

Title:

Characteristics of Idiomatic Expressions in English Animated Films and Their Chinese Translations

Chapter 1: Theoretical Background and Literature Review

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Chapter 1: Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Section 1.1: Understanding Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions represent a vital component of natural language use, embodying cultural values, social norms, and shared knowledge within a speech community. Unlike literal expressions, idiomatic expressions are characterised by fixed or semi-fixed structures whose meanings often cannot be directly deduced from the individual words. These include not only idioms in the narrow sense (e.g., “kick the bucket” or “spill the beans”) but also phrasal verbs (e.g., “give up”), collocations (e.g., “strong coffee”), and culturally bound metaphors or catchphrases (e.g., “let it go” from *Frozen*). Collectively, these forms enrich language, infusing it with expressiveness, humour, and nuance.

In animated films—especially those produced by studios like Disney, Pixar, and DreamWorks—idiomatic expressions are used frequently to reflect real-life speech, develop character personality, and entertain both children and adult audiences. Films such as *Moana*, *Toy Story*, *Cars*, *Frozen*, and *How to Train Your Dragon* are rich with idiomatic language that mirrors conversational English, often embedded in cultural or humorous contexts. These expressions pose a particular challenge in translation, especially when adapting for Chinese-speaking audiences, due to differences in linguistic structure and cultural background.

From a linguistic standpoint, idiomatic expressions are often categorised by their syntactic structure (verb phrases, similes, noun phrases, etc.) and semantic properties (opacity, metaphorical meaning, etc.). They are also known for their pragmatic function—enhancing naturalness, signalling tone or emotion, and establishing interpersonal relationships in dialogue. Understanding these layers is essential not only for analysing their use in film scripts but also for evaluating the effectiveness of their translations.

This section thus sets the stage for analysing idiomatic expressions as a broader category than idioms alone. It acknowledges their complexity, variability, and relevance in audiovisual media, particularly in animation where creative expression and cultural accessibility are key. The following section will examine how previous scholars have approached idiomatic expressions, with a focus on their occurrence in subtitled and dubbed media.

Section 1.1: Understanding Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions are a fundamental aspect of natural language, forming an essential bridge between linguistic form and cultural meaning. Unlike literal expressions, idiomatic expressions often carry meanings that cannot be directly inferred from their individual components. They are typically fixed or semi-fixed in form, and their usage is deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric of a language. For this reason, they pose a rich area of study for linguists, translators, and literary scholars alike.

The term *idiomatic expressions* encompasses a broad range of multi-word constructions that function as single semantic units. These include **idioms** in the narrow sense (e.g. "bite the bullet"), but also extend to **phrasal verbs** (e.g. "give up"), **collocations** (e.g. "make a decision"),

fixed expressions (e.g. "as a matter of fact"), and **culturally loaded metaphors** or sayings (e.g. "the elephant in the room"). What binds these together is that their meaning cannot always be deduced from a literal reading of the individual words—they rely on shared linguistic conventions and cultural understanding.

In the context of English animated films, idiomatic expressions play a vital role in crafting lively, believable, and culturally authentic dialogue. Major studios like **Disney, Pixar, and DreamWorks** consistently use idiomatic language to shape character identities, create humour, convey emotion, and build connections with the audience. For example, the *Toy Story* franchise is rich with colloquial expressions that reflect real-life American speech, while *Moana* and *Frozen* incorporate modern idiomatic language to make their mythical or historical settings relatable to contemporary viewers.

However, these expressions also present significant challenges in translation, particularly when adapting films for audiences with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In Chinese, for instance, idiomatic equivalence is not always available, and translators must carefully consider how to preserve meaning, tone, humour, and cultural resonance. This complexity makes the translation of idiomatic expressions in animated films an ideal focus for deeper linguistic and cultural analysis.

To fully appreciate the intricacies of idiomatic usage in animated film dialogue, it is important to first review existing academic perspectives on idiomatic expressions—how they are classified, understood, and approached in both linguistic theory and translation studies. This will be the focus of the following section.

Section 1.1: Understanding Idiomatic Expressions (continued)

Linguistically, idiomatic expressions often defy the compositional principle of meaning, wherein the meaning of a whole is derived from its parts. For instance, expressions such as "*break a leg*", "*under the weather*", or "*hit the road*" are not interpretable through a word-by-word translation. This non-compositionality is what gives idiomatic expressions their stylistic and communicative value, but it also makes them challenging for language learners and translators alike.

Idiomatic expressions serve multiple functions in spoken and written discourse. Pragmatically, they can **soften or intensify tone**, express **sarcasm or humour**, convey **solidarity or distance**, and **signal cultural identity**. They are commonly used in informal and expressive contexts, which is why they are so prevalent in animated films—particularly those aimed at a wide demographic. Children's animation, though ostensibly simple, often contains layered dialogues that appeal to adult viewers through idiomatic jokes, pop culture references, or emotionally charged expressions.

In films such as *Toy Story*, *Moana*, or *Cars*, idiomatic expressions help construct the personalities of characters—Woody's cowboy idioms ("reach for the sky"), Maui's cheeky one-liners ("What can I say except you're welcome?"), or Mater's country-style colloquialisms. These expressions reflect regional identity, historical background, and character roles. Without these linguistic flourishes, much of the humour, nuance, and emotional resonance would be lost.

Culturally, idiomatic expressions often **carry connotations that are deeply rooted in the source language's worldview**. For example, American idioms in Pixar or Disney films frequently rely on sports metaphors (“step up to the plate”), military slang (“in the trenches”), or biblical allusions. These expressions can be hard to translate without losing either the cultural significance or the emotional tone. In Chinese, equivalent expressions may not exist, or may convey a slightly different tone, making direct translation problematic.

Furthermore, idiomatic expressions are also **indicators of fluency** and **markers of authenticity**. Characters who use idiomatic language sound more natural and relatable, especially in English where idioms are integral to casual conversation. This is why animation scriptwriters carefully craft dialogue with idioms—not just for linguistic style, but for character development and audience engagement.

In translation, however, idiomatic expressions become a test of the translator’s ability to balance **linguistic accuracy** with **cultural equivalence**. The translator must ask: Should this idiomatic expression be translated literally, risking confusion? Should it be adapted to a culturally similar Chinese phrase? Or should it be paraphrased or omitted altogether to maintain narrative flow? These decisions are central to the translator’s role and directly impact the viewer’s reception.

To summarise, idiomatic expressions are not only linguistic artifacts; they are deeply embedded in the social, cultural, and emotional fabric of storytelling. Their use in animated films is deliberate and meaningful, and their translation requires a nuanced understanding of both source and target languages. This thesis takes idiomatic expressions as a broad and inclusive category, encompassing idioms, fixed phrases, collocations, and metaphorical speech, as they appear in English animated films and their Chinese versions. By doing so, it aims to reveal how language, culture, and translation interact in a genre that is globally popular yet culturally specific.

Section 1.1: Understanding Idiomatic Expressions (continued)

Idiomatic expressions are particularly significant in animated films not only because they mirror real-life speech, but because they enhance **narrative relatability** and **cross-generational appeal**. Studios such as **DreamWorks**, **Pixar**, **Blue Sky Studios**, and **Walt Disney Animation** intentionally embed idiomatic language in dialogue to create characters who sound modern, witty, and emotionally expressive. For instance, in *Shrek*, the titular character often speaks in ironic, sarcastic idioms that subvert traditional fairy tale expectations, such as “better out than in”—a crude yet culturally grounded phrase that reflects his personality and humour.

Similarly, *Kung Fu Panda* offers a unique case: though set in a fantastical version of ancient China, the characters—especially Po—speak in distinctly modern American idiomatic English. Po’s casual lines like “Skadoosh!” or “I’m not a big fat panda. I’m *THE* big fat panda” are not idioms in the traditional sense, but they belong to the broader category of idiomatic expressions as culturally charged, stylised language. His speech blends American pop-culture references with martial arts tropes, creating an intercultural linguistic texture that plays a key role in shaping audience perception.

In *Rio*, *Finding Nemo*, and *Despicable Me*, idiomatic expressions often carry comedic or emotional weight. Dory's line "Just keep swimming" from *Finding Nemo* has become a cultural catchphrase—simple on the surface but functioning as a metaphorical idiomatic encouragement. Gru, the antihero in *Despicable Me*, frequently uses dry humour and sarcastic expressions to reflect his conflicted, morally ambiguous character. In *Rio*, the vibrant Brazilian setting is contrasted with Americanised idiomatic expressions used by the main characters, generating humour and cultural juxtaposition.

These examples reveal how idiomatic expressions in animation are not merely decorative—they are **tightly interwoven with plot, characterisation, and audience targeting**. Children may appreciate the surface humour, while adults detect deeper cultural or metaphorical meanings. This dual-layered storytelling is especially prevalent in films like *Toy Story* and *Frozen*, where idiomatic expressions often reflect adult themes like identity, loss, ambition, and resilience.

A key point in this context is that animated films, though often dismissed as child-oriented, are **heavily stylised linguistic texts**. Expressions such as "you are a sad, strange little man" (*Toy Story*), "fish are friends, not food" (*Finding Nemo*), or "I am not your princess" (*Raya and the Last Dragon*) may appear light-hearted but are deeply idiomatic and tied to culture, ideology, and personality. These lines resonate not just due to wordplay, but because they embody values or perspectives unique to the source culture.

In translation, such expressions pose several dilemmas. Translators must assess whether to preserve the literal form (which may sound unnatural in Chinese), localise the meaning (which may diverge from the original), or substitute with a culturally relevant Chinese expression. For example, a phrase like "let it go" (*Frozen*) is both idiomatic and symbolic. The Chinese version rendered it as "随它吧" (*suí tā ba*), which roughly means "let it be." Though not a literal translation, it captures the emotional and contextual meaning in a way that feels idiomatic to the target audience.

Moreover, animated films often feature **idiomatic wordplay, alliteration, and rhyming idioms**, especially in musical numbers. In *Moana*, *Frozen*, and *Cars*, songs like "You're Welcome," "Let It Go," and "Life Is a Highway" are filled with idiomatic phrases that combine rhythm with meaning. Translating these into Chinese while maintaining rhyme, tone, and meaning is a particularly demanding task, requiring creativity and deep cultural insight.

What all this reveals is that idiomatic expressions in animation are multidimensional: they function linguistically, culturally, emotionally, and narratively. They are used to generate humour, construct identity, enhance emotional resonance, and appeal to a global yet culturally diverse audience. When dubbed or subtitled for Mandarin-speaking viewers, the idiomatic expressions become a site of negotiation between **source-language authenticity** and **target-language acceptability**.

Therefore, this thesis adopts an inclusive definition of idiomatic expressions, recognising them not only as fixed phrases but as any culturally and contextually loaded language whose figurative or stylised meaning goes beyond its literal surface. This encompasses traditional idioms, catchphrases, pop-culture references, metaphorical expressions, and stylised speech commonly

found in animated film dialogue and songs. By focusing on both their use and their translation, we can better understand the intersection of language, culture, and creativity in global media.

Section 1.1: Understanding Idiomatic Expressions (continued)

The frequent use of idiomatic expressions in English animated films highlights the **interplay between language and culture**, especially in media designed for international audiences. Studios like Disney and DreamWorks are acutely aware that their content will be consumed globally. As a result, their writers often use idiomatic expressions that are deeply rooted in American English, yet crafted to be entertaining, memorable, and—ideally—translatable. However, this balancing act doesn't always result in global clarity. Many idiomatic expressions that are humorous or emotionally resonant in English can be ambiguous or even confusing when presented to audiences unfamiliar with the cultural context.

For instance, consider *Cars*, where Lightning McQueen exclaims, “Float like a Cadillac, sting like a Beemer.” This line is a playful remix of the famous Muhammad Ali quote, “Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.” Translating this into Chinese requires not only the knowledge of car brands and boxing references, but also a strategy to maintain both the rhythm and humour in the target language. Similarly, in *Shrek*, Donkey's lines are full of fast-paced idiomatic quips like “You might have seen a housefly, maybe even a superfly, but I bet you ain't never seen a donkey fly.” The joke relies on rhyme, exaggeration, and pop culture parody, all of which are highly idiomatic and culturally dense.

In these moments, idiomatic expressions serve more than a stylistic function—they **construct the film's worldview**. They signal familiarity, satire, subversion, or affection, depending on the character's voice and the audience's cultural background. In *Despicable Me*, Gru's dry delivery of idiomatic phrases like “I'm having a bad day. A really bad day.” gains comedic weight precisely because of the mismatch between tone and context—an effect hard to replicate in translation without diluting the humour.

