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Translation of Metaphors in Ex Machina from English to Indonesian

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received 12 September 2025 Revised 02 December 2025 Accepted 10 December 2025 Available online 31 December 2025</p> <p>ISSN: 2986-3848</p> <hr/> <p>How to cite: Nafiza, J., & Erwina, E. (2025). Translation of metaphors in ex machina from English to Indonesian. <i>International Journal Linguistics of Sumatra and Malay (IJLSM)</i>, 4(2), 62-69.</p> <hr/>  <p>This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International. http://doi.org/10.32734/ijlsm.v4i2.22769</p>	<p>This research investigates the translation of conceptual metaphors from English to Indonesian in the movie <i>Ex Machina</i>, utilizing a descriptive qualitative methodology. The research seeks to categorize the types of metaphors included in the movie, examine the translation of these metaphors in the Indonesian subtitles, and assess the efficacy of the translation procedures in preserving the original conceptual meaning. The principal data comprises English dialogues with metaphorical terms along with their respective Indonesian subtitles, chosen for their pertinence to Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The researcher used Lakoff & Johnson (1980) framework to sort each of the 10 metaphors into structural, orientational, or ontological metaphors. The researcher used Miles & Huberman (1994) interactive approach to analyze the data. This model includes data reduction, data display, and making conclusions. Molina & Hurtado Albir (2002) translation technique framework helped with the classification and analysis by finding strategies including literal translation, modification, and paraphrase. The results indicate that numerous conceptual metaphors experience alterations in meaning as a result of cultural and language disparities, whereas others are maintained by meticulous lexical selections. The predominant approaches discovered underscore the translator's efforts to reconcile meaning retention with naturalness in the target. This research enhances comprehension of metaphor translation in audiovisual media and underscores the necessity of amalgamating cognitive linguistic theory with translation methodologies to guarantee precise and significant subtitle translation.</p> <p>Keywords: Ex Machina, Conceptual Metaphors, Lakoff & Johnson, Translation</p>

1. Introduction

Linguistics is the scientific research of language and its structure. It has many areas, such as phonetics and phonology (the research of sounds), morphology (the research of how words are formed), syntax (the research of how sentences are put together), semantics (the research of meaning), and pragmatics (the research of how language is used in context). McGregor (2024) characterizes linguistics as a scientific field focused on the analysis of human language, encompassing its structural elements such as phonetics, lexicon, and semantics.

Fowler, (2022) underscores the crucial function of language in human social and psychological existence and accentuates the importance of comprehending language acquisition to grasp the intricacies of human communication. Metaphor occupies a vital role in the realm of linguistics. A metaphor is a way of using language to describe one idea in terms of another to make it sound like something else. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) contend that metaphors are not only rhetorical embellishments but essential components of human cognition. Their important notion, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), explains how metaphors affect the way people think and grasp abstract topics. For example, sayings like "Time is Money" explain how metaphors link real-life situations to more abstract ones.

Gibbs jr & Ortony (2008) assert that metaphors are crucial to communication as they facilitate the expression of intricate concepts and emotions more effectively. Metaphors often make translation difficult since they depend on cultural knowledge and mental frameworks. Translators have to choose whether to translate metaphors word for word, change them, or use alternatives that are more culturally appropriate. This

is especially significant in art forms like movies, where metaphors add to the story's meaning and emotional impact. In linguistics, metaphor is analyzed via semantics, pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics. Metaphors signify semantic shifts by employing words beyond their literal interpretations. In practical terms, metaphors can only be comprehended when both the speaker and listener possess analogous cultural and contextual information. From a cognitive linguistic standpoint, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) assert that metaphors are rooted in human physiological experiences (embodiment) and picture schemas, rendering them universal yet culturally influenced.

To translate metaphors, someone need to know not only the language but also the culture so that the emotional and conceptual implications stay the same in the target language. Movies often employ metaphors to add depth to their stories, show abstract ideas, and make the tale more interesting. In *Ex Machina*, metaphors are very important for showing how people and AI interact with one other. Artificial intelligence represents extensive philosophical inquiries concerning identity, consciousness, and the demarcation between creator and creation. The movie uses pictures and words to make people think about what it means to be human in a world where technology is getting better all the time. Semiotic theory posits that movies function as sign systems wherein images and symbols produce metaphorical significations Chambers (2007).

