



EXPLORING TRANSLATOR'S COMPETENCE THROUGH THE CHOICE OF TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: THE CASE OF TRANSLATING EMOTIVE EXPRESSIONS IN 'INSIDE OUT 2'

Chau T. A. Nguyen,

Lien-Huong Voⁱ

University of Foreign Languages and International Studies,

Hue University,

Vietnam

Abstract:

This study explores how the choice of translation techniques showcases the translator's competence. Based on Molina and Albir's (2002) taxonomy of translation techniques and the PACTE model of translation competence (2003) as conceptual frameworks, the study analyzed the use of translation techniques for the translation of emotive expression in the movie 'Inside Out 2'. The findings show the employment of a variety of translation techniques, with literal translation being the most prevalent. The study has some similar findings to those of previous studies in translating emotions, but it also achieves some distinctive results. The findings help explain the reasons for untranslatability and the choice of omission as an apt technique. The study also discusses the implications for translator training regarding the area of subtitling.

Keywords: emotive expressions, PACTE, translation competence, translation techniques

1. Introduction

If translation serves as a vital bridge between languages and cultures, cinematic texts are the factors that showcase linguistic and cultural characteristics. The rapid expansion of the Internet has transformed viewing habits, increasing reliance on subtitled films and making translation quality crucial for brand reputation, service providers' credibility, and translator training. Film translation extends beyond language, facilitating access, fostering cross-cultural empathy, and sharing stories globally. A key challenge lies in translating emotive expressions, which are deeply tied to culture, context, and language-specific nuances, conveyed through linguistic and visual devices. This demands more than bilingual skills, requiring various types of competence from translators.

The choice of translation techniques is believed to reflect translator competence. Only a few studies have explored the relationship between translator competence and translation techniques. In addition, literary translation research often investigates traditional written texts such as novels, short stories, plays, etc., while leaving cinematic texts under-researched. This

ⁱ Correspondence: email anchauchau@gmail.com, vtlhuong@hueuni.edu.vn

study, therefore, is an attempt to bridge the gap by considering how the choice of translation techniques showcases the translator's competence. The focus is on the emotive expressions, which are arguably culture-specific and hard to translate. The study uses the script of the movie *Inside Out 2* as the data source, Molina and Albir's (2002) taxonomy of translation techniques and the PACTE model of translation competence (2003) as conceptual frameworks. The purpose of the study is to explore the translation techniques employed for the translation of emotive expressions and how these techniques reflect the translator's competence in handling the translation process.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Translation Competence

Translation competence is a set of skills required of a translator, as well as criteria for assessing those skills by analyzing their actual translation work rather than simply judging whether a translator is successful or not. At the early stage, translation competence was often defined in one of the following ways:

- 1) the knowledge and skills a translator need to have to perform the translation work,
- 2) the ability to know how to translate,
- 3) the interlingual competence based on comprehensive knowledge of the source and target languages, and
- 4) the system of skills and knowledge needed to be able to translate (Orozco & Albir, 2002).

These are the most basic understandings of translation competence, which is closely associated with the competence in the working languages of the translation. However, the increasing professionalization of the translation industry has led to higher requirements for skills and knowledge for translators. Gouadec (2007) argues that translation competence is a complex set of knowledge and skills, which has been viewed as a macro-competence system, divided into closely related sub-competencies (Schäffner & Adab, 2000).

In the 2000s, the Spanish research group PACTE started to develop a framework for translation competence. Their model has been revised and improved as a result of successive empirical research. After several revisions, PACTE (2003) introduced a model of translation competence that comprises six sub-competencies.