The **musical elements** in animated films further complicate the treatment of idiomatic expressions. In *Frozen*, the globally iconic “Let It Go” combines metaphor, repetition, and motivational idioms that reflect themes of liberation and identity. The phrase “let it go” is idiomatic and multi-layered—part command, part surrender, part declaration of independence. Its translation into Chinese as “随它吧” succeeds in conveying the core message, yet inevitably smooths over some of the original's poetic richness. The translator must weigh the lyrical flow, emotional impact, and semantic faithfulness simultaneously.

What makes idiomatic expressions in animation particularly complex is that they often rely on **multiple semiotic layers**—sound, image, gesture, cultural reference, and humour all working together. For example, in *Raya and the Last Dragon*, the dragon Sisu speaks with modern, informal English filled with idiomatic expressions like “I gotcha” or “I trust you.” Her speech contrasts with the more formal tone of other characters, highlighting her role as a bridge between

worlds—playful yet wise. Translating her dialogue into Chinese requires balancing modernity with accessibility, especially since her lines are crucial to audience perception.

These challenges raise critical questions that this thesis aims to explore:

- How are idiomatic expressions structurally and semantically constructed in English animated films?
- What strategies are used to translate them into Chinese in both subtitled and dubbed versions?
- To what extent are the cultural, emotional, and humorous values of the original expressions preserved, altered, or lost in translation?

By focusing on a corpus of high-profile animated films—*Toy Story 1–4*, *Frozen*, *Moana*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *Cars*, *Shrek*, *Despicable Me*, *Finding Nemo*, *Rio*, *Raya and the Last Dragon*, and *How to Train Your Dragon*—this study investigates how idiomatic expressions function as a **site of cultural negotiation** in audiovisual translation. These films offer rich, diverse linguistic data with strong character voices, dynamic storytelling, and global impact, making them ideal texts for analysing idiomatic expression use and transformation.

In sum, idiomatic expressions in animated films represent more than linguistic creativity. They encode emotion, identity, humour, and culture, often acting as the heartbeat of character interaction and narrative tone. In translation, they test the translator’s ability to preserve narrative integrity while adapting meaning for a new cultural audience. Understanding these dynamics is key to appreciating not just the technical, but also the **cultural artistry** involved in translating animated film dialogue.

Answers to the Critical Questions

1. How are idiomatic expressions structurally and semantically constructed in English animated films?

Idiomatic expressions in animated films are often short, punchy, and contextually loaded. Structurally, they include phrasal verbs (“give it up”), noun phrases (“piece of cake”), similes (“fast as lightning”), and catchphrases. Semantically, they tend to be metaphorical, emotionally expressive, humorous, or culturally referential. Writers deliberately choose idioms that reflect a character’s personality, age, background, or role—often mixing formal structure with informal tone to increase relatability.

In animated films, idiomatic expressions are carefully crafted to **match character identity**, **drive humour**, or **deliver emotional impact**. Structurally, they are often:

- **Short and rhythmical** (e.g., “No pain, no gain” in *Kung Fu Panda*)
- **Colloquial or slang-based** (e.g., “You da man!” in *Shrek*)

- **Modified idioms** (e.g., “Float like a Cadillac, sting like a Beemer” in *Cars*, adapted from a famous boxing idiom)

Writers often use **syntactic parallelism**, **alliteration**, or **metaphorical inversion** to make expressions catchy and memorable. Semantically, many idiomatic expressions express:

- **Humour** (e.g., “There’s no ‘I’ in team... unless you’re spelling it wrong” – *Despicable Me*)
- **Emotion** (e.g., “Just keep swimming” – *Finding Nemo*, a motivational idiom framed simply)
- **Cultural references** (e.g., “Stay golden, Ponyboy” allusions or quotes from American pop culture)

These expressions are not only figurative but often **anchored in American cultural metaphors**, which can be challenging for audiences unfamiliar with the source co

2. What strategies are used to translate them into Chinese in both subtitled and dubbed versions?

Common strategies include:

- **Paraphrasing** (to maintain meaning while adapting form)
 - **Substitution** (using a culturally equivalent Chinese idiom)
 - **Literal translation** (when clarity allows)
 - **Omission or simplification** (when the idiom is too obscure or fast-paced)
- Dubbed versions often lean toward **naturalisation** to suit spoken Mandarin rhythm and tone, while subtitles may prioritise **conciseness and clarity** due to space limits.

Your analysis will likely show that Chinese translators adopt **a flexible combination of strategies**, depending on the type of idiom, target audience, and the platform (dubbed vs. subtitled):

- **Literal Translation**
Used when the idiom is clear or has a close equivalent in Mandarin. Example: “Just keep swimming” becomes “继续游下去” (*jìxù yóu xià qù*) in *Finding Nemo*, keeping both rhythm and meaning.
- **Paraphrase**
When direct translation is confusing or the idiom has no equivalent. For example, in *Moana*, “You’re welcome” (used sarcastically by Maui) may be translated more plainly to reflect tone rather than literal form.
- **Cultural Substitution**
Using a familiar Chinese expression with similar function, e.g., replacing “hit the road” with “走人了” (*zǒu rén le*) to keep the conversational tone.
- **Omission or Simplification**
If the idiom is fast, tied to a visual joke, or too obscure, translators may drop it or

summarise it. For instance, in *Shrek*, many layered puns and idioms are simplified to maintain coherence in fast-paced dialogue.

- **Functional Re-creation in Dubbing**

Dubbing allows for more freedom: rhythm, emotion, and lip-sync can justify more expressive translations. For example, *Frozen*'s song "Let It Go" becomes "随它吧", which captures the spirit rather than literal semantics.

In general:

- **Subtitles prioritise brevity**, often simplifying idioms.
- **Dubs aim for natural fluency**, sometimes adding idiomatic equivalents that were not present in the original.

3. To what extent are the cultural, emotional, and humorous values of the original expressions preserved, altered, or lost in translation?

It varies.

- Emotional meaning is often **preserved**, especially in Disney's more polished translations (e.g., *Frozen*, *Moana*).
- Cultural references or wordplay are frequently **altered or lost**, especially in comedies like *Shrek* or *Kung Fu Panda*.
- Humour tends to be **replaced with locally familiar expressions**, sometimes changing the tone or intent slightly.

In short: while many translations successfully retain **semantic content**, they often adapt or sacrifice **cultural nuance and idiomatic flavour** for fluency and audience accessibility.

This is the core of your thesis: **preservation of meaning vs. loss of idiomatic style and culture.**

- **Emotional Value:** Often **well preserved**, especially in dramatic or motivational contexts. For instance, the heartfelt tone of "Just keep swimming" remains effective in Chinese, even when translated literally.
- **Humour:** Frequently **adapted or replaced**. In comedies like *Shrek* or *Despicable Me*, jokes based on English idioms or puns are often transformed into locally relevant humour. The spirit of the joke remains, but the **original wordplay is usually lost**.
- **Cultural Meaning:** This is where most losses occur. Idioms with strong American roots (sports metaphors, biblical phrases, idiomatic sarcasm) often lack direct Chinese counterparts. For instance, "*the elephant in the room*" may be replaced with a generic term like "明显的问题" (*obvious problem*), sacrificing metaphor and nuance.
- **Song lyrics and rhyme:** These are especially difficult. In films like *Frozen* and *Moana*, the need to maintain musical rhythm often leads to **creative reinterpretation**, where idioms are substituted with more singable, though semantically looser, phrases.

Ultimately, your thesis will likely argue that:

While semantic meaning is often retained, cultural and stylistic elements of idiomatic expressions are frequently adapted, diluted, or omitted—particularly in fast-paced or rhythm-sensitive contexts like jokes and songs.

This reflects the translator's balancing act: staying true to the original, while ensuring accessibility and naturalness for Chinese audiences.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Section 1.2: Review of Relevant Studies

The study of idiomatic expressions has attracted considerable attention across several disciplines, including linguistics, cognitive science, translation studies, and second language acquisition. Scholars have long recognised idiomatic expressions as not only central to linguistic competence but also crucial for understanding the cultural and pragmatic dimensions of communication. This section reviews key theoretical and empirical studies that have shaped the understanding of idiomatic expressions and their translation, with particular focus on audiovisual contexts such as film and animation.

One foundational perspective comes from **Fernando (1996)**, who categorised idiomatic expressions based on their compositional transparency. He defined three major types: **pure idioms** (e.g. “kick the bucket”), **semi-idioms** (e.g. “spill the beans”), and **literal idioms** (e.g. “take a break”). This classification has provided a practical basis for identifying the degree of figurative opacity and thus the potential difficulty in translation. Similarly, **Gläser (1984)** and **Cowie (1998)** contributed to typological studies by focusing on syntactic structure and fixedness, offering tools to identify and classify idioms systematically.

From a cognitive and functional perspective, **Gibbs (1994)** argued that idiomatic expressions are not stored as isolated lexical units but are processed using conceptual metaphors and embodied experience. This view suggests that idiomatic meaning is both mental and cultural, which makes translation an act of cross-cultural interpretation rather than word-for-word equivalence.

In the field of **translation studies**, **Baker (1992)** remains one of the most frequently cited scholars. She identified idiomatic expressions as a core challenge in interlingual transfer, especially when no direct equivalent exists in the target language. Baker proposed several practical strategies—**using an equivalent idiom**, **paraphrasing**, **omitting**, or **compensating elsewhere in the text**. These strategies are especially relevant in the context of subtitling and dubbing, where time constraints, visual context, and audience expectations place additional limits on translator choices.

In the specific context of **audiovisual translation**, researchers such as **Chiaro (2009)** and **Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007)** have explored how idiomatic expressions interact with multimodal storytelling. Chiaro argued that humour and idiomatic language in films often rely on sound, timing, and character performance—elements that are difficult to replicate in translation. Subtitling tends to compress content and prioritise readability, while dubbing allows more freedom but introduces technical constraints such as lip-syncing and rhythm.

A small but growing body of scholarship has focused on **idiom translation in animation**. For example, **Zabalbeascoa (2005)** noted that animated films are unique because they often employ “layered language”—simple on the surface but rich in idioms, jokes, and references meant for

adult viewers. This dual-audience strategy intensifies the challenge for translators, who must balance accessibility for younger viewers with cultural fidelity for older ones.

In the Chinese academic context, scholars such as **Wang Lin (王琳)** and **Zhang Meihua (张美华)** have explored how English idioms are translated in subtitled and dubbed films for Chinese-speaking audiences. Their studies have noted a clear tendency towards **domestication**—that is, adapting the expression to suit Chinese cultural and linguistic norms, even at the cost of losing some of the source idiom’s metaphorical or humorous nuances. This is often seen in translations of Disney and Pixar films, where idioms tied to Western pop culture or religious contexts are replaced with more neutral or relatable Chinese expressions.

Another relevant area of research lies in **Chinese subtitling practices**, where scholars such as **Liu Heping (刘和平)** have examined how translators manage constraints of space, timing, and clarity. Liu’s work shows that idiomatic expressions are frequently simplified or paraphrased, especially in fast-paced dialogue scenes or musical sequences. For example, song lyrics in films like *Frozen* or *Moana* are often rewritten to preserve rhythm and emotional tone, even if the idiomatic phrasing is lost or reinterpreted.

Despite these contributions, there remains a noticeable gap in research that combines the analysis of idiomatic expressions with the specific genre of **English-language animated films** and their **Chinese translations**. Existing studies tend to focus on either idioms in literature or technical aspects of audiovisual translation, with relatively few offering a focused, comparative approach that examines idiomatic expressions in animation as both a **linguistic phenomenon** and a **cultural product**.

This thesis seeks to bridge that gap by:

1. Analysing the structural and semantic features of idiomatic expressions in a selected corpus of widely-viewed English animated films (*e.g.*, *Toy Story*, *Frozen*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *Shrek*, etc.); and
2. Evaluating the strategies used in their Chinese translations, across both subtitled and dubbed versions, to assess how idiomatic meaning and cultural value are preserved, altered, or lost.

Through this approach, the thesis aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how idiomatic expressions function in animated film dialogue, and how they are shaped, constrained, and recreated in cross-cultural translation.

Section 1.2: Review of Relevant Studies

Research on idiomatic expressions has long been a central concern in the fields of linguistics, second language acquisition, and translation studies. Scholars have attempted to classify idiomatic expressions based on their structural and semantic properties, explore their role in communication, and address the particular challenges they pose in cross-linguistic contexts.

One of the most widely cited frameworks is that of **Fernando (1996)**, who categorised idiomatic expressions into three types: **pure idioms** (whose meaning is wholly non-compositional), **semi-idioms** (partially transparent), and **literal idioms** (idiomatic in use but semantically transparent). Other linguists, such as **Gläser (1984)** and **Cowie (1998)**, have contributed taxonomies focusing on form and function, differentiating idioms by grammatical structure and communicative purpose.

