

# Teaching Subtitling in the Classroom

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## Abstract

One of the problems translators have regarding their job is text subtitling. Things to consider when creating a subtitle is not only changing an SL (source language) to a TL (target language), but also the linguistic dimension of subtitling and technical dimension of subtitling. In translation classes, these two dimensions should be taught so that the students are knowledgeable of creating a subtitle. This paper discusses how the two dimensions should be taught in the class and the implementation of the two dimensions in subtitling lesson in the classroom.

Keywords:

*Translation, teaching, subtitle, classroom*

## 1. Introduction

Subtitling is not only a matter of changing an SL into a TL in a video format. There are a number of technical aspects which must be considered when creating a subtitle. In teaching subtitle, these technical aspects are not only to be taught, but they must also be a part of a subtitling lesson plan. The items which will be discussed in this article will be divided into three parts: the linguistic dimension of subtitling, technical dimension of subtitling, and the implementation of the two dimensions in subtitling lesson in the classroom.

## 2. Linguistic Dimension of Subtitling

Unless the SL are short dialogues or merely expressions which follow a heavy action sequence, one of the most used strategies in subtitling are reduction (Diaz: 2001). There are two types of reduction in a subtitling process. The first one is the partial reductions. Partial reduction is an elimination of only parts of the dialogue uttered by the actors of the movie. This is also known as the semantic

condensation. For this first type of reduction, a subtitler must be extremely wary of other aspects which may influence the condensation of the TL. The first aspect that a subtitler needs to be wary of is the stylistics factor. When a subtitler does a semantic condensation of the TL, he or she must also be wary that the style of the original must also be still intact. The other aspect that a subtitler must be aware of is the image. A subtitler must be careful that in doing semantic condensation, he must also take into account of what is happening in the movie, as it is an integral part of movie watching enjoyment. A semantic condensation should follow, or at least, not in contradiction with the semiotical messages which are trying to be conveyed through the image. Carroll stated that accordancy to the visual rhythm of the movie is one of the rhythms which must be followed by a subtitler (1998). The other type of reduction is the full reduction. In full reduction, sentences which are considered unimportant, whether from the image or semantic point of view. The reason for both reductions is specific. In one part, the utterances are reduced since it contains redundancy, repetitions, incomplete sentences or sentences which contradict themselves.

In terms of equivalence which should be used in a subtitle, Jamalimanesh and Rahkhoda (2009) stated that the most commonly used equivalence is the formal equivalence. Dynamic equivalence is favored in some cases such as in explicitation, collocations, phaticisms, idioms and proverbs, modulation, adaptation, ideology and ellipsis. In a formal-based equivalence, straightforward semantic units must be used; subtitle should be semantically self-contained.

### **3. Technical Dimension of Subtitling**

As stated in the previous section concerning the rhythms which must be adhered to when subtitling, the other two rhythms is concerned with technical issues of subtitling; namely the rhythm of actor's speech and the audience reading rhythm. In relation to the rhythm of the actors' speech, one of the main points to be considered is 'spotting'. Moreover, the in- and out-times of subtitles must follow the speech rhythm of the film dialogue, taking cuts and sound bridges into consideration (Carroll and Ivarsson: 1998). In addition, the presentation of the



subtitles themselves must follow the usual norms. Another problem often dealt with speech synchronization is on the pauses in said speech.

In terms of audience reading speech, there are plenty of aspects which play parts in making acceptable subtitle. In this article however, there are only three main points which will be discussed; the reading speed and its connected factors, the positions of the subtitles themselves, and the important items to be considered in creating subtitles for the hearing impaired.

#### **4. Implementations of Linguistic and Technical Dimension in Subtitling Class**

##### **4.1. Implementation of Linguistics Dimension**

In implementing the dimensions in classroom teaching, in this article, it will start with the implementation of linguistic dimensions. The first lesson could start with semantic condensation practice.