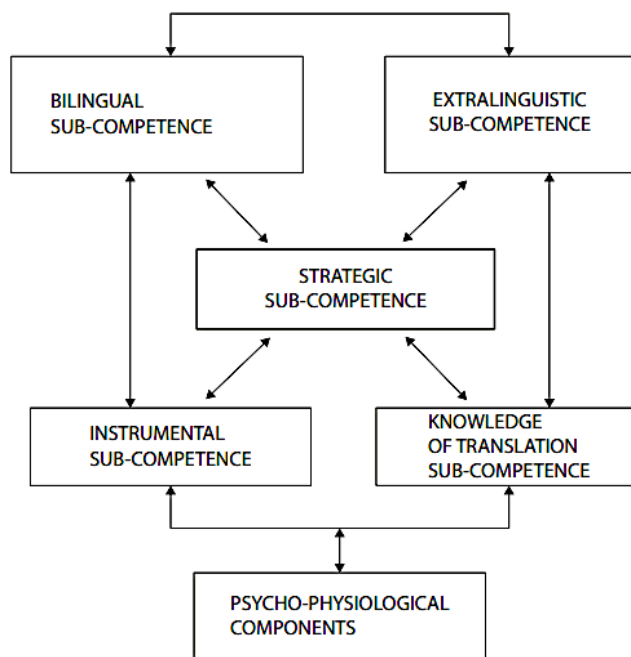


Figure 2.1: Translation Competence model (PACTE, 2003, p. 60)

Each sub-competence performs its particular function. In particular:

- *Bilingual sub-competence* refers to the prerequisite knowledge needed to carry out communication in two different languages, including knowledge of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, text structure, grammar and vocabulary.
- *Extralinguistic sub-competence* includes bicultural knowledge, general knowledge about the world and specialized knowledge of a field.
- *Knowledge of translation sub-competence* includes understanding of functions, processes, methods, translation ethics, etc.
- *Instrumental sub-competence* includes the understanding of resources (dictionaries, encyclopedias, text presentation handbooks, electronic corpora, etc.) and the technical tools to support translation work.
- *Strategic sub-competence* has the function of ensuring the effectiveness of the translation process as well as solving problems arising in translation. Strategic sub-competence plays an essential role in the translation competence system and has a profound influence on other sub-competences. Strategic sub-competence allows translators to plan the translation process and project, choose appropriate translation techniques, evaluate and handle the translation process, activate sub-competences in the system and compensate for the shortcomings of sub-competences.
- *Psychological factors* are components of translation competence related to attitudes (confidence, curiosity and motivation) and psychological operating mechanisms (ability to receive, remember, concentrate and control emotions in operation).

Among these, the strategic sub-competence is very crucial. One of its impacts on the translation process is the choice of translation techniques, which is decisive in the success of the translation.

2.2 Translation Techniques

Molina and Albir (2002) defined translation techniques as specific methods for handling language components (words, phrases, sentences) to find appropriate equivalents in the target language. They classified translation techniques into direct techniques and indirect techniques. The direct techniques maintain the target text's closer similarity to the source text in terms of structure and form. These techniques include:

- *Borrowing*: an adoption of the source words/phrases into the target language, retaining form and cultural nuances when there is no target language equivalent.
- *Calque*: an adoption of the structure in the source language.
- *Literal translation*: a word-for-word translation with certain adjustments of the target language grammar.

The indirect techniques involve greater transformation from the source language to the target language for natural, clear, and culturally appropriate results when direct transfer fails to convey meaning or effect. These include:

- *Transposition*: a change of grammatical categories while preserving meaning.
- *Modulation*: a shift in perspective for the sake of naturalness or clarity in the target language.
- *Compensation*: a replacement of lost elements in the source language elsewhere in the target language.
- *Adaptation*: a replacement of cultural elements in the source language with localized equivalents in the target language.
- *Description*: a replacement of terms with descriptions when there are no target language equivalents.
- *Discursive creation*: a creation of context-specific, non-lexical equivalents.
- *Generalization*: using a broader target language term for a specific source language term.
- *Particularization*: using a more precise target language term than a source language term.
- *Reduction/Omission*: deleting redundant or untranslatable elements.
- *Amplification*: adding words for clarity, explaining implicit source language content.
- *Substitution*: a change of paralinguistic elements (e.g., tone, gestures).
- *Variation*: an adjustment of dialects for the target language audience.