In translation studies, the work of **Baker (1992)** is especially influential. She identified the translation of idioms as one of the key problem areas in audiovisual translation and outlined several strategies translators might use: **literal translation**, **paraphrasing**, **substitution**, **omission**, or even **cultural adaptation**. Each strategy has its own benefits and drawbacks, and the translator's choice is often guided by the target audience, the cultural relevance of the source expression, and the constraints of subtitling or dubbing.

Within the specific context of **audiovisual translation**, idiomatic expressions pose additional challenges. Scholars like **Chiaro (2009)** and **Cintas and Remael (2007)** note that dubbing and subtitling impose strict time and space constraints, making the preservation of idiomatic meaning especially difficult. Moreover, animated films often target both children and adults, adding an extra layer of complexity in maintaining humour and cultural accessibility across different demographics.

Although a growing body of literature has addressed idiomatic translation in general, relatively few studies have focused specifically on **animated films** as a genre. Animated films are unique in their stylised use of language—blending fantasy, modern slang, and emotional narrative—which makes them especially rich for idiomatic analysis. In the Chinese context, scholars such as **Wang Lin (王琳)** and **Zhang Meihua (张美华)** have explored idiom translation in film, but comprehensive analyses that combine linguistic, structural, and cultural dimensions remain limited.

This thesis seeks to fill that gap by examining the idiomatic expressions used in a selection of popular English-language animated films (*Moana*, *Toy Story 1–4*, *Cars*, *Frozen*, *How to Train Your Dragon*) and analysing their Chinese translations across both subtitled and dubbed versions. The goal is to understand not only the linguistic features of these expressions, but also the translation strategies employed and their effectiveness in preserving meaning and tone.

Section 1.2: Review of Relevant Studies

Research on idiomatic expressions spans multiple disciplines—linguistics, translation studies, pragmatics, and second language acquisition. Scholars have approached idiomaticity from various angles, analysing its structural properties, semantic opacity, cognitive processing, and challenges in cross-cultural communication. This section reviews foundational theories of idiomatic expressions and their application to audiovisual translation, particularly in the context of animated films. While a substantial body of work exists on idioms, relatively little research focuses specifically on idiomatic expressions in animated films and their translation into Chinese, making this thesis a timely and valuable contribution.

One of the earliest and most influential theoretical models comes from **Fernando (1996)**, who classifies idiomatic expressions into three categories: *pure idioms*, *semi-idioms*, and *literal idioms*, based on their degree of semantic transparency. Similarly, **Gläser (1984)** and **Cowie et al. (1983)** provide structural taxonomies of idiomatic constructions, identifying fixed expressions, collocations, and idiomatic verb phrases. These works highlight the unique grammar of idiomatic expressions and emphasise their role in natural language fluency.

From a pragmatic and communicative standpoint, **Nunberg, Sag, and Wasow (1994)** argue that idiomatic expressions are not just lexical oddities but deeply embedded elements of discourse that carry social, emotional, and cultural meanings. Their model allows for a more flexible interpretation of idiomaticity, which aligns well with how animated film scripts often bend or play with idioms for creative effect.

In translation studies, **Mona Baker (1992)** offers one of the most practical frameworks for translating idiomatic expressions. She identifies several strategies: (1) using an idiom with similar meaning and form, (2) using an idiom with similar meaning but different form, (3) paraphrasing, and (4) omission. These strategies remain widely cited and are directly applicable to the challenges of translating film dialogue, where spatial and temporal constraints further limit the translator's choices.

Further research by **Chesterman (1997)** and **Newmark (1988)** explores the ideological dimension of translation—how cultural values embedded in idiomatic expressions can be preserved or reshaped in the target text. This is particularly relevant to audiovisual translation, where the translator must consider not only meaning but also audience expectation, dubbing constraints, and cultural resonance.

In the field of **audiovisual translation**, scholars such as **Cintas and Rемаel (2007)** and **Chiaro (2009)** have examined the unique challenges of subtitling and dubbing, especially for humour and culture-specific references. Chiaro argues that idiomatic humour is one of the most difficult aspects of film translation, often requiring substantial adaptation to maintain the intended comedic or emotional effect. Their work provides crucial insight into how constraints like reading speed, visual timing, and voice synchronisation affect the translation of idiomatic expressions in animated films.

Within Chinese scholarship, researchers like **Wang Lin (王琳)** and **Zhang Meihua (张美华)** have contributed to the study of idiom translation in Western media. Wang (2012) explores the tension between domestication and foreignisation in translating English idioms into Chinese,

while Zhang (2015) focuses on the preservation of cultural imagery in subtitle translation. Their findings reveal that translators often favour semantic clarity and fluency over literal fidelity, particularly when addressing young or family audiences.

However, despite this growing body of literature, **specific analysis of idiomatic expressions in animated films remains underexplored**. Much of the existing research either focuses broadly on idioms or limits itself to live-action or literary texts. Animated films, with their stylised language, fantasy settings, and broad demographic appeal, demand a different analytical lens. They often blend modern colloquialisms, cultural metaphors, and character-specific speech patterns in ways that challenge traditional translation strategies.

This thesis seeks to address this gap by conducting a detailed analysis of idiomatic expressions in English-language animated films and their Chinese translations. By examining how idiomatic expressions are used in films like *Frozen*, *Moana*, *Shrek*, *Toy Story*, and *Kung Fu Panda*, and how these expressions are handled in both subtitled and dubbed versions, the study builds on the foundational theories reviewed here while contributing original insight to the field of audiovisual translation and cross-cultural communication.

Chapter 2: Structural and Semantic Features of Idiomatic Expressions in Animated Films

Section 2.1: Structural Features of Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions in animated films vary widely in form but share one crucial trait: they function as **fixed or semi-fixed linguistic units**, often with meanings not directly deducible from their individual parts. From a structural point of view, these expressions appear in a variety of grammatical patterns, shaped to suit the fast, dynamic, and emotionally charged dialogue characteristic of animation. This section explores several common structural types of idiomatic expressions found in popular English animated films.

1. Verb-Based Idiomatic Expressions

These are among the most frequently used structures, especially in action-oriented or comedic scenes. Examples include:

- “*Let it go*” (*Frozen*) – a simple verb phrase functioning as both literal action and metaphorical release.
- “*Just keep swimming*” (*Finding Nemo*) – a motivational idiom using repetition and simplicity for emotional effect.
- “*Give up*”, “*Get over it*”, “*Break it down*” – everyday phrasal verbs with idiomatic meanings commonly found in films like *Toy Story* and *Despicable Me*.

These structures are concise, often imperative, and rhythmically easy to deliver, making them effective for dialogue and song lyrics.

2. Noun Phrases and Idiomatic Metaphors

Some idiomatic expressions appear as fixed noun phrases or metaphorical constructs. Examples include:

- “*Piece of cake*” (*Shrek*) – meaning something is easy; used for comedic tone.
- “*Can of worms*” – used in *Kung Fu Panda 2* to refer to a complicated situation.
- “*Fish are friends, not food*” (*Finding Nemo*) – combines a literal statement with a metaphorical shift.

These expressions often serve as punchlines, moral statements, or humorous contradictions.

3. Similes and Comparative Idioms

Animated films often use similes to exaggerate or stylise character traits, often borrowing from sports, animals, or pop culture:

- “*Fast as lightning*” (*Cars*) – used to emphasise speed and energy.
- “*As cool as a cucumber*” – appears in several films as a playful description of calmness.
- “*Like a bat out of hell*” – sometimes used to convey chaos or urgency.

These comparative structures offer vivid imagery, often with regional or cultural flavour.

4. Compound or Formulaic Expressions

These are longer expressions made up of multiple clauses or conjoined phrases:

- “*You break it, you buy it*” (*Raya and the Last Dragon*) – a fixed formula often used humorously.
- “*There’s no ‘I’ in team*” (*Despicable Me*) – a cliché often used sarcastically.
- “*Better late than never*” – used in *Moana* and *Toy Story 4* as a reflection of timing or regret.

These expressions are typically drawn from English proverbs, slogans, or everyday wisdom. In film, they help shape character voice and cultural setting.

5. Catchphrases and Creative Variants

Animated films often invent their own idiomatic expressions or rework familiar ones:

- “*Skadoosh*” (*Kung Fu Panda*) – invented catchphrase that mimics real idiomatic usage.
- “*Reach for the sky*” (*Toy Story*) – a cowboy-style phrase reflecting Woody’s persona.
- “*I’m not your princess*” (*Raya*) – a twist on a common archetype, rephrased as an idiomatic rejection of traditional roles.

These expressions blend idiomatic rhythm with character-specific voice, making them iconic and memorable even if they aren’t traditional idioms.

6. Song Lyrics as Idiomatic Language

Musical numbers in animated films are often packed with idiomatic expressions to convey emotional turning points. For example:

- “*Life is a highway*” (*Cars*) – metaphorical for life’s unpredictability.
- “*How far I’ll go*” (*Moana*) – evokes ambition and self-discovery through idiomatic phrasing.
- “*You’re welcome*” (*Moana*) – reuses a polite expression sarcastically as a boast.

These lyrics are rhythmically designed and structurally compressed, often requiring transformation when translated.

In summary, the structural diversity of idiomatic expressions in animated films reflects both **linguistic creativity** and **narrative intention**. Whether appearing as phrasal verbs, metaphors, proverbs, or custom catchphrases, these expressions are tailored to character identity, audience engagement, and emotional rhythm. Understanding these structures is essential for analysing how meaning is encoded—and how it might shift during translation into other languages, particularly Mandarin Chinese.

Section 2.1: Structural Features of Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions are structurally diverse linguistic units that, while sometimes appearing grammatically regular, often carry meanings that deviate from their literal composition. In English animated films, idiomatic expressions are crafted to be short, rhythmically appealing, and emotionally expressive, reflecting both the **oral nature of film dialogue** and the **cultural identity** of characters. This section explores the most common structural types of idiomatic expressions identified in animated film scripts, drawing on examples from a representative corpus including *Toy Story*, *Frozen*, *Shrek*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *Moana*, *Finding Nemo*, and others.

1. Verb-Based Idiomatic Expressions (Phrasal Verbs & Imperatives)

Verb-based idiomatic expressions are highly common due to their **action-oriented** nature and natural fit with **spoken English**. These include **phrasal verbs** (verb + particle) and **imperative idioms**, both of which lend themselves to expressive delivery.

- **Phrasal Verbs** like “give up,” “hold on,” “look out,” or “pull through” appear frequently in *Despicable Me*, *Cars*, and *Frozen*. These are compact expressions where the addition of a particle (e.g., *up*, *on*, *out*) transforms the verb’s meaning entirely.

- In *Kung Fu Panda*, characters frequently use action idioms like “step up,” “get down to business,” and “knuckle down,” reflecting both comedic tone and motivational subtext.
- **Imperative idioms** such as “let it go” (*Frozen*) or “just keep swimming” (*Finding Nemo*) also function as key **narrative motifs**, repeated for emotional and thematic emphasis. These idioms are especially effective because of their clarity and rhythmic appeal, making them memorable for audiences of all ages.

These verb-based structures often occur at **turning points** in the plot or are used in musical lyrics, giving them additional emotional resonance and making their translation particularly critical.

2. Noun Phrases and Idiomatic Metaphors

Many idiomatic expressions occur in the form of **noun phrases** that encapsulate metaphorical meaning in a compact form.

- “*Piece of cake*” (*Shrek*) functions as a humorous expression of ease, while “*can of worms*” (*Finding Dory*) signals complexity or unintended consequences.
- In *Toy Story 3*, Buzz Lightyear refers to Woody’s leadership as “*a tough nut to crack*”, a metaphorical noun phrase for a difficult problem or person.
- These phrases are often used to express **abstract concepts** (difficulty, confusion, fear, excitement) in **tangible terms**, which is particularly useful for children’s comprehension, though the idiomatic nuance is more often appreciated by adult viewers.

These expressions rely on **visual imagery** and **figurative framing**, often functioning as micro-metaphors embedded in casual speech.

3. Comparative and Simile-Based Idioms

Similes and comparison structures are used to **amplify character traits**, often in exaggerated or humorous ways. These are particularly prevalent in animated films that rely on **physical comedy** or **stylised dialogue**.

- In *Cars*, Lightning McQueen uses expressions like “*fast as lightning*” or “*runs like a dream*” to describe performance and speed.
- In *Kung Fu Panda*, Po’s descriptions often lean on humorous comparisons like “*like a hungry panda at a dumpling shop*.”
- *Shrek* plays with cliché similes such as “*as pretty as a picture*”, but twists them for comedic or ironic effect.