Since semantic condensation is basically a summary of the spoken utterance, it is best to start the practice with a summarizing practice. In this case, students can be asked to watch short movies in order to get the GIST of the movie. Once they have successfully been able to practice getting the GIST, the lesson can move on to the fusing of the summary with the movie, by paying attention to the aspects of a subtitle which may not be a problem if it is not integrated with the movie. As mentioned previously, one of the aspects that a subtitler needs to pay attention to is the stylistics factor. One aspect which is closely connected to the stylistic factor in subtitling is the use of proper range of formality. Joos (1967) proposed five range of formality level, namely frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. One example of the wrong implication of the use of formality scale in a subtitle can be seen below:

TL: Should I get a maintenance history of the plane?(24 TV Episode,  
Season 1)

SL: *Haruskah kuambil catatan pemeliharaan dari pesawat ini?*

From the example above, it can be concluded that the conversation is between two friends who work in a same agency, and they are facing national crises. The

question was intended as a suggestion to a friend. Thus the supposed formality scale used is supposed to be consultative. However, the subtitle seemed to have used frozen scale on this matter; therefore it is safe to assume that the subtitler has failed to follow the formality scale intended by the speaker of TL. This particular lesson on the proper use of formality scale can be used as one of the subjects to be taught in a subtitling class.

Another aspect to be aware of is the imagery. The lesson on this can be connected to full reduction in subtitling. Students can be asked to practice eliminating sentences which are considered unimportant, as opposed to the image in the movie. As also stated previously, the reason for reductions are usually due to redundancy, repetitions, incomplete sentences or sentences which contradict themselves. However, if the factors mentioned above are important to the imagery of the movie, students can also be taught the way to handle such problems.

In terms of equivalence, the proper usage of dynamic equivalence as favored in some cases such as in explicitation, collocations, phaticisms, idioms and proverbs, modulation, adaptation, ideology and ellipsis can also become one aspects of the curriculum of subtitling for university students.

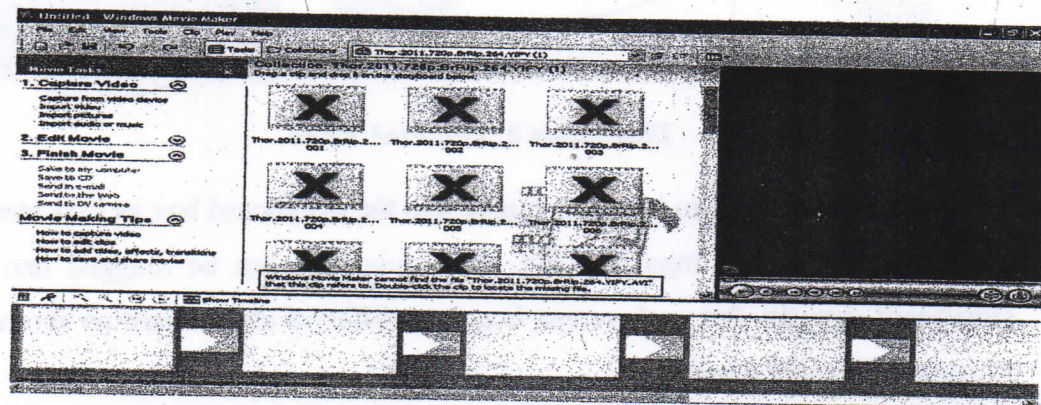
#### **4.2. Implementation of Technical Dimension**

After finishing the lessons on the linguistic point of view, the next to be learnt is undoubtedly the technical aspects of subtitling. In addition, the application of the technical aspects is integrating the linguistics dimensions of the subtitling. The first item to be learnt in these aspects is on the choice of the software used. In his experience, the author has been using software which is available in any Window-based Operating System (OS) before Windows 7™. Moreover, this OS is free, and does not need to be downloaded or installed to be used. The name of this software is Windows Movie Maker™. Concerning the Movie Maker™, below are some simple instructions to use it as a subtitling tool.