Metaphors assist show how characters change, how they deal with internal issues, or how they think about philosophical ideas through narrative theory. Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive metaphor theory bolsters the notion that metaphors in movies connect abstract ideas with tangible visual depictions, rendering them potent instruments in narrative construction. The sentence "*Obviously, you have been programmed*" is one example from *Ex Machina*. This metaphor shows that the AI figure is a machine and also uses the whole idea of programming algorithms, instructions, and limits to explain how AI works. This illustrates how structural metaphors enable the viewer to understand artificial intelligence within a familiar context. The researcher selected *Ex Machina* as the subject of analysis because of its captivating plot, profound metaphorical language, and philosophical complexity.

The researcher has a personal interest in metaphors as linguistic phenomena since they enable the indirect yet profound expression of meaning. The researcher, with an academic background in conceptual metaphor theory and translation, seeks to advance translation studies by investigating the transfer of metaphors between languages and cultures. Consequently, this research examines the translation of conceptual metaphors from English to Indonesian in *Ex Machina*, employing Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The research additionally examines if the translations maintain the original meaning, cultural subtleties, and emotional impact of the metaphors.

The problems of research:

1. What kinds of conceptual metaphors structural, ontological, and orientational are in the conversations of *Ex Machina*?
2. How are these intellectual analogies rendered in Indonesian in the subtitle version of *Ex Machina*?

Objectives of the research to determine the categories of conceptual metaphors structural, ontological, and orientational employed in the dialogues of *Ex Machina* and explain how these conceptual analogies are translated into Indonesian in the movie's subtitles.

This research concentrates solely on the conceptual metaphors included in the dialogues of the movie *Ex Machina* and their translations into Indonesian. The research is grounded in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The research does not address the technical elements of the movie, such cinematography, direction, or sound design. Instead, it looks at how metaphors work in the story and how they are used in subtitles in other languages. The results of this research enhance the utilization of Conceptual Metaphor Theory in movie and translation studies. The research illustrates the function of metaphors in both colloquial language and movie narratives, facilitating the expression of philosophical and ethical topics. This research enhances translation theory by analyzing the translation of metaphors in *Ex Machina*, specifically in relation to cross-cultural issues and the identification of solutions that maintain metaphorical meaning and emotional resonance. This research offers valuable insights for translators engaged in movie subtitle work.

The research emphasizes methodologies that can preserve the content, nuance, and emotional impact of metaphors in translation. The results may also be useful for moviemakers and others in the movie industry since they show how important it is to translate metaphors correctly for people from other countries. This can help people comprehend and enjoy translated movie content more.

2. Method

To assess the translation of metaphors in the movie *Ex Machina* from English to Indonesian, this research uses a qualitative descriptive design (Gapur et al., 2024; Gapur & Pujiono, 2018; Harahap & Gapur, 2020;

Moleong, 2014). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct an in-depth examination of linguistic phenomena, particularly metaphor translation techniques, through the process of identifying, categorizing, and interpreting metaphors within the context of movie. Primary and secondary data were sourced from the movie *Ex Machina*'s dialog and its official Indonesian subtitles. Researcher established data selection criteria for all dialogs, which consisted of utterances containing conceptual metaphors based on the theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). This researcher find 10 metaphors, which were then reduced and classified by type. Secondary data consists of relevant literature, such as articles, scientific journals, and previous research on conceptual metaphor theory, translation techniques, and language analysis in movie.

To collect data, the MAX platform was used to watch the movie repeatedly in order to understand the context of the dialog. Then, the complete dialog transcript in English and Indonesian subtitles was collected. Next, the researchers systematically recorded each metaphorical expression found, matched it to the transcripts, and noted its translation pairs. Expressions like "*I'm not a man I'm God*" which are considered ontological metaphors, can be identified by identifying the relationship between the source domain and the target domain. Researchers conducted expert validation with a linguistics lecturer to examine the classification and mapping of metaphors, as well as inter rater agreement with an additional rater to ensure consistent identification, thereby increasing data reliability. The interactive model of Miles & Huberman (1994) was used for data analysis, which included data presentation, drawing conclusions, and data reduction. At the reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused, and simplified the metaphorical data based on its type, conceptual mapping, and the relationship between the source language dialog and the target language translation.

The data is presented in a structured table format that includes the source language, target language translation, source language metaphors, metaphor type (structural, ontological, or orientational), mapping of source domain to target domain, and translation techniques. Combining Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of metaphor classification and mapping, as well as Molina & Hurtado Albir (2002) framework for establishing translation techniques such as paraphrase, adaptation, borrowing, or literal translation, was used for the analysis. By using the integration of these two theories, we can evaluate how metaphorical ideas evolve from English to Indonesian and how well the methods used maintain the conceptual meaning originating from the source language.