These idioms often reinforce genre tropes (e.g., sports idioms in *Cars*, animal idioms in *Zootopia*) and are **anchored in culturally specific frames of reference**—a challenge for cross-cultural translation.

4. Compound and Proverbial Expressions

Many idiomatic expressions in animated film scripts are **compound structures**, often borrowed from proverbs or slogans. These expressions are longer but function as **single semantic units** and frequently reflect moral lessons or common wisdom.

- “*You break it, you buy it*” (*Raya and the Last Dragon*) operates as a rule-like idiom, often humorous or sarcastic.
- “*There’s no ‘I’ in team*” (*Despicable Me*) uses a visual pun to reinforce team values with a touch of irony.
- “*Better late than never*” (*Moana, Toy Story 4*) is used in reflective scenes, carrying both emotional and moral weight.

These idioms often **frame key scenes or turning points** in the plot and are used to summarise a theme or deliver closure to a moral dilemma. Their formal structure makes them easier to recognise but more difficult to translate idiomatically.

5. Catchphrases and Invented Expressions

Animated films frequently invent **original catchphrases** that mimic idiomatic form and function but are **culturally new**. These are often associated with a particular character and help define their voice and branding.

- “*Skadoosh*” (*Kung Fu Panda*) is a nonsense word that functions idiomatically as a signal of victory or emphasis. It mimics the sound and rhythm of an exclamatory idiom.
- Woody’s “*Reach for the sky!*” (*Toy Story*) mimics old Western idioms, blending in-character language with genre parody.
- In *Shrek*, Donkey creates informal idioms like “*I’m makin’ waffles!*”, which become catchphrases despite having no traditional idiomatic history.

Such expressions are **playful, exaggerated**, and often context-bound. They serve a **stylistic function** rather than a strictly semantic one, making their translation more reliant on tone and humour than literal meaning.

6. Idiomatic Language in Musical Lyrics

Musical numbers are a key feature of many animated films, and their lyrics often incorporate idiomatic language for metaphor, rhythm, and emotional intensity.

- “*Life is a highway*” (*Cars*) uses metaphorical idiom to represent life’s unpredictability.

- “*How far I’ll go*” (*Moana*) is a repeated metaphor for personal ambition and inner conflict.
- “*Let it go*” (*Frozen*) is perhaps the most globally famous example—simple in structure, yet layered in meaning.

These expressions must match **melodic structure**, **rhyme scheme**, and **narrative arc**, which makes them among the most **challenging to translate**. In Chinese versions, translators often re-create expressions that maintain the emotional core but diverge structurally from the original.

Summary

The structural range of idiomatic expressions in animated films is broad and context-dependent. From short phrasal verbs to lyrical metaphors and proverb-based sayings, these expressions are tightly woven into the linguistic fabric of the film’s narrative and character design. Their structure affects not only how they are understood by the audience, but also how they can be translated across languages. A translator must recognise not only what is being said, but how it is being said—its rhythm, function, and cultural connotation. Understanding the structural tendencies of idiomatic expressions lays the groundwork for deeper semantic and translational analysis, which will be addressed in the following section.

7. Elliptical and Truncated Idiomatic Expressions

These are idioms that are **shortened or incomplete**, relying on the audience to mentally supply the full phrase. This is common in fast-paced dialogue or when the expression is culturally well-known.

- In *Shrek*, a character might say “*If looks could kill...*” and leave it at that.
- In *Frozen 2*, Anna says “*Some things never...*” instead of completing “*Some things never change.*”

This truncation adds dramatic pause or humour but can confuse non-native audiences if the idiom isn’t familiar.

□ **Translation challenge:** Chinese subtitles often require completion or rephrasing, since Chinese idioms are more rigidly structured and less likely to be left incomplete.

8. Interjections and Idiomatic Exclamations

Some idiomatic expressions are used not in full sentences but as **interjections**—short, emotionally loaded phrases like:

- “*No way!*”

- “*You wish!*”
- “*Way to go!*”
- “*Get a load of that!*”

You’ll find these in *Despicable Me*, *Toy Story*, and *Kung Fu Panda*—used to convey sarcasm, disbelief, excitement, or admiration in very few words.

□ **Translation challenge:** Mandarin often lacks direct equivalents for these. Translators usually paraphrase or adapt to preserve tone (“真的假的?”, “你想得美”).

9. Idiom-Based Humour and Wordplay

This isn't a new form structurally but worth listing as its own category because it combines **idioms with puns** or **double meaning** for humour.

- In *Shrek*, Donkey says: “*You might’ve seen a housefly, maybe even a superfly... but I bet you’ve never seen a donkey fly.*”
□ It plays on “fly” as both noun and verb.
- In *Zootopia*, sloths say “*You want it fast?*”—used ironically because they speak slowly.

□ **Translation challenge:** These often can’t be translated literally and require **creative adaptation** to maintain the joke, especially if visual timing is involved.

Additional Structural Patterns

While the six categories outlined above capture the majority of idiomatic expressions used in English animated films, it is worth noting several additional structural forms that, although less frequent, contribute meaningfully to the stylistic and communicative richness of animated dialogue. These include **elliptical idioms**, **idiomatic interjections**, and **idiom-based humour or wordplay**, each of which adds nuance and variation to the film’s linguistic texture.

Elliptical and Truncated Idioms are shortened forms where the full idiomatic phrase is intentionally left incomplete, relying on the audience’s cultural familiarity to fill in the meaning. For instance, a line like “If looks could kill...” in *Shrek* leaves the consequence unstated, adding dramatic effect or sarcasm. This elliptical style reflects the fast-paced and often casual tone of animated dialogue, but it poses challenges in translation, particularly into Chinese, where expressions are more syntactically complete and context-driven completion is less common.

Idiomatic Interjections and Exclamatory Phrases are brief expressions that convey attitude, sarcasm, or emotion. Lines such as “No way!”, “You wish!”, or “Way to go!” appear frequently in *Despicable Me*, *Toy Story*, and *Kung Fu Panda*. These are structurally simple but culturally dense, often functioning as social cues. In translation, they typically require paraphrasing to match the tone and function, as Mandarin lacks exact idiomatic equivalents with the same punchy brevity.

Idiom-Based Wordplay and Humour forms another distinctive pattern. These involve either punning on the literal and figurative meanings of an idiom or remixing idioms to humorous effect. A prime example occurs in *Shrek*, where Donkey jokes, “You might’ve seen a housefly, maybe even a superfly, but I bet you ain’t never seen a donkey fly!” This play on the word “fly” across noun and verb forms creates a visual pun that is rooted in idiomatic structure. Translating such expressions often requires creative reinvention, as wordplay and idioms rarely align cross-linguistically.

Incorporating these less conventional forms broadens our understanding of how idiomaticity operates in animated film dialogue—not only as a carrier of figurative meaning, but as a tool for emotional emphasis, humour, and cultural commentary. These examples illustrate the richness and flexibility of idiomatic structures and further justify the need for nuanced translation strategies, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

1. Fixed Phrases

Explanation:

Fixed phrases are idiomatic expressions with a **set word order** and **non-literal meaning**. The structure cannot be rearranged, and replacing any word often causes the idiom to lose its idiomatic value. These expressions are widely used in both casual and dramatic dialogue and are especially common in animated films due to their **punchiness, familiarity, and humour**.

✔ Example 1 – *Shrek*

Original: “Break the ice.”

Wrong translation: 打破冰块。

→ Literal and confusing in Mandarin; loses figurative meaning.

Good translation: 打破沉默。 (“Break the silence.”)

→ Mandarin equivalent that keeps the intended social nuance.

Why: Retains the idiomatic purpose—**starting a conversation**—not the literal image.

✔ Example 2 – *Toy Story 3*

Original: “Hit the road.”

Wrong translation: 撞到路上。

→ Literal and meaningless.

Good translation: 上路吧！

→ Simple imperative form that conveys **departure** clearly and naturally.

Why: Captures the action of leaving without awkward phrasing.

✔ Example 3 – *Frozen*

Original: “Let it go.”

Wrong translation: 让它走。

→ Misleading; implies a physical object is being released.

Good translation: 随它吧。

→ Figurative and emotional tone matches the theme of **emotional release**.

Why: Preserves metaphor and poetic rhythm; idiomatically correct.

✔ Example 4 – *Cars*

Original: “Step on it!”

Wrong translation: 踩它！

→ Sounds like stomping on an object, not a vehicle idiom.

Good translation: 加速！快点！

→ Functional equivalent expressing urgency.

Why: Mandarin doesn't use a direct metaphor here, so speed-related verbs are more natural.

✓ Example 5 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “Hang in there.”

Wrong translation: 挂在那里。

→ Sounds like a physical command, not encouragement.

Good translation: 坚持住！

→ Mandarin phrase used in **emotional or stressful situations**.

Why: Preserves **supportive tone** and motivational function.

2. Verb + Object Phrases

Explanation:

These idiomatic expressions follow a "**verb + object**" structure and often involve metaphorical or figurative action. While they appear grammatically simple, their meaning is usually **non-literal** and culturally embedded. They are common in dialogue and require translators to understand both the **action and the implied meaning** to avoid mistranslation.

✓ Example 2 – *Despicable Me* (approx. 00:17:30)

Original: “Crack the code.”

Wrong translation: 破解密码。

→ Literal and too technical for the comedic tone.

Good translation: 找到破解的方法。

→ More conversational and context-appropriate.

Why: Keeps the **problem-solving context**, without sounding like a spy movie.

✓ Example 3 – *Finding Nemo* (approx. 00:34:00)

Original: “Spill the beans.”

Wrong translation: 把豆子撒出来。

→ Literal and odd in Chinese.

Good translation: 说出来吧。 or 别藏着了。

→ Simple idiomatic phrases that imply revealing a secret.

Why: Maintains the figurative sense of **confessing** or telling the truth.

✓ Example 4 – *Toy Story 2* (approx. 00:22:00)

Original: “Face the music.”

Wrong translation: 面对音乐。

→ Misleading—implies literal music.

Good translation: 面对现实。

→ Common Mandarin expression meaning to confront consequences.

Why: Captures the core idea of **accountability**.

✓ Example 5 – *Raya and the Last Dragon* (approx. 01:04:00)

Original: “Make your move.”

Wrong translation: 做你的动作。

→ Robotic and unclear.

Good translation: 出招吧！ or 该你了！

→ Matches the **combat setting** and character tone.

Why: Adds natural flow and context-appropriate expression.

3. Verb + Preposition/Adverb Combinations (Phrasal Verbs)

Explanation:

Phrasal verbs consist of a **verb combined with a preposition or adverb**, forming a new idiomatic meaning that’s **not directly predictable** from the individual words. These are **especially tricky to translate**, as Mandarin does not have a direct equivalent for many of them. The translator must interpret the overall **context and implied function** before selecting the right phrase.

✓ Example 1 – *Kung Fu Panda* (approx. 00:21:30)

Original: “Give up.”

Wrong translation: 给出去。

→ Literal and incorrect.

Good translation: 放弃。

→ Direct Mandarin equivalent used in both casual and emotional contexts.

Why: Captures the meaning of **surrender** or **conceding defeat**.

✓ Example 2 – *Toy Story* (approx. 00:44:10)

Original: “Back off!”

Wrong translation: 后退。

→ Technically accurate, but too neutral in tone.

Good translation: 别靠近我! or 走开!

→ More emotionally charged and contextually appropriate.

Why: Reflects **urgency and threat**, common in high-stakes dialogue.

✓ Example 3 – *Finding Nemo* (approx. 00:38:00)

Original: “Calm down.”

Wrong translation: 冷静下来。

→ Correct but formal, lacks the friendly tone.

Good translation: 别急～放轻松。

→ More natural and soothing in Mandarin.

Why: Matches the **encouraging emotional tone** of the scene.

✓ Example 4 – *Luca* (approx. 00:50:00)

Original: “Come on!”

Wrong translation: 过来!

→ Wrong meaning—implies physical movement.

Good translation: 拜托啦～快点嘛!

→ Expresses impatience and playfulness.

Why: Mandarin offers multiple casual equivalents depending on tone.

✓ Example 5 – *The Incredibles* (approx. 01:13:00)

Original: “Blow up.”

Wrong translation: 吹起来。

→ Misinterpreted as inflating.

Good translation: 爆炸了!

→ Matches the action and dramatic tone of the scene.

Why: Preserves both the **literal** and **emotional intensity** of the moment.

4. Binomial Expressions

Explanation:

Binomial expressions are idioms made up of **two words joined by “and” or “or”**, often with **rhythmic balance, repetition, or contrast**. They are catchy, easy to remember, and frequently used in spoken English for **emphasis, humour, or stylistic rhythm**. In Mandarin, they often require replacement with a **four-character idiom (成语)** or a **parallel phrase** to maintain fluency and tone.