The first thing to be done in using the Movie Maker™ software is to import the video file. An unfortunate disadvantage of using this software, however, is that the only files which can be processed in this software are files with specific extension names such as .avi, .mpg, and .mpeg. There are other files

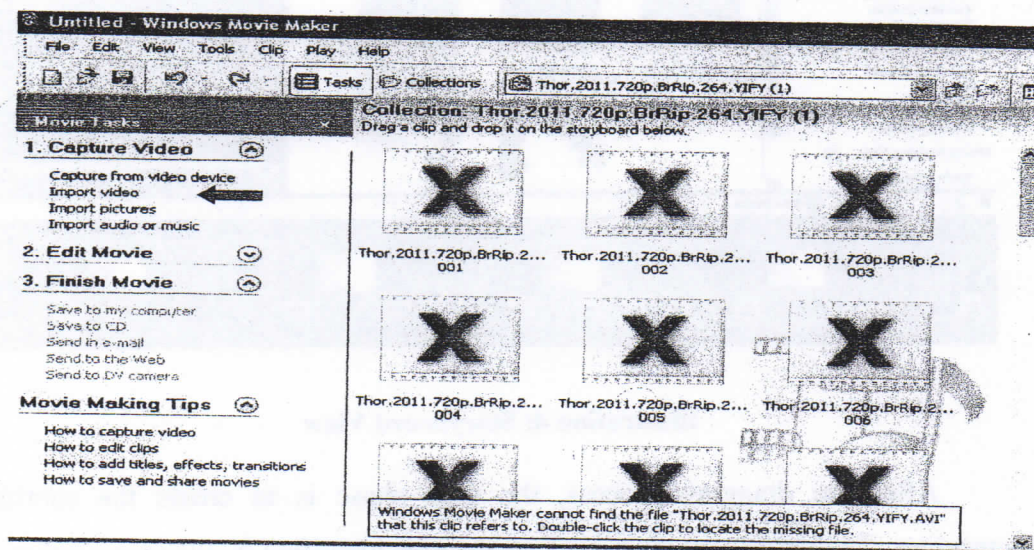


extension which can be processed in this software, however, those three seems to be the one commonly used. The following is an illustration of a standard view in the Movie Maker™ software.



**Illustration 1: Standard View of the Movie Maker File**

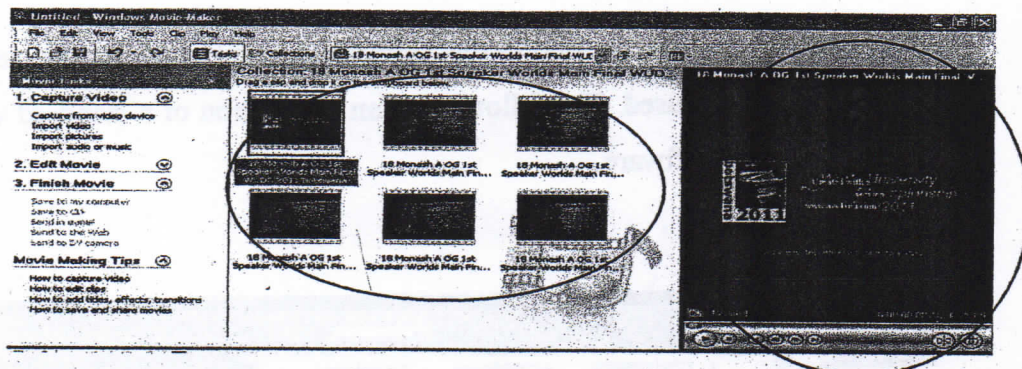
The first item to be chosen is the one identified by the arrow below. The item to be chosen is the *import video* item.