Drawing conclusions and verification is the final step. At this point, the researchers combined the overall results to determine which translation method was most widely used. They also evaluated how this impacted the accuracy of metaphorical mapping in the subtitles of *Ex Machina*. To ensure validity, the conclusions were retested by cross checking them against the initial data. Therefore, the entire research process follows the Miles & Huberman's model and a qualitative descriptive design. These models provide a strong methodological foundation for producing accurate and meaningful analyses (Miles et al., 2014).

3. Result and Discussion

Data 1

Oriental Metaphor

SL: One day, the AI's are gonna look back on us the same way we look at fossil skeletons on the plains of Africa.

TL: *Suatu hari kecerdasan buatan akan balas menatap kita, seperti halnya kita melihat kerangka fosil dari dataran afrika.*

The definition of "artificial intelligence" is a concept that is considered as a real entity that has the ability to be possessed by a computer. By considering artificial intelligence as something real, this metaphor will make it easier for someone to understand something abstract into a more tangible form, for example as an object that can be installed on a computer.

The translation technique is *Amplification*, the dialog structure is mostly translated literally. The slight addition of "from" to "African plains" is a *amplification* for clarity.

Data 2

Ontological Metaphor

SL: That the computer has artificial intelligence.

TL: *Bahwa komputer itu punya kecerdasan buatan.*

The term "*look back*", a verb that denotes spatial direction or orientation. According to Lakoff & Johnson's theory, orientation metaphors connect ideas with directions (up-down, front-back, inside-out, etc.). In this section, the abstract thing of artificial intelligence "*melihat manusia*" is described with a "back" spatial orientation, like a real perspective. This is not only a physical position, but will also shape the way we understand existence and time AI will be in front, while humans are just "the past".

The translation technique is *Borrowing*. Computer comes from English which is also translated into Indonesian as "*komputer*".

Data 3

Structural Metaphor

SL: Time Flies.

TL: *Waktu cepat berlalu*.

Through abstract concepts, such as flies (*terbang*), it can help to understand the abstract concept of time. In this case, understanding the structure of the rapid movement of a flying creature is given directly to an experience of time that is difficult to understand. Although time is not actually a living creature and cannot fly, this metaphor makes it easier for one to understand time as something that moves quickly through our lives. This is a key characteristic of structural metaphors: an abstract concept can be understood by using a conceptual structure derived from another, more specific domain.

The translation technique *Modulation* because flies usually means to "*terbang*" but is stylized as "*cepat berlalu*".

Data 4

Ontological Metaphor

SL: Your heads the warp drive.

TL: *Kepalamu adalah mesin warp drive*.

An abstract concept derived from the thinking ability or intelligence contained in the "head" is replicated like a tangible object, such as a rotating machine, which in science fiction is described as a super-fast machine. Likening the head to a machine transforms the abstract components of the mind into an entity that can be recognized, owned, and perform specific tasks. This metaphor corresponds to the ontological feature of metaphor, which regards non-physical or abstract things as tangible entities that can be treated like real objects.

The translation technique is *Borrowing* because the word warp drive is from the English language.

Data 5

Ontological Metaphor

SL: We have her mind.

TL: *Kami punya pikirannya*.

The mind is defined as a concrete object that can be possessed. Although the mind is essentially an intangible mental process, it is reified into an entity that can be "possessed" or "controlled" through this metaphor, which makes it easier to understand the abstract using the framework of something real and tangible.

The translation technique is *Literal translation* because translated word-for-word according to the original structure.

Data 6

Structural Metaphor.

SL: The computer is Mary in the black, The human is when she walks out.

TL: *Marry adalah komputer dalam ruangan*, Manusia saat dia keluar.

There is a process of understanding the abstract concept of the difference in knowledge capabilities between computers and humans through a concrete structure of experience, such as the case of Mary in the "black room" philosophical experiment. In this metaphor, the computer is depicted as the "Mary still in the room", whose knowledge is limited to black data, while the human is depicted as the "Mary coming out of the room", who has direct knowledge and experience.

The translation technique is *Modulation* because in the dialogue, in the black is translated as "*dalam ruangan*" while the original meaning is "*didalam hitam*".

Data 7

Orientational Metaphor

SL: In the depth of shame.

TL: *Dikedalaman rasa malu*.

An emotionally abstract experience, such as shame, can be understood through the vertical spatial orientation of depth (depth → downward). According to Lakoff & Johnson's theory, negative emotions are often described in a downward, or decreasing, direction, while positive emotions are often described in an upward, or increasing, direction. Shame is positioned as if it is sinking or deep below the surface. As a result,

the abstract concept of shame can be understood through a concrete spatial orientation, or depth.