While translation competence guides the translation process and strategic decisions, translation techniques are instrumental for these decisions, thus showcasing the translator's competence.

2.3 Emotive Expressions

Emotive expressions are the conveyance of emotional states by explicitly describing them or using words with a strong emotional impact. Emotive language is crucial in communication as it conveys an individual's feelings, attitudes, and intended actions, shaping the meaning beyond the literal content (Safarov, 2008; Leech, 2014; Langlotz & Locher, 2017). Unlike factual language, it prioritizes emotional impact through words, phrases, and figurative speech, with connotations varying by cultural norms (Scarantino, 2019). While some expressions are

globally similar, such as happiness, sadness, or anger, some expressions are closely tied to cultural norms, individual personality, and context. Wierzbicka (1999) exemplified this by arguing that the German word *schadenfreude* conveys an emotional complexity and has no straightforward counterpart in English. This suggests that emotive expressions are challenging to translate on account of differences in how emotions are perceived and expressed across cultures.

Research into the translation of emotive expressions has achieved various results. This is indicative of the culture-specific characteristics of the emotive expressions. However, there are only a few studies examining the translation of expressions of emotions (Bağ, 2023). Even if these studies investigated issues in translating emotive expressions, they often focused on a type of emotive expression. For example, Saputri and Wijaya (2022) analyzed translation techniques of harsh language. Suryasa et al. (2019) examined the English-Indonesian translation of happy emotions, and Utara et al. (2022) studied the types of positive emotion words and the translation technique applied to translate them. Recently, Wanodya et al. (2024) investigated the translation techniques of both positive and negative states of emotions. The results of these studies varied in terms of translation techniques applied to translate emotive expressions.

While Utara et al. (2022) found that four techniques of literal translation, amplification, transposition, and particularization were prevalent in translating emotions, Wanodya et al. (2024) found six single techniques and two compound ones, arguing that literal translation is most common in translating emotions. The discrepancy in the research findings is presumably the result of differences in translators' choice of translation techniques in view of their different competence. This lends plausibility to the present study. It aims to consider the translator's competence in handling the translation through their choice of translation techniques.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study follows the descriptive qualitative design, which focuses on providing an account of a phenomenon, and generating categories and themes for a better understanding of the subject matter. This design is suitable to research in translation studies in general and the purpose of the present study in particular.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data source for the study is a parallel corpus of 2,180 English-Vietnamese script-subtitle pairs from *Inside Out 2*, legally sourced from Disney+. To ensure the accurate English-Vietnamese correspondence, the bilingual corpus was aligned using YOUALIGN, a free online tool used for sentence-level alignments of source and translated documents.

First, the emotive expressions from the English version were identified, annotated and grouped based on Plutchik's (1980) taxonomy of emotion, which categorized emotion into eight states, namely joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger, and anticipation.

Equivalents from the Vietnamese version were then annotated in a similar way, and translation techniques were labeled by comparing the emotional and linguistic contents of the terms.

Data were analyzed by considering the frequency of translation techniques applied in rendering emotive expressions, and then explaining how the choice of the translation techniques showcases the translator's particular competence.

3.3 Reliability and Ethics

As the movie was semi-copyrighted, only the open-access contents were extracted and used as data for the study, with careful handling to avoid unnecessary content disclosure. In addition, to ensure the reliability of the data while complying with the research ethics, two researchers acted as inter-raters during the process of labeling translation techniques.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Emotive Expressions Used in *Inside Out 2*

The study identified a total of 224 emotive expressions in the English script and 212 corresponding expressions in the Vietnamese subtitles. Notably, all types of emotions as classified by Plutchik (1980) were present in the findings, with the distribution being displayed in Table 1.