**Illustration 2: Start up Button**

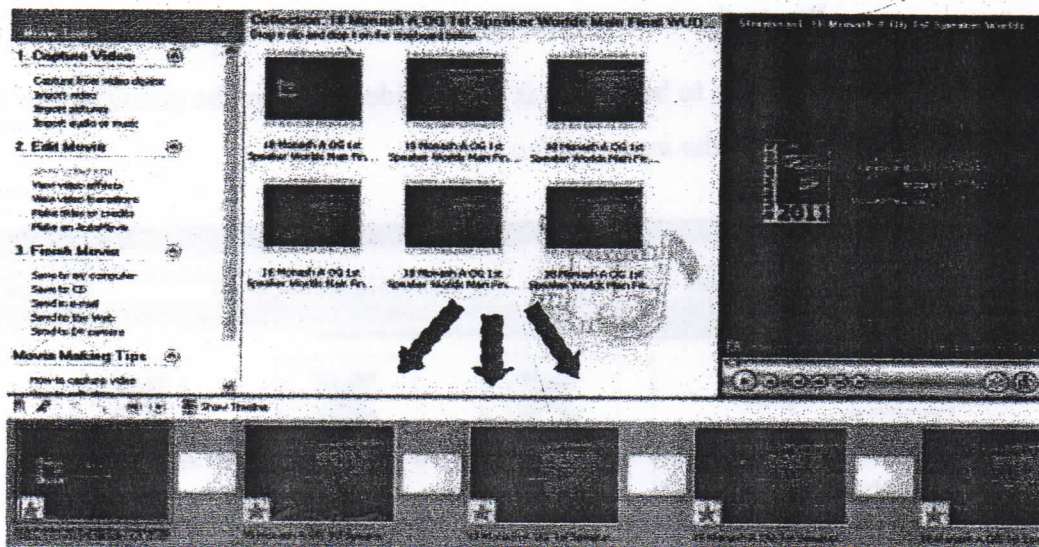
After, the movie file has been successfully imported; here is the image which can be seen in your computer.





**Illustration 3: Imported Video**

The next step is to input the movie into the storyboard box as indicated by the arrows below. To input the file, the movie files can be dragged into the storyboard directly. Put each screen box into different story board as shown in illustration number 4 below.



**Illustration 4: Storyboard View**

After the dragging process, the next phase is to create the subtitles themselves. To do this, you must click on the area identified by the arrow below.



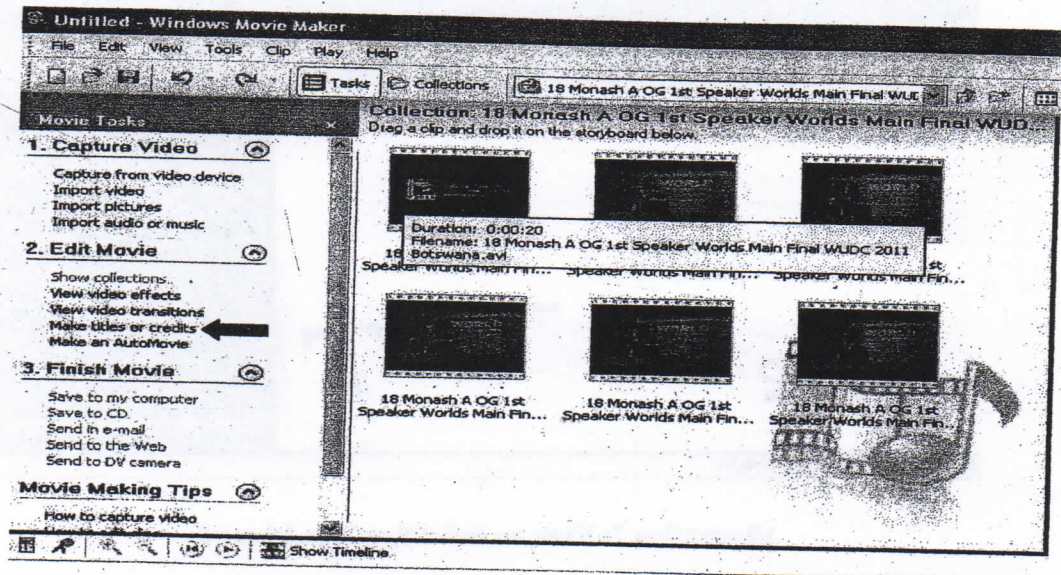


Illustration 5: View on Subtitling Icon

After you click the area of interest, the next step that you have to do is to click on the item identified by the circle below.