✓ Example 1 – *Shrek* (approx. 00:29:00)

Original: “Give and take.”

Wrong translation: 给予和拿走。

→ Literal and unnatural.

Good translation: 互相包容。

→ Expresses the idea of **mutual compromise** in natural Mandarin.

Why: Keeps the cooperative tone, avoids clunky literal structure.

✓ Example 2 – *The Incredibles* (approx. 00:56:30)

Original: “Now or never.”

Wrong translation: 现在或者永远不会。

→ Overly long and awkward.

Good translation: 机不可失。

→ Four-character idiom expressing the idea of **seizing the moment**.

Why: Replaces binomial with a **concise cultural equivalent**.

✓ Example 4 – *Frozen II* (approx. 01:11:00)

Original: “Sink or swim.”

Wrong translation: 下沉或游泳。

→ Literal and makes no sense.

Good translation: 成败在此一举。

→ Classic idiom reflecting **success or failure** in one move.

Why: Captures the **urgency and risk** behind the expression.

✓ Example 5 – *Cars* (approx. 00:25:00)

Original: “Fast and furious.”

Wrong translation: 快速和愤怒。

→ Sounds unrelated or unbalanced.

Good translation: 风驰电掣。

→ Four-character idiom meaning **extremely fast**.

Why: Replaces binomial with a **powerful, vivid image** known to Chinese audiences.

5. Similes and Comparatives

Explanation:

These idiomatic expressions use **comparisons** to describe something vividly, often through

“as...as”, “like”, or “than” constructions. They are common in humorous or expressive dialogue, especially in animation. In Mandarin, translators often use 比喻句, 四字结构, or vivid **imagery** to recreate the figurative effect while adapting for local norms.

✔ Example 1 – *Shrek 2* (approx. 00:34:00)

Original: “As pretty as a princess.”

Wrong translation: 像公主一样漂亮。

→ Flat and awkward phrasing.

Good translation: 美得像仙女一样。

→ More poetic and aligned with Chinese aesthetic expressions.

Why: Keeps romantic imagery while localising the metaphor.

✔ Example 2 – *Kung Fu Panda* (approx. 00:44:30)

Original: “You move like a pregnant yak.”

Wrong translation: 你像怀孕的牦牛一样走路。

→ Literal and clunky.

Good translation: 你慢得像头怀孕的牛。

→ Rephrased to sound more natural, still funny.

Why: Keeps insult tone while maintaining metaphor.

✔ Example 3 – *Luca* (approx. 00:31:00)

Original: “Faster than a sea monster on fire!”

Wrong translation: 比着火的海怪还快。

→ Grammatically okay but confusing.

Good translation: 比着火的海怪还疯跑。

→ Adds verb for vivid action and tone.

Why: Enhances the **hyperbolic imagery**, fits childlike exaggeration.

✔ Example 4 – *Frozen* (approx. 00:23:00)

Original: “Cold as ice.”

Wrong translation: 冷得像冰一样。

→ Too literal, lacks emotion.

Good translation: 冷得刺骨。

→ Idiomatic phrase that expresses the **emotional and physical chill**.

Why: More expressive and idiomatic in Mandarin.

✓ Example 5 – *Despicable Me 2* (approx. 00:19:00)

Original: “You’re like a fart in a spacesuit.”

Wrong translation: 你就像宇航服里的屁。

→ Too literal, awkward and possibly offensive.

Good translation: 你像困在罐头里的臭气。

→ Localises humour while keeping the playful insult.

Why: Reframes simile using a **culturally similar image**.

6. Imperative Phrasing

Explanation:

These idiomatic expressions are in the **imperative form**—commands, suggestions, or motivational exclamations. They often reflect a character’s urgency, emotion, or authority. In Mandarin, the translator must choose phrasing that sounds **natural, punchy, and emotionally fitting**, without being too direct or awkward. Often, **colloquial** or **four-character** phrases are used.

✓ Example 1 – *Frozen* (approx. 00:55:30)

Original: “Let it go.”

Wrong translation: 让它走。

→ Sounds like releasing a pet or object.

Good translation: 随它吧。

→ Figurative and poetic; fits emotional release theme.

Why: Sounds natural and matches the song’s emotional tone.

✓ Example 2 – *Kung Fu Panda* (approx. 00:47:00)

Original: “Keep it together!”

Wrong translation: 保持它在一起。

→ Nonsensical literal meaning.

Good translation: 镇定！别慌！

→ Common phrases in emotional situations.

Why: Expresses the idiomatic command effectively in stress scenes.

✓ Example 4 – *Luca* (approx. 00:42:00)

Original: “Go for it!”

Wrong translation: 去吧!

→ Lacks encouragement tone.

Good translation: 冲啊! 加油!

→ Expressive and culturally appropriate.

Why: Adds energy and idiomatic familiarity in Mandarin.

✓ Example 5 – *The Incredibles* (approx. 01:17:00)

Original: “Run!”

Wrong translation: 跑。

→ Incomplete tone-wise.

Good translation: 快跑啊!

→ Adds **urgency and panic**, as intended in the scene.

Why: Mandarin commands often require **intonation and context** to feel alive.

7. Negative–Positive Constructions

Explanation:

These idiomatic expressions use a **negative structure to imply something positive**, or vice versa. They often express **sarcasm, modesty, or understatement**, which can be tricky to convey in Mandarin. A successful translation requires understanding the **real intent behind the words** and matching it with an equivalent tone in Chinese—often through **tone shifts, soft sarcasm, or rhetorical patterns**.

✓ Example 1 – *The Incredibles* (approx. 00:50:30)

Original: “Not bad at all.”

Wrong translation: 一点也不坏。

→ Literal and flat; sounds defensive.

Good translation: 真不错。 or 挺棒的嘛。

→ Natural phrases that reflect sincere praise with subtle tone.

Why: Captures implied **positivity through understatement**.

✓ Example 3 – *Luca* (approx. 00:58:00)

Original: “It’s not like I’m scared or anything.”

Wrong translation: 不是我害怕。

→ Loses tone and intent.

Good translation: 谁说我怕了?

→ Rhetorical structure common in Mandarin.

Why: Reflects the **denial-means-admission** dynamic in teen speech.

✓ Example 4 – *Frozen II* (approx. 01:06:00)

Original: “It’s not exactly a walk in the park.”

Wrong translation: 这并不是在公园里散步。

→ Misleading; doesn’t express difficulty.

Good translation: 事情可没那么简单。

→ Direct Mandarin phrase implying challenge.

Why: Preserves the **figurative difficulty** while removing literal reference.

✓ Example 5 – *Shrek* (approx. 00:27:00)

Original: “It’s not rocket science.”

Wrong translation: 这不是火箭科学。

→ Confusing and meaningless in Mandarin.

Good translation: 这又不难懂。 or 这不是什么高深的事。

→ Softens tone, keeps humour.

Why: Mandarin does not use “rocket science” as a metaphor, so **semantic clarity is key**.

8. Idiomatic Clauses and Multi-Clause Sentences

Explanation:

These idiomatic expressions appear as **complete sentences or multi-part clauses** that carry a figurative or idiomatic meaning as a whole. They are often used for storytelling, emotional emphasis, humour, or sarcasm. Translating these expressions into Mandarin requires **rephrasing or restructuring**, while ensuring the tone and logic stay intact. Literal translation usually results in confusion.

✓ Example 1 – *Toy Story 3* (approx. 01:30:00)

Original: “So long, partner.”

Wrong translation: 再见，伙伴。

→ Technically correct but flat and lacks emotional depth.

Good translation: 一路走好，老朋友。

→ Adds warmth, sentiment, and finality.

Why: Captures the emotional **farewell tone** between close companions.

✔ Example 2 – *Kung Fu Panda* (approx. 00:48:00)

Original: “There is no secret ingredient.”

Wrong translation: 没有秘密的成分。

→ Literal and cold.

Good translation: 秘密其实就在你自己身上。

→ Adds depth and **philosophical flavour**.

Why: Preserves the metaphor about **inner strength**, not ingredients.

✔ Example 4 – *Shrek 2* (approx. 00:40:00)

Original: “You are more than just a pretty face.”

Wrong translation: 你不仅仅是一张漂亮的脸。

→ Feels stiff and lacks warmth.

Good translation: 你不只是外表漂亮，你还有一颗善良的心。

→ Expands emotionally, more **in line with Mandarin expression**.

Why: Completes the idea with balance and emotional depth.

✔ Example 5 – *Frozen II* (approx. 01:15:00)

Original: “When one can see no future, all one can do is the next right thing.”

Wrong translation: 当人看不到未来时，只能做接下来的正确事情。

→ Overly long and clunky.

Good translation: 看不清未来，就走好脚下的每一步。

→ Poetic and metaphorical, like the original.

Why: Balances **philosophical tone** with Mandarin rhythm.

9. Fixed Idiomatic Questions

Explanation:

These are **commonly used rhetorical or sarcastic questions** that function as idiomatic expressions. Although they appear to be genuine questions, their real purpose is often to express **attitude, emotion, or irony**. These structures are tricky to translate because Mandarin may not use a literal question format in the same context. Instead, translators must recreate the **intended tone or implied meaning**, often using rhetorical strategies or culturally equivalent expressions.

✓ Example 1 – *Shrek* (approx. 00:26:00)

Original: “What’s the big deal?”

Wrong translation: 这有什么大事情?

→ Literal and flat; lacks dismissive tone.

Good translation: 这有什么好大惊小怪的?

→ Reflects Shrek’s sarcastic attitude.

Why: Mandarin phrasing captures the **casual tone and rhetorical intent**.

✓ Example 2 – *Toy Story* (approx. 00:33:30)

Original: “Who’s counting?”

Wrong translation: 谁在数?

→ Literal and confusing.

Good translation: 谁在意呢?

→ Common rhetorical equivalent.

Why: Shifts focus from the literal to the **underlying dismissiveness**.

✓ Example 3 – *Finding Nemo* (approx. 00:38:40)

Original: “What’s the catch?”

Wrong translation: 钓鱼的鱼饵是什么?

→ Misunderstood; not about literal fishing.

Good translation: 这其中有什么猫腻?

→ Captures suspicion and nuance.

Why: Idiomatically fits the tone of **distrust or trickery**.

✓ Example 5 – *The Incredibles* (approx. 01:02:00)

Original: “What could possibly go wrong?”

Wrong translation: 可能出什么问题?

→ Sounds like a genuine inquiry.

Good translation: 还能出啥问题嘛?

→ Sarcastic and rhetorical, matches character tone.

Why: Mandarin rephrasing reflects **ironic foreboding**.

Chapter 2: Structural and Semantic Features of Idiomatic Expressions in Animated Films

Section 2.2: Semantic Features of Idiomatic Expressions

While structural patterns define the outward form of idiomatic expressions, it is their **semantic properties** that distinguish them as idiomatic. In essence, idiomatic expressions convey meanings that are **non-compositional**, **context-sensitive**, and often **culturally bound**. In animated films, these expressions play a key role in delivering humour, emotion, irony, and character development—functions that rely on subtle shifts between literal and figurative language. This section explores the major semantic features of idiomatic expressions as used in animated film dialogue.

1. Non-Compositional Meaning

The defining semantic trait of idiomatic expressions is that their meaning cannot be interpreted by simply analysing the meanings of individual words.

- In *Toy Story*, when Woody says “You are a sad, strange little man,” the line’s humour and sarcasm derive from the delivery and context—not the literal meaning of “sad” or “strange.”
- In *Frozen*, the phrase “Let it go” operates at both a literal level (releasing control) and a symbolic one (emotional self-liberation).
- *Finding Nemo*’s “Just keep swimming” has become an idiomatic encouragement despite its literal form.

□ These expressions derive their meaning from convention, tone, and shared cultural experience, not word-by-word analysis.

2. Opacity and Figurative Language

Idiomatic expressions vary in **semantic transparency**. Some are nearly opaque, where the original metaphor is lost, while others remain partially interpretable.

- “*Break a leg*” (not commonly used in kids’ films, but illustrative) is fully opaque to learners.
- “*Fish are friends, not food*” in *Finding Nemo* is semi-transparent—it can be interpreted literally but is also metaphorical, subverting predator instincts for comedic effect.
- “*Life is a highway*” in *Cars* uses metaphor to express the ups and downs of life, maintaining a clear yet non-literal meaning.

□ Opacity affects **translation difficulty**—the more opaque, the more likely translators must paraphrase or substitute to convey intended meaning.

3. Cultural Embeddedness

Many idiomatic expressions carry **cultural assumptions**, values, or references specific to a source language or region.

