direct English translation due to their potential awkwardness. Consequently, replacing culturally specific terms with more general ones can risk losing the sociocultural vitality of the source language (Mahmood et al., 2025). The third problem is the loss of authentic communication nuances. Making implied meaning explicit reduces the authenticity of the dialogue, as real human communication relies heavily on implied meaning (Cimmino et al., 2023; Grice, 1975). It potentially creates a more passive experience of watching the films.

b. Lessened Directness

Even though there is a general trend toward a more direct approach to translation, a lot of data indicate the lessening of directness (41.8%). Considering that English speakers prioritize negative politeness, which emphasizes respect for autonomy and avoiding imposition, the directness lessening may show an adaptation to target-culture norms. Extract 13 provides an example.

Extract 13. ST *Maem, Pak. Wis mateng.* (121/11)
[Eat, Sir. It's cooked]
TT The lunch is ready.

The strong direct imperative in the ST, encouraging the husband to eat immediately, is transformed into a declarative form, simply stating the fact that lunch is ready. In this way, the directive intent is disguised, which requires implicit interpretation. The shift is appropriate as in Javanese, giving such a command is a usual way to show that someone cares, particularly when the food is freshly prepared. Meanwhile, in an English context, it may be perceived as indicative of a nagging, bossy, or domineering spouse.

A more extreme lessening of directness is shown in extract 14.

Extract 14. ST *Apa meneh? Rasah ngamen. Aku ra butuh hiburan.* (307/9)
[What else? Don't busk. I don't need entertainment.]
TT What? I don't need buskers, I don't need entertainment right now.



Figure 5. Mismatch between verbal text and audiovisual context

The blunt prohibition ‘*Rasah ngamen.*’ [Don't busk.] is transformed into an indirect strategy where the speaker expresses personal needs rather than issuing a command. While this utterance is considered polite because it avoids confrontation that could potentially threaten the interlocutor's face, it creates a mismatch between the verbal text and the speaker's angry facial expression and intonation in the audiovisual source (see Figure 5). The gap between polite text and angry paralinguistic cues, or nonverbal communication conveyed through sounds, such as emphasis or emotion (Tokuyama et al., 2021), may lead to confusion or distortion in the character's portrayal, representing a challenge in audiovisual translation (Mudawe & Mudawe, 2023).

Another significant pragmatic softening is illustrated in extract 15.

Extract 15. ST *Kae. Ana tamu kae, Ndhuk.
Bukakna. (312/9)*
[There. There's a guest,
daughter. Open (the door).]
TT I think guests are coming.

The imperative verb ‘*bukakna*’ [open] in the ST indicates a direct command. However, the hierarchical context between the participants and the term of endearment for girls ‘*Ndhuk*’ [daughter] mitigates the command, making it less direct. In a declarative statement, the utterance ‘I think guests are coming,’ reduces its pragmatic force. This aligns with the tendency of English speakers to use indirect strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The neutral statement ‘I think...’ allows the interlocutor to infer the appropriate action, making the command more polite. This modality marker is necessary in spoken language to prevent the speaker from showing an authoritative role (Phuc Tran, 2014).

These extracts suggest that utterances are often softened to sound natural, polite, and contextually appropriate for English-speaking audiences. While this strategy may seem to be a domestication strategy, aiming at adapting the source text and integrating the audience into the TL culture (Kononchuk, 2024; Ning, 2013), it is, in fact, a complicated process with

risks. The consequences of this pragmatic softening include a gap between the subtitle and the source audiovisual elements, a shift in the perception of intimacy among participants, and a distortion of the speaker's pragmatic authority or intent. This illustrates that while reducing directness can address the issues of perceived impoliteness, it may lead to new issues of weakened characterization and pragmatic mismatch.

Conclusion

Considering that politeness features are often lost or underrepresented in subtitle translation, this study investigated what happened to (in)directness and politeness in directive speech acts (DSAs) when they are translated from Javanese into English for audiovisual subtitles. Employing a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach, this study analyzed the Javanese directive utterances and their English translations from 20 locally produced short films.

The quantitative prevalence of direct translation (59.6%) aligns with other studies on DSA subtitling in some languages. This study also reveals that the direct translation of DSA strategies does not mean simple literal translation. It includes a range of approaches, from word-for-word transfer to significant changes in lexical and syntactic aspects. All of those approaches are meant to preserve the illocutionary force and ensure the TL acceptability. Importantly, the approach's viability was dependent on the DSA strategy employed. While a straightforward transfer is possible for strong direct utterances, it is also feasible but requires careful adaptation for conventional indirect ones. However, the approach is most challenging for weak direct and non-conventional indirect strategies due to their embedded politeness devices and high context-dependency. On the other hand, the substantial portion of translation shifts (40.4%) demonstrates the translator's active pragmatic modification. The trend toward enhanced directness (58.2%) highlights the powerful influence of media constraints, in terms of space and time, and a prioritization of clarity and efficiency, often at the cost of losing Javanese interactional details. Meanwhile, the

shift toward lessening directness (41.8%) reflects strategic adaptations to align with target culture politeness norms, particularly the English speakers' preference for negative politeness, though sometimes at the risk of distorting the speaker's intention or creating a mismatch with paralinguistic cues.

By connecting cross-cultural pragmatics and audiovisual translation studies, this study demonstrates that politeness is a dynamic and context-sensitive variable. It confirms that the translation of speech acts is an intercultural mediation where success is measured by the perceived politeness and social appropriateness rather than formal correspondence.

This research expands the field of politeness studies beyond the dominant East Asian languages by incorporating Javanese, a prominent Austronesian language characterized by a complicated hierarchical politeness system. This study offers essential insights into the interaction of such a system with the norms of English in audiovisual subtitles. While it provides a detailed pragmatic analysis grounded in theoretical frameworks and strengthened by the use of COCA to verify the contextual appropriateness of the English translation, this study ultimately lacks validation of native English speakers' perceptions. Therefore, future research could incorporate reception-based methods, through surveys or interviews with English-speaking audiences, to provide a valuable complement to the product-based analysis presented here.

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