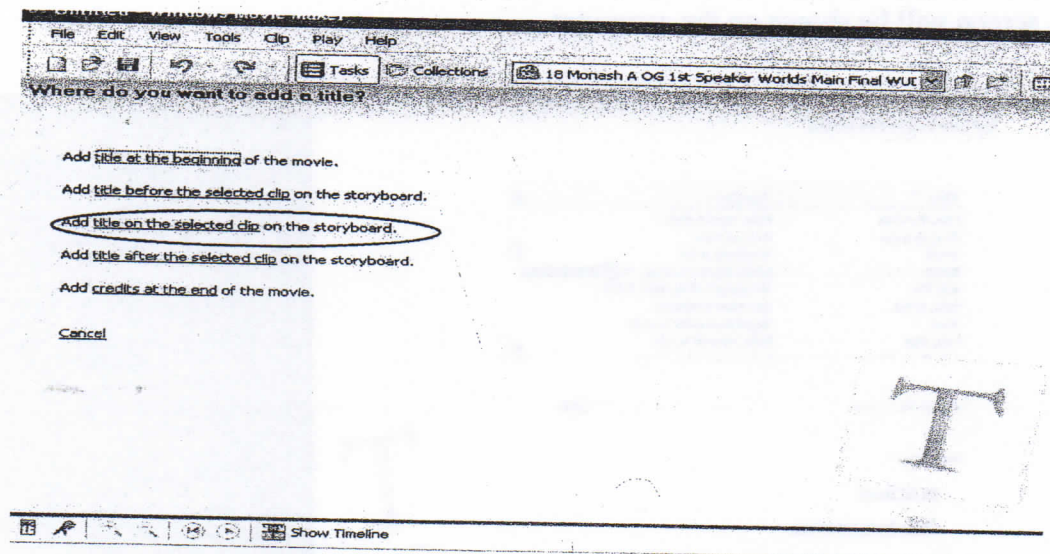
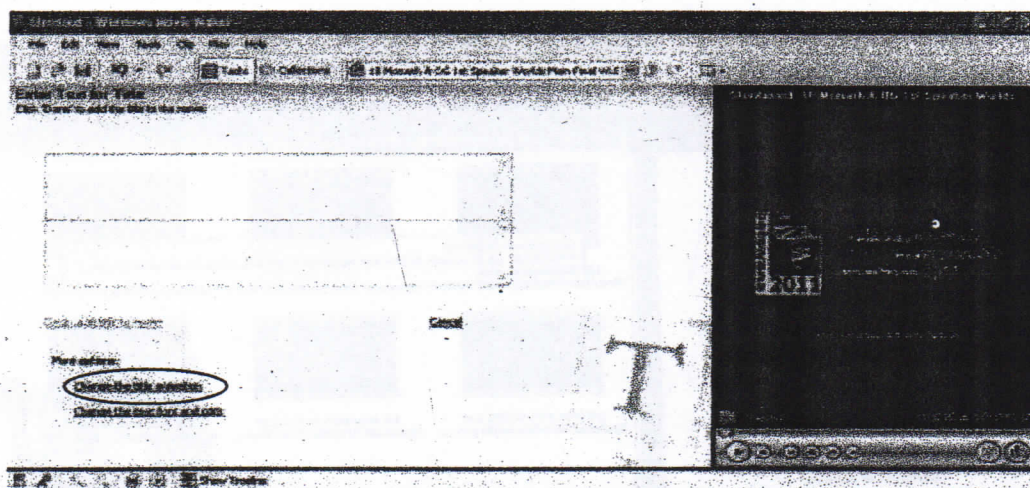
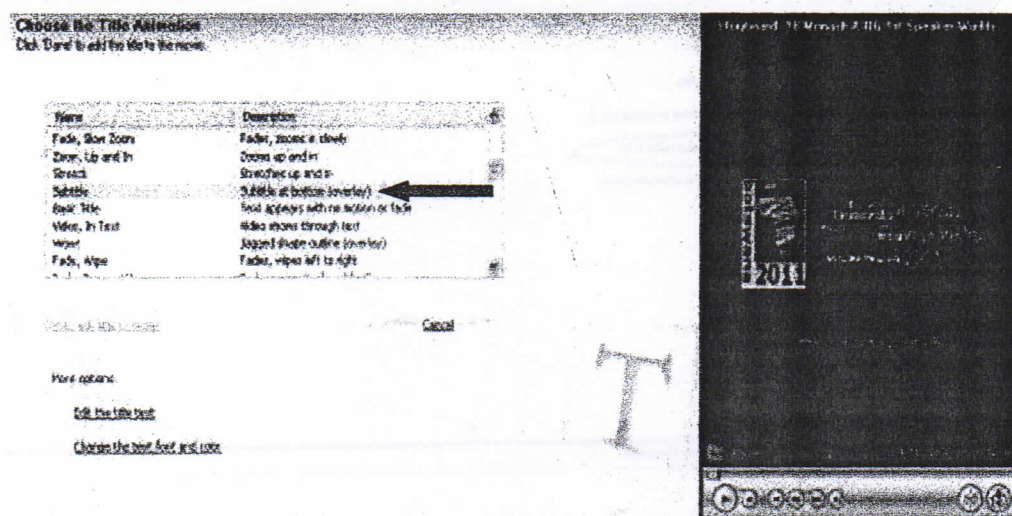