Table 4.1: The Distribution of Emotive Expressions Across Types

Types emotions	English expressions	Vietnamese expressions
Joy	87	82
Sadness	40	34
Anger	22	20
Fear	32	23
Surprise	9	7
Disgust	5	14
Trust	4	15
Anticipation	25	17
Total	224	212

The asymmetry in the number of corresponding emotive expressions in the two data sets shows that the translator has made adjustments in the type of meaning during the translation process, leading to changes in the types of emotion. These adjustments were made by means of the translation techniques they selected for each instance. This suggests that the decision-making is based on the translator's tactics and insights into the source and target cultures, implying different types of competence in translation. In the subsequent section, identified types of translation techniques are reported, and the competence underlying the choice of those techniques is discussed.

4.2 The Use of Translation Techniques and the Underlying Competence

The analysis of data shows the employment of a variety of translation techniques. Many techniques suggested by Molina and Albir (2002) were present in the data, except for borrowing, calque, description, substitution and variation. The analysis involved the rendering techniques for English-Vietnamese translation. Thus, the counting was based on 224 instances of English emotive expressions. The 12 emotive expressions that were not found in Vietnamese equivalents were considered the technique of omission. The distribution of these techniques is presented in Table 2.

Table 4.2: Distribution of Translation Techniques

Translation Strategy	Number of occurrences	Percentage (%)
Literal Translation	86	38.40
Modulation	57	25.40
Transposition	28	12.50
Amplification	25	11.10
Adaptation	9	4.00
Discursive Creation	3	1.40
Generalization	2	0.90
Particularization	2	0.90
Omission	12	5.40
Total	224	100.00

Among the translation techniques, literal translation dominated in the data, accounting for 38.4%, occurring 86 times. This is consistent with the findings in the study by Wanodya et al. (2024). Cintas and Remael (2020) explained that translators might prefer literal translation for animation film subtitling for clarity of translation.

- [1] Oh, Mom looks *sad*.
 Mẹ *buồn* rồi kìa
- [2] Hey, don't *worry* so much anymore.
 Thôi, cậu đừng có *lo lắng* nhiều như vậy.

The instances of literal translation have shown a common characteristic. Lexical items describing the emotive states are often in a single form, indicating a general feeling rather than a specific emotion. As Huang (2024) explained, emotions are, on the one hand, specific, but they are universal on the other. Therefore, there are accessible equivalents for these general emotions in the target language. The choice of literal translation shows the translator's bilingual competence and their knowledge of translation competence.

Modulation was the second most employed technique, occurring 57 times, accounting for 25.4% of the total data. This is also evidence for Huang's (2024) idea about the specificity of emotions.

- [3] People, it's the *apocalypse*!
Bà con ơi *toang* rồi!

In [3], the word *apocalypse* means the destruction that puts an end to the world, as described in the Bible. Although there is a word in Vietnamese, *tận thế*, for this concept, the translator chose to use the word *toang*, a word used by Vietnamese young generation to describe a situation that has reached a dead end and cannot be saved. This adaptation makes it natural and familiar to the audience that the movie intended. In addition to bilingual competence and knowledge of translation competence, this decision-making also shows the translator's extra-linguistic competence, which is about their understanding of the social context.

Another example of modulation is the adaptation of *beautiful*, a literal equivalent to Vietnamese *đẹp*, into *tuyệt vời*, a literal equivalent to English *wonderful*.

- [4] Everything is *beautiful*!
Mọi thứ đều hết sức *tuyệt vời*!

In Vietnamese, the word *đẹp* is commonly used to talk about the beauty of appearance. In [4], it is about the situation in which the Vietnamese often use the word *tuyệt vời* to describe with a positive attitude.