- In *Moana*, Maui’s line “When you use a bird to write with, it’s called tweeting” is a humorous modern cultural reference embedded in a mythological setting.
- *Shrek* constantly parodies Western fairy tale idioms like “happily ever after” or “knight in shining armor,” blending cliché with subversion.
- *Despicable Me* contains idioms based on American sarcasm, such as “Now that’s what I call parenting,” often used ironically.

□ These expressions require **cultural decoding**. Without shared background knowledge, the idiom’s full effect may be lost in translation.

4. Pragmatic Function and Emotional Tone

Idiomatic expressions carry **pragmatic force**—they express attitude, emotion, sarcasm, humour, encouragement, etc.

- In *Kung Fu Panda*, Po’s use of casual idioms signals nervousness or false confidence: “No big deal. I totally got this.”
- In *Raya and the Last Dragon*, expressions like “Not my problem” mark emotional detachment and distrust.
- In *Frozen II*, Olaf’s use of expressions like “This is fine” in moments of chaos is delivered with deadpan irony, creating comic contrast.

□ The pragmatic function often outweighs the literal one—tone and context matter more than surface meaning, especially in dubbing or performance.

5. Dual-Audience Layering (Child vs. Adult Semantics)

A distinctive feature of idiomatic usage in animation is the intentional **layering of meaning** to serve both children and adults.

- In *Shrek*, many idiomatic lines function innocently on the surface but carry double entendre or sarcasm for older viewers.

- *Toy Story* lines like “You are a toy!” may seem literal, but semantically reflect existential questions and emotional denial—subtle themes more accessible to adults.
- *Moana* and *Frozen* use song-based idioms like “Know who you are” and “Let it go” that resonate with adult identity struggles while remaining accessible to children.

□ This dual-layering increases **semantic richness**, making translation more complex.

Translators must decide whether to retain the layered tone or prioritise accessibility for younger viewers.

6. Context Dependency and Polysemy

Idiomatic expressions often derive meaning from **situational context**, especially in animated films where visuals and tone guide interpretation.

- “That’s a wrap!” may literally refer to wrapping up an event but also signals closure or exhaustion, depending on context.
- In *Frozen*, “Let it go” is emotionally loaded in the scene, supported by visuals and music—it would not carry the same impact outside of that moment.

□ Because animated films are multimodal (language, image, sound), idiomatic meaning is often **co-constructed**, not just verbal. This adds to their richness—but also translation difficulty, especially in subtitle-only contexts.

7. Creativity and Semantic Reframing

Writers often manipulate idiomatic expressions to **reframe meaning**, creating humour or surprise.

- In *Shrek*, idioms are twisted to challenge expectations (e.g., “Beauty is only skin deep” is questioned when applied to ogres).
- *Kung Fu Panda* invents idiom-like expressions such as “Skadoosh” that function semantically like real idioms—emphasising triumph or surprise—even if they’re nonsense words.

□ This reframing adds novelty and humour but is difficult to replicate in another language without re-creating new expressions that serve the same narrative role.

Summary

The semantic features of idiomatic expressions in animated films are diverse and dynamic. They operate on multiple levels—literal, metaphorical, emotional, and cultural—often simultaneously.

Their figurative meaning, cultural specificity, and pragmatic force all contribute to their expressive power, but also to their **vulnerability in translation**. A successful translation must capture not just the meaning of the words, but the **tone, intention, and effect**—a task that requires sensitivity to both language and audience. Understanding these semantic dimensions is crucial before evaluating how idiomatic meaning is preserved or adapted in the process of translation, which will be addressed in Chapter 3.

8. Emotional Ambiguity and Multiplicity of Meaning

Many idiomatic expressions in animated films are **intentionally ambiguous**, carrying multiple emotional or contextual interpretations. This feature is especially common in emotionally charged scenes or in moments where character development is foregrounded.

- In *Frozen*, “Let it go” is at once a command, a release of repression, and a declaration of self-empowerment.
- In *Toy Story 4*, Woody’s “I can’t stop Andy from growing up... but I can be there for him” uses everyday phrasing with deep emotional and philosophical implications.

These expressions offer **semantic layering**, allowing for different interpretations based on the viewer’s age, background, or emotional state. In translation, this multiplicity may be **flattened**—the line must often be reduced to a single interpretation in Chinese, losing some of its richness.

9. Intertextual and Genre-Based Idiomaticity

Some idiomatic expressions in animated films rely on the audience’s familiarity with **genre conventions**, classic lines, or cultural slogans. These expressions are not idiomatic in a dictionary sense, but **function idiomatically** due to their recognisability and fixed role in pop culture.

- *Shrek* constantly mocks fairy tale clichés like “true love’s kiss,” treating them as idiomatic norms ripe for subversion.
- *Kung Fu Panda* echoes martial arts film tropes like “the student becomes the master,” playing them both straight and ironically.
- In *Raya and the Last Dragon*, idioms like “a broken kingdom” or “trust is a two-way street” reference narrative archetypes that feel idiomatic due to repetition in Western media.

These expressions are **semantically loaded with genre meaning**, and their translation often requires **domesticating** the idiom to fit the cultural expectations of the Chinese viewer, sometimes using different metaphors entirely.

10. Semantic Rhythm and Sound Symbolism

Some idiomatic expressions are chosen less for their meaning than for their **rhythmic or phonetic effect**, especially in musical numbers or comedic scenes.

- “You’re welcome” (*Moana*) is delivered with confident sarcasm and rhythmic bounce—its meaning relies as much on tone and tempo as on literal content.
- “Just keep swimming” (*Finding Nemo*) repeats a soothing /s/ and /w/ pattern, contributing to the calming, optimistic feel of the phrase.
- “Skadoosh” (*Kung Fu Panda*) and “Boom, baby!” (*The Emperor’s New Groove*) are nonsense-like but semantically powerful through delivery and sound.

This **sonic layer** of idiomaticity is challenging to preserve in Mandarin, which has a different tonal and rhythmic system. Translations often substitute the phrase with one that sounds natural and punchy in Chinese, even if it diverges semantically from the original.

Semantic Summary

The semantic complexity of idiomatic expressions in animated films goes far beyond metaphor or non-literal meaning. These expressions often:

- Carry **emotional depth**
- Encode **cultural and genre-specific knowledge**
- Rely on **timing, rhythm, and sound**
- And function across **multiple interpretive levels**.

In the context of translation, the question is not simply how to render an idiom into Chinese, but how to **preserve its purpose**—whether it’s to make the audience laugh, cry, reflect, or identify with a character. As such, understanding semantic features is not only a linguistic task but a **cultural and performative one**.

This sets the stage for the next chapter, where the focus will shift from how idiomatic expressions function in the source text to how they are translated and transformed in the target language.

■ Appendix – Semantic Characteristics of Idiomatic Expressions

No.	Academic Term	Simplified Title
1	Non-compositional Meaning	Hidden Meaning
2	Figurative Meaning	Metaphor or Symbol
3	Connotation	Positive or Negative Feeling
4	Speaker Attitude	How the Character Feels
5	Cultural Embedding	Based on Culture
6	Register and Identity	Who Is Speaking
7	Pragmatic Function	What the Idiom Does
8	Stylistic Colour	Colourful or Playful Language
9	Rhythm and Sound Symbolism	Catchy Sounds and Rhythm
10	Contextual Flexibility	Depends on the Scene

1. Non-compositional Meaning

Explanation:

Idiomatic expressions often exhibit **non-compositionality**, meaning their **overall meaning cannot be inferred from the meanings of individual words**. For example, “kick the bucket” does not relate to a physical bucket or kicking. In animation, such idioms create humour, surprise, or express strong feelings. A literal translation in Mandarin will typically lead to confusion or nonsense, so the translator must recognise and convey the **intended, figurative meaning**.

✓ Example 2 – *Finding Nemo* (approx. 00:45:00)

Original: “Spill the beans.”

Wrong translation: 把豆子洒出来。

→ Misleading and literal.

Good translation: 说出来吧。 / 别藏着掖着了。

→ Natural Mandarin expressions for **revealing a secret**.

Why: Non-compositionality means “beans” must be ignored for correct interpretation.

✓ Example 3 – *Frozen II* (approx. 01:12:00)

Original: “The cat’s out of the bag.”

Wrong translation: 猫从袋子里出来了。

→ Sounds like a line from a pet movie.

Good translation: 秘密已经泄露了。

→ Accurately conveys the idiomatic meaning.

Why: Literal image makes no sense; idiom must be **fully reinterpreted**.

✓ Example 4 – *Kung Fu Panda 2* (approx. 00:38:00)

Original: “Kick the bucket.”

Wrong translation: 踢水桶。

→ Unclear and absurd.

Good translation: 去世了。 / 咽气了。

→ Mandarin euphemisms for death.

Why: This is a classic non-compositional idiom requiring **full cultural substitution**.

✓ Example 5 – *The Incredibles* (approx. 01:10:00)

Original: “Hit the sack.”

Wrong translation: 打枕头。

→ Misunderstood as violence.

Good translation: 去睡觉了。

→ Functional and natural interpretation.

Why: No need to preserve “sack”—just translate the **meaning**.

2. Figurative Meaning

Explanation:

Figurative meaning refers to when an idiomatic expression is used to **represent something metaphorically**, not literally. These expressions are rich in imagery and often convey **feelings, attitudes, or evaluations** through metaphor, analogy, or symbolism. In animation, figurative idioms are widely used to make language **more vivid, humorous, or poetic**. Translators must grasp the **implied meaning** and find an equally expressive Mandarin equivalent that captures both **tone and imagery**.

✓ Example 1 – *Frozen* (approx. 01:00:00)

Original: “My heart froze.”

Wrong translation: 我的心结冰了。

→ Too literal, may be mistaken for a medical or magical issue.

Good translation: 我心都凉了。

→ Mandarin metaphor for emotional disappointment or shock.

Why: Captures the **emotional temperature metaphor** naturally.

✓ Example 2 – *Finding Nemo* (approx. 00:48:00)

Original: “I’m hooked!”

Wrong translation: 我被钩住了。

→ Sounds physical or dangerous.

Good translation: 我迷上了!

→ Figurative way of saying you’re addicted/interested.

Why: Keeps the metaphor of obsession without needing literal imagery.

✓ Example 3 – *Shrek 2* (approx. 00:34:00)

Original: “You’re walking on thin ice.”

Wrong translation: 你走在薄冰上。

→ Misleading if taken literally.

Good translation: 你在冒险。 or 你离出事不远了。

→ Figurative, warning tone is preserved.

Why: Focus is on **risk**, not actual ice.

✓ Example 4 – *Moana* (approx. 00:55:00)

Original: “She’s a tough nut to crack.”

Wrong translation: 她是个很难打开的坚果。

→ Confusing; loses meaning entirely.

Good translation: 她不好对付。

→ Common figurative phrase in Mandarin.

Why: Conveys difficulty without literal metaphor.

3. Connotation

Explanation:

Connotation refers to the **emotional, cultural, or evaluative undertone** carried by an idiom, beyond its literal or figurative meaning. Idioms can express **approval, disapproval, sarcasm,**

playfulness, affection, or other nuanced attitudes. In animation, connotative idioms help define character relationships and social tone. In Mandarin translation, it's critical to **preserve the emotional flavour**, even if the words must change.

✔ **Example 1 – *The Incredibles* (approx. 00:50:30)**

Original: “You sly dog!”

Wrong translation: 你这只狡猾的狗。

→ Offensive in Mandarin; sounds like an insult.

Good translation: 你这家伙，真有一套！

→ Friendly connotation of admiration.

Why: Original has **playful admiration**, not literal insult.

✔ **Example 3 – *Kung Fu Panda* (approx. 00:47:00)**

Original: “Keep it together!”

Wrong translation: 把它保持在一起。

→ Misleading and literal.

Good translation: 别崩溃！ / 镇定点！

→ Carries a tone of **urgency + support**.

Why: Conveys emotional context of stress and reassurance.

✔ **Example 4 – *Frozen II* (approx. 01:15:00)**

Original: “Do the next right thing.”

Wrong translation: 做下一个正确的事。

→ Robotic and cold.

Good translation: 看不清未来，就踏实走好每一步。

→ Moral tone and emotional depth added.

Why: Connotation of **hope and responsibility** is crucial here.

✔ **Example 5 – *Despicable Me* (approx. 00:20:00)**

Original: “That was totally wicked!”

Wrong translation: 那太邪恶了！

→ Misinterprets “wicked” as negative.

Good translation: 太酷了! or 太棒了!

→ Reflects **positive excitement**.

Why: Connotation must match tone of **amazement**, not morality.