Illustration 6: View on Subtitling Icon Phase 2



**Illustration 7: View on Subtitling Icon Phase 3**

After you have opened the view as seen on illustration 7, you are now ready to put in words for the subtitle. However, there is one more thing that must be done before that. To have a subtitle of a standard format, you must first click the circled area on illustration 7. As you click the icon identified above, this screen will be shown on the computer.

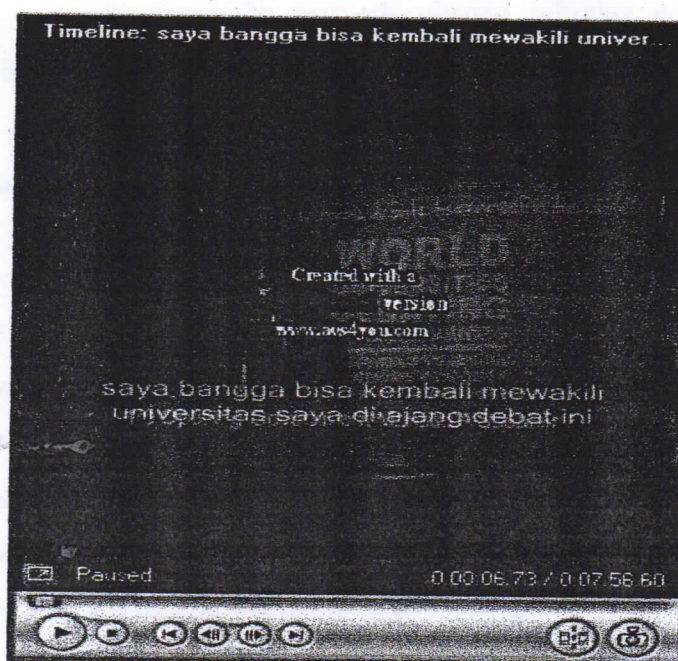


**Illustration 8: View on Subtitling Icon Phase 4**

Click on the area identified by the arrow, or the highlighted area, and start putting in your subtitles based on the screen image. You can play the movie while putting in the subtitles to best synchronize the starting and ending time of the subtitle.