The frequent use of modulation in the data of the present study is different from findings from a previous study (Utara et al., 2022), where instances of modulation were absent from the results. However, the findings show a similarity with Utara et al. (2022) in the use of transposition and amplification techniques. There are 28 instances of transposition across the data, making a proportion of 12.5%. Especially, when an English emotive expression is presented by a noun, there is a transformation into an equivalent of a different part of speech in Vietnamese. For example,

- [5] No *time*!
Không *rảnh*!

In [5], instead of literally translating *no time* into *không (có) thời gian*, the translator turned it into *không rảnh* ('not free'), using an adjective in place of a noun. This adjustment is necessary to be appropriate to Vietnamese speech. Similarly, in [6] below, the prepositional phrase *on the spot* was rendered by the adjective *lúng túng*.

- [6] You're putting me *on the spot*.
Cậu làm tớ *lúng túng* quá.

Amplification occurred 25 times, taking 11.1% of the total data. This technique was often used to translate the kind of feeling of empathy. The most frequent amplifying words were *quá* as in [6], *lắm* as in [7] and *chết* as in [8].

[7] *I'm freaking out!*
*Tớ lo **lắm!***

[8] *Ennui*
*Chán **chết!***

The choice of transposition and amplification indicates that the translator was aware of the Vietnamese speech culture and confident in the language in context. This is evidence of extralinguistic competence and psychological competence in translation.

Apart from the prevalent techniques above, the findings show instances of adaptation, discursive creation, generalization, and particularization, although the frequency was quite low. For example,

[9] *a happy place*
chốn bình yên

A happy place, instead of being translated as *nơi hạnh phúc* was adapted to a common Vietnamese expression *chốn bình yên* ('peaceful place') while maintaining the meaning within the local cultural context.

In addition to the instances of English emotive expressions that were smoothly rendered in Vietnamese, there was evidence of untranslatability, as shown in Table 1. This is reasonable. We can experience in life the types of emotions that are universal, for example, fear, anger, happiness, and sadness, but we can also have a sophisticated feeling that is rooted in the cultural life of a community. The words for these feelings are often impossible to render by corresponding words in another language. It is common for translators to annotate or to use a description technique. This is restricted in subtitling, which is often impacted by time and space. The remedy is that the segments of the source text need to be excluded or streamlined (Cintas & Remael, 2020). This is arguably a fine explanation for the 12 instances of omission found in the data.

The findings, in a nutshell, have shown similarities to the results of previous studies of related topics, but there are also other techniques found in the data, and notably the instances of omission. The differences were, perhaps, due to the manifestations of target texts in the form of subtitling. The choice of translation techniques has been indicative of the translator's combination of multiple competencies. More than simply bilingual competence, the translation of the movie shows the translator's extralinguistic competence in understanding of cultural and social factors affecting the target language, psychological competence in controlling or amplifying the expression of emotions appropriately, and the knowledge and skills of translation to handle the translation work. More importantly, the strategic competence is central to all kinds of competence as it manipulates the decision-making in the translation process, enabling the choice of the proper technique for each instance of emotive expression.

5. Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, the present study has explored translation techniques to translate emotive expressions in the movie *Inside Out 2* and the translator's competence underlying the choice of these techniques. Several translation techniques were identified. These results were, on the one hand, in line with findings from previous studies, and on the other, found new techniques applicable in translating emotive terms. The study also tried to explain the omission in translating emotions, considering the context of the subtitles as the target text. Implications have emerged for translator training, especially in translating cinematic texts. It is important to incorporate subtitling movies as part of the translation course to increase students' opportunity to understand language and culture, to make sound decisions about the selection of translation techniques. In this way, students will develop different types of competence such as strategic competence, instrumental competence, and extralinguistic competence other than just bilingual competence and knowledge of translation.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to the lecturers at the University of Foreign Languages and International Studies (HUFLIS), Hue University, Vietnam, for their invaluable knowledge, support, and guidance throughout the MA program in English Language Studies. Special thanks are extended to Dr. Thai Cong Dan and Ms. Thai Phan Bao Han for their meticulous proofreading, insightful suggestions, and assistance with the language and formatting of the manuscript. Lastly, the authors wish to sincerely thank the *Editorial Board of the European Journal of Multilingualism and Translation Studies* for the opportunity to publish this paper, thereby making it accessible to a wider audience interested in translation, subtitling, and language education through cinematic works.