The translation technique is *Literal translation* because translated word-for-word according to the original structure.

Data 8

Orientational Metaphor

SL: So, we need to break the ice.

TL: *Jadi kita perlu mencairkan suasana.*

The metaphorical meaning of ice, which is in a solid state and must be broken or melted to make the atmosphere warmer and more open, can help understand the abstract concept of rigid or awkward social relationships. Orientation metaphors, according to Lakoff & Johnson's theory, relate to abstract experiences with spatial/physical directions or conditions. In this case, cold-warm, freeze-thaw orientations are used to understand the cold and rigid atmosphere of the social environment. These orientations are based on everyday physical experiences.

The translation technique is *Equivalent* because the idiomatic expression break the ice in English cannot be translated literally as break the ice. Therefore, the translator chose an idiomatic expression in Indonesian that has the same meaning, which is to break the ice “*mencairkan suasana*”.

Data 9

Ontological Metaphor

SL: This card it just takes all that worry away.

TL: *Kartu ini menghilangkan kecemasanmu.*

The abstract concept of anxiety is depicted as a concrete object that can be "taken" or "removed" with the card. Although anxiety has no tangible form, in this metaphor it is depicted as an entity that can be moved or removed. This is a key characteristic of ontological metaphors understanding something abstract through a framework of real entities that can be treated like an object.

The translation technique is *Reduction* because the phrase "all those worries" is simply translated as "kecemasanmu". The word that emphasizes "just" is also omitted.

Data 10

Structural Metaphor

SL: They thought that search engines were a map.

TL: *Mereka mengira mesin pencari adalah peta berisi pikiran orang.*

The structure of conceptual maps can help to understand the abstract concepts of search engines. Search engines are complex systems based on algorithms, but can be described as maps that can show directions or locations. This makes it easier to understand the purpose of a search engine, which is to provide an overview, clue, or path to information. Thus, the abstract domain (search engine) is described through the structure of a concrete domain, or map. This is a key feature of structural metaphors.

The translation technique is *Amplification* based on the source text "They think that a search engine is a map", it is simply called "peta". However, in the translation to, the translator also added the explanation "Peta berisi pikiran orang" which was not in the original text.

Data 11

Structural Metaphor

SL: Her flirting isn't an algorithm to fake you out.

TL: *Rayuannya bukanlah algoritma untuk menipumu.*

An algorithm is a highly structured idea consisting of a series of steps, rules, and a logical sequence intended to achieve a specific result (in this case, "cheat"). Seduction is a concept that is often more abstract and spontaneous, and has no clear procedure. By saying that "a seduction is not an algorithm", it suggests that seductions have the same structured, systematic, and designed characteristics with manipulative purposes as algorithms.

The translation technique is *Literal Translation* Translated word-for-word according to the original structure.

Data 12

Orientational Metaphor

SL: I'm hot in high level abstraction.

TL: *Aku antusias pada abstraksi tingkat tinggi.*

Although this sentence uses spatial terms to describe the level of complexity of ideas, it contains metaphors of orientation, especially up-and-down patterns. "*High level*" here does not mean physically high it means a level of abstraction or conceptual thinking that is more complex, vast, and distant from concrete experience.

The translation technique is *Modulation* the meaning of hot is actually "*panas*" but is modulated to "*antusias*."

Data 13

Ontological Metaphor & Structural Metaphor

SL: An upright ape, living in dust with crude langague and tools.

TL: *Kera yang tegak hidup di tempat berdebu, dengan bahasa kasar dan perkakas batu.*

When abstract or complex concepts are explained through concrete or physical objects, this is called an ontological metaphor. In this phrase, "*The ape that stands erect*" is an ontological way of seeing humans not as exalted rational beings, but as biological and physical animals. "*Living on the ground*" describes man's weak, mortal, or unglorified state, contrasting with the idea that man is a noble being. "*Language and crude tools*" is a description of humans as beings with only entry-level communication and technological abilities, not something sophisticated or superior.

The concept of "*human*" is denigrated or reduced in this sentence to a mere biological entity—a creature with a certain physical shape and boundaries, living in a limited environment, and having cognitive and technological limitations. Moreover, the highly complex concept of "*human*" (including culture, emotions, morality, spirituality, etc.) is framed through the metaphorical structure of "*animal*" or "*upright ape*". In short, a simpler framework of biological and evolutionary structures is used to understand humans.

The translation technique is *Amplification* the word tools, which means "*perkakas*", is added to "*perkakas batu*."