This technicality of using the software is very simple and does not require a lot of work. In synchronizing the subtitles, it is also as easy as putting the subtitle themselves. As mentioned earlier, the movie file can be played while we are creating the subtitles. As the dialogues commence, you can pause the image in order to input the subtitles. Unlike the practice in the past, in which you have to record the timeline of the movie in order to have the synchronization, you can just put the subtitle anywhere on the storyboard with this software. The duration of said subtitle can even be extended to match the dialogue with just a simple drag of the text box. This way, the only aspect to be concerned by the subtitle is to have an appropriate subtitle. The lesson on technicalities of the software can be taught in just one meeting. This is more than enough since the remaining of the subtitling activity will be done using this software anyway. The illustration number 9 shows an example of a finished version of the movie with the subtitle.



**Illustration 9: View on Subtitling (Finished Version)**

The next stage of the lesson in subtitling, after the technicalities of using Movie Maker™, is to deal with cuts and bridges. Cuts in subtitling are camera cuts. As stated previously, when dealing with camera cuts, most subtitler will just let the subtitles to overrun. This is bad as research has shown that this kind of practice will only lead the reader to re-read the pre-existing subtitles. In relation to



that, the lesson could include the practice that they can do in order to overcome such problems. The general rules for dealing with camera-cuts are as follows:

- Avoid inserting a subtitle less than one second before a camera-cut and removing a subtitle less than one second after a camera-cut.
- Attempt to insert a subtitle in exact synchrony with a camera-cut.
- A decision to segment a single sentence into more than one subtitle, to be placed around a camera-cut, should depend on whether the sentence can be segmented naturally and on whether the resulting subtitles can be allowed sufficient display time.

Bridges involves the production of sounds in speech. In a lesson concerning bridges, it is advisable for students to learn the ortho-typographic convention of a subtitle; namely the use of punctuation, an indication of simultaneous speech in one subtitle, typographic resources, and upper cases. Another lesson is on the pauses of speech. Some speech sounds are pauses to increase dramatization. This aspect must be learnt because dramatization enhances the visual imagery of the movie.

In terms of audience reading speech, there are three aspects which will be discussed in making acceptable subtitle. The first aspect is the reading speed. According to Diaz (2001), the average reading speed of a movie watcher is 70 spaces per 6 seconds. This average speed contributes to a lot of factor such as the number of lines which should be used, the number of characters used, the considerations on the ending and beginning of a subtitle, the font size used, and durations of the subtitle. In its relation to the number of lines of text which should appear in a subtitle, a subtitler must also take into considerations the original usage of a subtitle. The original expectation of using subtitles is to decrease frustration for readers in watching the movie. Thus, a subtitle presented in the movie itself should not present an additional frustration towards the movie. Due to that reason it has been conventionally agreed, at least between subtitlers, that only two lines should be presented in a movie (Carroll and Ivarsson: 1998). In relation



to the lines, the number of characters used per line must also be limited. As stated previously, there are only two lines allowed in one subtitle. In its relation to the average reading speed of a movie watcher, which are 70 spaces per 6 second, so it is only natural that in each line, there should only be 35 spaces. In the case that there are less than 70 spaces in one subtitle, then, the positioning of the subtitle is also affected. Wherever two lines of unequal length are used, the upper line should preferably be shorter to keep as much of the image free as possible and in left-justified subtitles in order to reduce unnecessary eye movement.

Ideally, each subtitle should comprise of single complete sentence. However, depending on the speed of speech, there are exceptions to this general recommendation, such as in:

- Real-time subtitling
- Short sentences may be combined into a single subtitle if the available reading time is limited. Additional reading time is gained in this way because the viewer's gaze needs to be directed to the subtitle area only once, rather than two or three times if two or three short sentences are displayed on consecutive subtitles.
- Very long sentences which are too long to fit into a single two-line subtitle. There are two procedures for dealing with such cases, they are:
  1. It may be possible to break a long sentence into two or more separate sentences and to display them as consecutive subtitles, "We have standing orders, and we have procedures which have been handed down to us over the centuries." becomes:

We have standing orders  
and procedures.