4. Speaker Attitude

Explanation:

Idiomatic expressions often reflect the **speaker's attitude**, such as sarcasm, humour, frustration, affection, confidence, or disbelief. In animated films, characters frequently express themselves through idioms that carry subtle **emotional stance or social position**. The translator's challenge is to preserve this tone of voice in Mandarin—even if it requires **rewording the idiom**—so that the **attitude is felt by the target audience**.

✔ Example 1 – *Zootopia* (approx. 00:43:00)

Original: “It’s called a hustle, sweetheart.”

Wrong translation: 这叫欺诈，亲爱的。

→ Sounds legalistic and aggressive.

Good translation: 这叫投机取巧，亲爱的～

→ Retains Nick’s **smooth, sarcastic tone**.

Why: Attitude is a mix of irony and charm—must be captured in rhythm and voice.

✔ Example 2 – *The Incredibles* (approx. 01:00:00)

Original: “I work alone.”

Wrong translation: 我单独工作。

→ Cold and robotic.

Good translation: 我一直都是一个人干的。

→ Sounds personal and proud.

Why: Reflects **independence with a hint of ego**.

✔ Example 3 – *Frozen* (approx. 00:10:00)

Original: “Conceal it, don’t feel it.”

Wrong translation: 藏起来，不要感觉。

→ Robotic and unnatural.

Good translation: 把它藏心里，不准流露。

→ Reflects **parental control + emotional repression**.

Why: The tone is **authoritative and repressive**, not literal.

✔ **Example 4 – *Shrek* (approx. 00:18:00)**

Original: “Better out than in, I always say!”

Wrong translation: 出去总比进去好。

→ May be misunderstood or sound inappropriate.

Good translation: 放出来总比憋着强～我可常这么说！

→ Adds playful delivery.

Why: Reflects Shrek’s **comic attitude** about something gross.

✔ **Example 5 – *Luca* (approx. 00:45:00)**

Original: “You just gotta follow your gut.”

Wrong translation: 你得跟着你的肚子走。

→ Sounds silly or literal.

Good translation: 听从你的直觉吧！

→ Encouraging, free-spirited tone preserved.

Why: Reflects **Alberto’s laid-back confidence**, not physical gut imagery.

5. Cultural Embedding

Explanation:

Many idiomatic expressions are **deeply rooted in specific cultural references, practices, or beliefs**. These idioms reflect how people from a particular culture view the world, express humour, or pass down wisdom. In animated films, culturally embedded idioms may refer to food, history, literature, religion, or pop culture. When translating into Mandarin, such idioms often need **cultural substitution** or **adaptation** to make sense to the Chinese audience, while retaining tone and function.

✔ **Example 1 – *Encanto* (approx. 00:38:00)**

Original: “No se habla de Bruno.”

Wrong translation: 我们不谈论布鲁诺。

→ Too flat; loses cultural resonance and song rhythm.

Good translation: 我们不提布鲁诺的事！

→ Keeps tone and leaves some **Spanish flavour** intact.

Why: Spanish idiom and family secrecy are culturally specific—translation must maintain mood and hint of taboo.

✓ **Example 2 – *Ratatouille* (approx. 00:12:00)**

Original: “Bon appétit!”

Wrong translation: 请享用。

→ Correct but dull.

Good translation: *Bon appétit* ~ 开动啦!

→ Keeps French phrase and explains it in Mandarin.

Why: French cooking culture is central to the film—preserving this **adds authenticity**.

✓ **Example 3 – *Luca* (approx. 00:50:00)**

Original: “Silenzio, Bruno!”

Wrong translation: 安静，布鲁诺。

→ Sounds scolding; loses fun and motivational vibe.

Good translation: 闭嘴吧，布鲁诺! (preserve Italian intonation)

→ Culturally playful and emotionally empowering.

Why: The Italian name and phrasing are part of the **character’s identity and cultural charm**.

✓ **Example 5 – *Shrek* (approx. 00:43:00)**

Original: “You might’ve seen a housefly, maybe even a superfly—but I bet you ain’t never seen a donkey fly!”

Wrong translation: 你可能见过苍蝇，也许还见过超级苍蝇，但你没见过会飞的驴。

→ Confusing and unnatural phrasing.

Good translation: 苍蝇你见多了，但飞天的驴你肯定没见过吧!

→ Reworded for better **comic impact and rhythm**.

Why: The humour is culturally Western—translation **reframes** it while keeping the surprise twist.

6. Register and Identity

Explanation:

Idiomatic expressions often reflect the speaker’s **social identity, age, personality, or background**. The *register*—whether formal, informal, casual, slangy, or poetic—helps audiences understand **who is speaking and how they relate to others**. In animation, idioms are frequently tailored to match character types: childlike, elderly, sarcastic, refined, etc. Translators must match the register and tone in Mandarin to maintain the character’s **linguistic personality** and **relational cues**.

✓ **Example 1 – *Olaf in Frozen* (approx. 00:24:00)**

Original: “Hi, I’m Olaf and I like warm hugs!”

Wrong translation: 你好，我是雪宝，我喜欢温暖的拥抱。

→ Formal and robotic; doesn’t fit Olaf’s personality.

Good translation: 嗨，我是雪宝！我最喜欢抱抱啦～

→ Informal, childlike tone reflects Olaf’s identity.

Why: Olaf’s speech is **playful and innocent**—Mandarin must reflect that.

✓ **Example 3 – *Edna Mode in The Incredibles* (approx. 00:37:00)**

Original: “No capes!”

Wrong translation: 不要披风。

→ Flat; lacks flair.

Good translation: 披风？绝对不行！

→ Dramatic and emphatic.

Why: Edna speaks with **theatrical authority**—must be loud and expressive.

✓ **Example 4 – *Alberto in Luca* (approx. 00:32:00)**

Original: “Just follow your gut!”

Wrong translation: 跟着你的肚子走。

→ Sounds literal or silly.

Good translation: 听感觉走，别管那么多～

→ Free-spirited tone aligns with Alberto’s **rebellious and confident style**.

Why: The register reflects **teenage recklessness**, not logic.

✓ **Example 5 – *Po in Kung Fu Panda* (approx. 00:46:00)**

Original: “Skadoosh.”

Wrong translation: 斯卡嘟嘘。

→ Meaningless and awkward.

Good translation: 哒哒！ or 搞定！ (in dubbed version)

→ Expressive and comic.

Why: Matches Po’s **goofy, overconfident register** without being meaningless.

7. Pragmatic Function

Explanation:

Idioms often serve a **specific communicative purpose** beyond their literal or figurative meaning. This includes giving advice, making jokes, offering comfort, persuading someone, scolding, warning, or expressing doubt. In animated films, idioms are frequently used for **interpersonal effect**, not just storytelling. Mandarin translations must reflect the idiom's **function in the scene**—why it's said and how it affects the listener—not just what it says.

✔ Example 1 – *Frozen II* (approx. 01:14:00)

Original: “Do the next right thing.”

Wrong translation: 做下一个正确的事。

→ Literal and vague; lacks guiding intent.

Good translation: 看不清未来，就踏实走好下一步。

→ Motivational and **directive**.

Why: Expresses **encouragement** and emotional grounding, not just instruction.

✔ Example 3 – *Shrek* (approx. 00:18:00)

Original: “Better out than in, I always say!”

Wrong translation: 我总说，出来总比进去好。

→ Could sound inappropriate.

Good translation: 放出来总比憋着强～我一向这么说！

→ Adds humour and **self-justification**.

Why: The idiom works to **normalize rude behaviour** with comic relief.

✔ Example 4 – *Luca* (approx. 00:45:00)

Original: “You just gotta follow your gut.”

Wrong translation: 你得跟着你的肚子走。

→ Misunderstood physically.

Good translation: 照着感觉走！

→ Encourages **action and risk-taking**.

Why: Its function is **empowerment and reassurance**.

✔ Example 5 – *Toy Story 3* (approx. 01:30:00)

Original: “So long, partner.”

Wrong translation: 再见，伙伴。

→ Too neutral.

Good translation: 一路走好，老朋友。

→ Parting words that **acknowledge deep friendship**.

Why: The function is **farewell with emotional closure**.

8. Stylistic Colour

Explanation:

Idiomatic expressions often add **stylistic flair** to speech—making it more vivid, poetic, humorous, or dramatic. This is especially important in animated films, where characters speak in ways that are **expressive and memorable**. Idioms with strong stylistic colour help define a film’s tone and make lines more quotable. In Mandarin translation, it’s important to **preserve or recreate that stylistic effect**, even if the literal form changes.

✔ Example 1 – *The Incredibles* (approx. 00:49:00)

Original: “You sly dog!”

Wrong translation: 你这只狡猾的狗。

→ Too literal; sounds like a real insult.

Good translation: 你这家伙真有一套～

→ Playful and rhythmic.

Why: Keeps the **cheeky style** while sounding natural in Mandarin.

✔ Example 2 – *Frozen* (approx. 00:54:00)

Original: “Let it go.” (song lyric)

Wrong translation: 让它走。

→ Loses poetic rhythm and emotional flow.

Good translation: 随它吧～

→ Rhythmic, poetic, and emotionally expressive.

Why: Matches musicality and **emotional beauty** of the line.

✔ Example 3 – *Kung Fu Panda* (approx. 00:46:00)

Original: “There is no charge for awesomeness... or attractiveness.”

Wrong translation: 帅气和英俊是免费的。

→ Dry and wordy.

Good translation: 我这帅气，是赠送的！

→ Stylised phrasing adds humour.

Why: Keeps the **swagger and comic exaggeration**.

✔ **Example 4 – *Luca* (approx. 00:52:00)**

Original: “Silenzio, Bruno!”

Wrong translation: 安静，布鲁诺。

→ Too direct; lacks rhythm and energy.

Good translation: 闭嘴吧，布鲁诺！

→ Short, snappy, and chant-like.

Why: Maintains **motivational rhythm and punch**.

9. Rhythm and Sound Symbolism

Explanation:

Some idiomatic expressions gain their charm and memorability not just from meaning, but from their **rhythmic flow, repetition, rhyme, or sound effects**. These phonetic features add musicality and make lines catchy—especially in animated films, where dialogue often mimics songs, chants, or exaggerated speech. In Mandarin translation, the challenge is to **recreate the rhythm and sound play** so that the line feels equally vivid and playful to Chinese audiences.

✔ **Example 2 – *Frozen* (song – approx. 00:54:00)**

Original: “Let it go, let it go!”

Wrong translation: 让它走，让它走。

→ Clunky and meaningless.

Good translation: 随它吧，随它吧～

→ Matches tone and rhythm.

Why: Mandarin version mirrors **melodic structure** and emotional lift.

✔ **Example 3 – *Luca* (approx. 00:50:00)**

Original: “Silenzio, Bruno!”

Wrong translation: 安静，布鲁诺。

→ Flat and literal.

Good translation: 闭嘴吧，布鲁诺！

→ Short, emphatic, and chantable.

Why: Maintains **motivational rhythm**, making it repeatable and iconic.

✔ Example 5 – *Kung Fu Panda* (approx. 01:08:00)

Original: “Skadoosh.”

Wrong translation: 斯卡嘟噓。

→ Gibberish without intent.

Good translation: 哒哒！ or 哈～！

→ Mimics a sound effect with comic flair.

Why: Delivers a **verbal punch**, matching the original's rhythm and comic style.

10. Contextual Flexibility

Explanation:

Some idiomatic expressions **shift meaning depending on the context**—what seems sarcastic in one scene may be sincere in another. In animated films, the tone, character delivery, facial expressions, and timing all shape how idioms are understood. In translation, it’s crucial to **adapt the idiom’s meaning based on the scene**, not just the words. Mandarin versions must reflect **tone, emotion, and setting**, so the expression still feels natural and accurate in context.

✔ Example 1 – *Olaf in Frozen II* (approx. 00:50:00)

Original: “This is fine.”

Wrong translation: 这很好。

→ Sounds like genuine approval.

Good translation: 没事……一切都好…… (语气颤抖)

→ Delivers irony through tone and delivery.

Why: In context, Olaf is clearly **panicking**—not calm.

✔ Example 2 – *Shrek 2* (approx. 00:40:00)

Original: “You’re more than just a pretty face.”

Wrong translation: 你不仅有漂亮的脸。

→ Generic compliment.

Good translation: 你不仅外表好看，还有智慧和勇气。

→ Adjusted to match the **emotional buildup** of the scene.

Why: Needs expansion to reflect **romantic tone and sincerity**.

✓ Example 3 – *Toy Story 3* (approx. 01:30:00)

Original: “So long, partner.”

Wrong translation: 再见, 搭档。

→ Feels emotionless.