Creative Commons License Statement

This research work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>. To view the complete legal code, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.en>. Under the terms of this license, members of the community may copy, distribute, and transmit the article, provided that proper, prominent, and unambiguous attribution is given to the authors, and the material is not used for commercial purposes or modified in any way. Reuse is only allowed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Authors

Chau T. A. Nguyen is a postgraduate student of English Language Studies at the University of Foreign Languages and International Studies (HUFLIS), Hue University, Vietnam. She is interested in translation studies and the role of translation in disseminating cinematic products.

Email: anchauchau@gmail.com

Lien-Huong Vo is a senior lecturer at the University of Foreign Languages and International Studies (HUFLIS), Hue University, Vietnam. Her research interest pertains to the use of language from perspectives of contemporary linguistic theories. She is also interested in translation competence and translation pedagogy.

Email: vtluong@hueuni.edu.vn

References

- Bak H, 2023. Issues in the translation equivalence of basic emotion terms. *Ampersand* 11: .
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2023.100128>
- Cintas J. D, Remael A, 2020. *Subtitling: Concepts and practices*. London, UK. Retrieved from
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315674278>
- Gouadec D, 2007. *Translation as a profession*. Amsterdam, Netherlands. Retrieved from
https://books.google.ro/books/about/Translation_as_a_Profession.html?id=EzuEHQw5psYC&redir_esc=y
- Huang Y, 2024. A theory of emotion based on a universal model. *Humanities & Social Science Communication* 11: 362. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-02869-x>
- Molina L, Albir A, 2002. Translation techniques revisited: A dynamic and functionalist approach. *Meta: Translators' Journal*, 47(4): 498-512. <https://doi.org/10.7202/008033ar>
- Orozco M, Albir A, 2002. Measuring translation competence acquisition. *Meta: Translators' Journal*. 47(3): 375-402. <https://doi.org/10.7202/008022ar>
- PACTE, 2003. *Building a translation competence model*. Amsterdam, Netherland, pp 43–66. Retrieved from
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360560795_Building_a_Translation_Competence_Model
- Plutchik, R. (1980). *Emotion: A psychoevolutionary synthesis*. San Francisco, CA, USA. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/053901882021004003>
- Saputri J. R, Wijaya A, 2022. Translation Procedures of Harsh Language and Their Correlation to the Visual in The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 22(2): 490–503. <https://doi.org/10.24071/joll.v22i2.4541>
- Schäffner C, Adab B, 2000. *Developing Translation Competence*. Amsterdam, Netherlands. Retrieved from
https://books.google.ro/books/about/Developing_Translation_Competence.html?id=g1NjLIc2WUC&redir_esc=y

- Suryasa I, Wayan I, Sudipa N, Puspani I, Netra I, 2019. Translation Procedure of Happy Emotion of English into Indonesian in Kṛṣṇa Text. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 10(4): 738–46. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1004.08>
- Utara K. G, Rajeg I, Puspani I, 2022. Translation of Positive Emotion Words in Red Queen. *Linguistika: Buletin Ilmiah Program Magister Linguistik Universitas Udayana* 29(1): 83. <https://doi.org/10.24843/ling.2022.v29.i01.p09>
- Wierzbicka A, 1999. *Emotions across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals*. Cambridge, UK. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511521256>
- Wanodya A, Anggraeni D, Sigalingging B. M, 2024. Translation Method of Emotional Expression in Daniel Keyes' the Minds of Billy Milligan. *Journal of Language and Literature* 24(2): 439-454. <https://doi.org/10.24071/joll.v24i2.8017>.