Data 14

Ontological Metaphor

SL: You got the light on you, Man.

TL: *Ada Cahaya Dalam Dirimu, Kawan.*

These dialogue are ontological metaphors because they treat abstract and intangible concepts such as hope, goodness, potential, or spirit as if they were real or physical objects. Literally, light is a physical object that emits energy. However, in this context, "*light*" is used to describe a person's inner qualities. We understand that hope or goodness is not merely a feeling; it is a tangible object that may "*exist*" and even have a specific location, such as "*within you*" like an object in a box. This metaphor helps us understand and feel this difficult-to-grasp idea in a more concrete and easily understandable way by transforming it into something that can be described.

The translation technique is *Modulation* man actually means "*Pria*" but in the dialog becomes "*kawan*".

Data 15

Ontological Metaphor

SL: He let his mind go blank and his hand go where it wanted.

TL: *Dia membiarkan pikirannya kosong dan tangannya bergerak sendiri.*

This Dialogue is an ontological metaphor because it is a type of metaphor that describes a concept, activity, or experience as if it were a concrete object that can be touched, moved, or has physical properties. "*Mind*" is an abstract idea in this sentence. When someone says "*clear your mind*" it treats the mind as a container or space that can be emptied. Similarly, "*the hand moves on its own*" grants freedom and independence to the hand, as if the hand were an autonomous being with its own will. However, what is actually meant is a reflexive or instinctive action performed by someone without full conscious control. This transforms mental and physical processes into objects or beings that stand on their own.

The translation technique is *Modulation* his hand go where it wanted If translated literally "*tangannya pergi ke mana pun yang diinginkannya*" The translator adjusts his point of view which is a more Indonesian friendly translation.

Based on the research results, it is found that the dialog in *Ex Machina* has used many metaphors from the three conceptual categories stated by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), including structural, ontological, and orientational. Through the data studied, various abstract concepts such as time, mind, shame, or worry can be interpreted through daily life experiences. For example, time is described as something that "*flies*", thoughts are described as machines, shame is described as something that "*sinks to the bottom*", or worry is described as something that can be "*taken away*".

As Erwina (2023) points out Indonesian faces issues related to the increasing use of non standard language in the media, which can confuse the general public in distinguishing standard forms. According to the conceptual theory of metaphor, bodily experience (embodiment) is the main source of abstract meaning, and this is also reinforced by these findings.

The research found that the translators used literal translation, modulation, reduction, borrowing, equivalent, and amplification techniques. When the source language metaphor means natural language, literary translation will be effective, such as when the translator translates "*break the ice*" into "*mencairkan suasana*". However, if the metaphor has a deeper philosophical or cultural meaning, the translator must make changes or adjustments so that the conceptual meaning can still be conveyed well to the target audience.

An example is the metaphor "*Mary in the black*" Previous studies, such as D'hulst & Delabastita (1993) and Newmark (1988), have found that metaphors are quite difficult to translate literally because they are closely related to the cultural context. Modern research, such as Rizzo (2024) and Sinambela et.al (2024), also shows that to prevent losing their conceptual and emotional meaning, metaphors in audiovisual media require cross-context strategies. Therefore, metaphor translation is not only a process of language change, but also a cognitive and cultural process.

The results of this research also show that metaphors in the movie *Ex Machina* are not only a linguistic style, but also a philosophical tool to discuss important issues such as the boundaries between humans and machines, as well as freedom, control and identity. Therefore, the translation of metaphors in movies is very important to improve the clarity of the language and maintain the philosophical meaning contained in them.

4. Conclusion

This research found that metaphors play an important role in conveying accurate concepts about the relationship between humans and artificial intelligence in the movie *Ex Machina*. Three main categories of metaphors-structural, ontological, and orientational-were identified based on Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) theory. Each of these categories is used to connect abstract concepts (such as thoughts, time, and emotions) with various real experiences.

The research found that the translators used various techniques from Molina & Hurtado Albir (2002), particularly literal translation, modulation, adjustment and amplification, to maintain a balance between the precise conceptual meaning and the cultural understanding of the Indonesian audience. Metaphor, which is deeply rooted in cultural or philosophical context, is a fundamental issue to keep the meaning intact, an adaptive approach is needed.

Academically, this research contributes to conceptual metaphor research and translation research, especially in the audiovisual field. In particular, it helps movie translators in understanding the translation strategies of metaphors across languages and cultures. For further research, it is suggested that the analysis be conducted by looking at other movie genres or by comparing it with literary texts. This will strengthen the understanding of the dynamics of metaphor translation in different genres.

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