They have been handed down to us  
over the centuries.

This is especially appropriate for compound sentences joined by coordinating conjunctions and, but, or. This procedure is also possible with some complex sentences joined by subordinating conjunctions

such as since, when, because, etc or by relative pronouns such as who, that. An example of such sentence is "All we wanted was a quiet chat just you and me together, but you seemed to have other ideas." which becomes:

All we wanted was a quiet chat  
just you and me together.

But you seemed to have  
other ideas.

It is sometimes also possible to break single main clauses effectively into more than one subtitle such as in the sentence "I saw a tall, thin, bearded man with the stolen shopping basket disappearing into the crowd." becomes:

I saw a tall, thin, bearded man  
with the stolen shopping basket.

He disappeared into the crowd

2. If sentence breaking procedures are inappropriate, it might be necessary to allow a single long sentence to extend over more than one subtitle. In this case, sentences should be separated naturally, such that each subtitle forms an integrated linguistic unit. Thus, segmentation at clause boundaries is to be preferred. For example:

When I jumped on the bus...

..I saw the man who had taken  
the basket from the old lady.

Segmentation at major phrase boundaries can also be accepted as follows:

On two minor occasions  
immediately following the war,...



..small numbers of people  
were seen crossing the border.

There is considerable evidence from the psycho-linguistic literature that normal reading is organized into word groups corresponding to syntactic clauses and phrases, and that linguistically coherent segmentation of text can significantly improve readability. Random segmentation such as the one below must certainly be avoided.

On two minor occasions  
immediately following the war,...  
..numbers of people, etc.

In the examples given above, sequences of dots (three at the end of a to-be-continued subtitle, and two at the beginning of a continuation) are used to mark the fact that a segmentation is taking place. Many viewers have found this technique helpful.

The other factors related to the reading speed are the considerations on the ending and beginning of a subtitle, and durations of the subtitle. Discussing on the considerations on the beginning and ending of a subtitle in one sequence of a movie, one must also relate to the durations of the subtitle and the font size. The '6-seconds rule' is applicable in terms of duration, and in consequence, with the initiation and ending of a subtitle. Carroll and Ivarsson (1998) stated that no subtitle should appear for less than one second or, with the exception of songs, stay on the screen for longer than seven seconds. Therefore, subtitle appearance should coincide with speech onset and subtitle disappearance should coincide roughly with the end of the corresponding speech segment.

The second point to be discussed with the audience rhythm is the position of the subtitle. In summary, the position of a subtitle must be consistent by following these considerations. The first one is on the position of a subtitle in film applications. Carroll and Ivarsson stated that subtitles for film application must be centered. This position is deeply connected to the branding which is often found in media other than film, such as in television. In TV and video application, because of the logo presented, the subtitle must be left justified. In video

application, however, if it shown in large screen, it is better to have the video left centered. This is because research has shown that it is easier to read centered subtitles on large screen. In addition, if there two subtitles indicating two different speakers on the same setting, they must be left justified with an additional dash in the beginning of each line to indicate different speakers.

As a subtitler, one must also be wary that the readers of the said subtitle are not always people who can enjoy the sounds of the movie. Thus, in relation to the reading rhythm of the audience, it is also important to consider the items which must be considered in creating subtitles. The first thing to be considered by subtitler is on the nonverbal language. Most of the times, an actor does not always have to speak in order to express their feeling or emotion. This unspoken factor is not only necessary but important, because sometimes, the said actors are not shown on the screen. Gottlieb mentions that there are four channels to be considered when subtitling. One of the four in on verbal channels; the other three are non verbal which includes music, natural sounds, sound effect, superimposed titles, signs on the screen, picture composition and flow (2002). Moreover, Gamal (2009) stated that in Egyptian setting, the procedures which can be used to overcome this are the use of compensation or explication or verbalization. Whether or not those procedures can be used in Indonesian setting can be seen in the practice in the classroom.



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