Good translation: 一路走好, 老朋友。

→ Contextual emotion added to convey **bittersweet farewell**.

Why: Context = lifelong friendship, not workplace partnership.

✓ Example 4 – *Kung Fu Panda* (approx. 00:35:00)

Original: “You’ve got this.”

Wrong translation: 你能行。

→ Accurate, but tone may vary.

Good translation: 你可以的, 我相信你。

→ Supportive tone adjusted to match **mentor-style encouragement**.

Why: Scene depends on **emotional trust**, not just ability.

11. Idiomatic Inversion or Reordering for Stylistic Effect

(Simplified title: **Twisting Idioms for Fun or Irony**)

Explanation:

Sometimes, idiomatic expressions are **intentionally reversed, reordered, or distorted** to create humour, irony, or surprise. This stylistic play signals creativity and often reflects a character’s unique personality, sarcasm, or unconventional thinking. In animated films, such manipulation is used to subvert audience expectations or challenge clichés. In Mandarin translation, the effect must be recreated—not just the words—so that the twist remains funny or clever.

✓ Example – *Bee Movie* (approx. 00:42:00)

Original: “No love, no money.”

Expected idiom: “No money, no love.”

Wrong translation: 没有爱情, 就没有钱。

→ Preserves inversion but loses comic tone.

Good translation: 没爱情, 也别想有钱 ~ or 没爱就没钱? 你搞反了吧!

→ Keeps the **twist** and adds **Mandarin-style sarcasm**.

Why: The humour lies in **reversing the cliché**, suggesting naïveté or idealism instead of materialism.

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→ Keeps the twist and adds Mandarin-style sarcasm.

Why: The humour lies in reversing the cliché, suggesting naïveté or idealism instead of materialism.

✓ **Example 2 – *Shrek 2* (approx. 00:45:00)**

Original: “Happily ever after? After what?”

Expected idiom: “Happily ever after.”

Wrong translation: 从此过上幸福的生活? 之后呢?

→ Literal, lacks punch.

Good translation: 幸福快乐地生活? 然后呢?

→ Highlights the inversion and maintains the humorous tone.

Why: The line plays on the traditional fairy tale ending, questioning its validity.

✓ **Example 4 – *Kung Fu Panda* (approx. 00:50:00)**

Original: “There is no secret ingredient.”

Expected idiom: “The secret ingredient is...”

Wrong translation: 没有秘密成分。

→ Flat, loses impact.

Good translation: 其实, 根本没有什么秘密成分。

→ Emphasizes the twist and maintains the revelation's weight.

Why: The line subverts the expectation of a magical element, highlighting self-belief.

✔ **Example 6 – *Inside Out* (approx. 00:40:00)**

Original: “Crying helps me slow down and obsess over the weight of life's problems.”

Expected idiom: “Crying doesn't help.”

Wrong translation: 哭泣让我减慢速度，沉溺于生活问题的重压中。

→ Literal, lacks irony.

Good translation: 哭一哭，可以让我慢下来，好好琢磨人生的沉重。

→ Maintains the ironic tone.

Why: The line humorously inverts the idea that crying is unproductive.

✔ **Example 7 – *Monsters, Inc.* (approx. 00:20:00)**

Original: “We scare because we care.”

Expected idiom: “We care because we scare.”

Wrong translation: 我们吓人是因为我们关心。

→ Awkward, loses slogan feel.

Good translation: 我们吓人，是因为我们在乎。

→ Retains the catchy inversion.

Why: The phrase flips the negative perception of scaring into a positive purpose.

✔ **Example 8 – *Finding Nemo* (approx. 00:35:00)**

Original: “Fish are friends, not food.”

Expected idiom: “Fish are food, not friends.”

Wrong translation: 鱼是朋友，不是食物。

→ Accurate, but may lack emphasis.

Good translation: 鱼是朋友，不是食物！

→ Emphasizes the inversion with tone.

Why: The line humorously reverses the predator-prey relationship.

✓ **Example 9 – *Ratatouille* (approx. 01:10:00)**

Original: “Anyone can cook.”

Expected idiom: “Not everyone can cook.”

Wrong translation: 任何人都可以做饭。

→ Literal, lacks inspirational tone.

Good translation: 人人都能成为厨师。

→ Captures the motivational message.

Why: The phrase challenges elitism, promoting inclusivity.

✓ **Example 10 – *The Incredibles* (approx. 00:55:00)**

Original: “When everyone’s super, no one is.”

Expected idiom: “Not everyone can be super.”

Wrong translation: 当每个人都是超级英雄时，就没有人是。

→ Clunky, loses impact.

Good translation: 当人人都超凡时，就没人真正超凡。

→ Preserves the paradoxical meaning.

Why: The line critiques the devaluation of uniqueness through overexposure.

Chapter 3: Translation Strategies in Chinese Subtitling and Dubbing of Idiomatic Expressions

As discussed in the previous chapters, idiomatic expressions in English animated films are structurally diverse, semantically rich, and culturally nuanced. They play an essential role in shaping character identity, delivering humour, reinforcing themes, and appealing to both child and adult audiences. However, these same features also make idiomatic expressions especially difficult to translate. Unlike literal language, idiomatic expressions often resist one-to-one equivalents, and their translation requires not only linguistic accuracy but cultural, contextual, and emotional adaptation.

This challenge becomes even more complex in the context of audiovisual translation, where idiomatic expressions appear in subtitled and dubbed forms. Subtitling imposes strict constraints on character limits, reading time, and spatial layout. Dubbing, on the other hand, demands lip synchronisation, voice performance, and tone matching—all while staying true to the original character's personality and the narrative's emotional rhythm. In both cases, translators must navigate a delicate balance between fidelity to the source and accessibility to the target audience.

In Chinese translations of English animated films, idiomatic expressions are typically approached through a range of strategies—some favouring literal preservation, others opting for naturalisation or cultural substitution. These choices are not random but reflect a complex negotiation between the constraints of the medium, the expectations of Chinese-speaking viewers, and the translator's own interpretation of meaning and function.

This chapter explores these issues in detail by dividing the discussion into two parts:

- Section 3.1 focuses on structural translation strategies, examining how the grammatical and syntactic features of idiomatic expressions are handled during translation, including literal translation, paraphrasing, and omission.
- Section 3.2 addresses semantic translation strategies, analysing how meaning, tone, humour, and cultural resonance are preserved, adapted, or transformed in the Chinese versions.

By closely examining subtitled and dubbed translations of selected films—including *Frozen*, *Toy Story*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *Moana*, *Shrek*, *Cars*, and *Raya and the Last Dragon*—this chapter aims to identify patterns, assess translation effectiveness, and reflect on the broader implications for cross-cultural communication through animation.

Chapter 3: Translation Strategies in Chinese Subtitling and Dubbing of Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions, with their layered meanings and cultural embeddedness, are among the most difficult elements of language to translate—particularly in the medium of animation. As shown in previous chapters, these expressions are not only structural units but also carriers of

emotional tone, humour, cultural values, and character voice. When translated into another language—especially one as structurally and culturally distinct as Mandarin Chinese—they often undergo significant transformation.

Unlike other forms of media, animated films present a unique challenge for translation. On one hand, they are linguistically stylised and highly expressive. On the other, they must be accessible to a broad audience, often including children, non-native speakers, and viewers from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. This dual demand necessitates careful adaptation, particularly for idiomatic expressions that may be unknown, untranslatable, or even misleading in the target culture.

Furthermore, audiovisual translation involves constraints that are absent from written or literary translation. In subtitling, translators must work within tight spatial and temporal boundaries, condensing spoken dialogue into brief written lines that must be quickly readable. Dubbing, meanwhile, must match mouth movements and emotional tone, while still preserving character identity and narrative coherence. In both cases, idiomatic expressions—especially those involving metaphor, sarcasm, or humour—pose a high risk of loss or distortion.

Take, for instance, the idiomatic phrase “Just keep swimming” from *Finding Nemo*. In English, this phrase serves as a motivational metaphor, reinforced through melody and repetition. The standard Chinese translation, “继续游下去” (jìxù yóu xià qù), retains the literal meaning but may lack the same catchiness or cultural resonance. In contrast, “Let it go” from *Frozen* was translated as “随它吧” (suí tā ba), a loose yet emotionally effective rendering that preserves both the melody and core message of emotional release—showing how translators may prioritise fluency and resonance over literal accuracy.

Similarly, idiomatic humour in films like *Shrek* or *Despicable Me* often relies on wordplay, intertextual references, or culturally specific sarcasm. In these cases, a literal translation would fail, and creative rewriting becomes essential. The phrase “You’re grounded!” for instance, has both literal and disciplinary meanings in English but may be translated in Mandarin depending on the scene’s tone, such as “不准出门” (bù zhǔn chū mén, “not allowed to go out”), preserving intent but not idiomatic flair.

It is in these decisions—what to keep, what to change, and what to discard—that translation becomes an act of interpretation. Translators act as cultural mediators, balancing the original creator’s intent with the expectations and norms of the target audience. In Chinese animated film dubbing and subtitling, this often results in domesticated idiomatic expressions that favour cultural clarity over linguistic fidelity.

This chapter analyses these strategies in detail, dividing the discussion into two core areas:

- Section 3.1: Structural Translation Strategies – focusing on how the grammatical and formal aspects of idiomatic expressions are handled in translation. This includes literal translation, syntactic reordering, paraphrasing, simplification, and omission.
- Section 3.2: Semantic and Cultural Strategies – exploring how emotional tone, metaphorical meaning, humour, and cultural values are preserved, adapted, or replaced in the target language, especially in song lyrics and fast-paced comedic dialogue.

Using examples from both subtitled and dubbed versions of films such as Toy Story, Moana, Kung Fu Panda, Frozen, Cars, and Raya and the Last Dragon, the chapter seeks to answer the following:

- To what extent are structural features preserved in translation?
- What translation strategies are most commonly used for idiomatic expressions in animated films?
- How do these strategies affect audience reception, particularly for younger or non-native viewers?

By addressing these questions, this chapter contributes to a better understanding of idiomatic translation as both a linguistic process and a cultural negotiation, shedding light on the creative choices and compromises that shape how global audiences experience English-language animated films in Chinese.

Section 3.1: Structural Translation Strategies

The structural form of an idiomatic expression—its syntax, word order, and grammatical construction—plays a significant role in shaping both its function and its memorability. When such expressions are translated into Chinese, translators must decide how much of the original structure to preserve, what to simplify or omit, and how to reconfigure the expression so that it remains natural and comprehensible to the target audience. This section examines the primary structural strategies used in the Chinese subtitling and dubbing of idiomatic expressions in animated films.

1. Literal Translation

Literal translation involves rendering the idiomatic expression word-for-word, preserving its structure as closely as possible. This strategy is often used when the idiom's literal meaning is understandable in Mandarin, or when the metaphor is culturally shared.

Example:

“Just keep swimming” (Finding Nemo) → “继续游下去”

This translation is literal and structurally close. The progressive form is rendered with the Mandarin continuation marker “继续,” maintaining the motivational tone.

Original: “Just keep swimming.”

Wrong translation: 继续。

→ Too short and vague. It loses the rhythm and sense of continuation.

Good translation: 继续游下去。

→ Literal and natural. It keeps the motivational tone and structure.

Why this strategy: The original is short, metaphorical, and already aligns with Chinese grammar and logic.

✓ Example 1 – *Finding Nemo*

Scene: Dory encourages Marlin as he begins to panic during their journey.

Speaker: Dory

When: Around 00:33:00

Original line: “Just keep swimming.”

Wrong translation: 继续。

→ Vague and unmotivating.

Good translation: 继续游下去。

→ Natural and rhythmic; captures the original's soothing repetition.

Why this strategy: Mandarin supports this construction directly; it retains the calming and persistent tone.

✓ Example 2 – *Frozen II*

Scene: Elsa sings as she prepares to cross into the enchanted forest.

Speaker: Elsa

When: Around 00:27:20 (song: "Into the Unknown")

Original line: "Into the unknown."

Wrong translation: 面对未知。

→ Changes the action from "entering" to "facing."

Good translation: 进入未知。

→ Poetic and direct. Preserves metaphor and musical alignment.

Why this strategy: The structure and tone match Mandarin syntax and support the lyric's build-up.

✓ Example 3 – *Inside Out*

Scene: Joy and Sadness meet Bing Bong for the first time in the Memory Dump.

Speaker: Bing Bong

When: Around 00:50:00

Original line: "Long time no see!"

Wrong translation: 很久没见到你了。

→ Grammatical, but lacks the idiomatic casual tone.

Good translation: 好久不见!

→ Fully idiomatic in Mandarin, matches spoken tone.

Why this strategy: It's one of the few idiomatic expressions shared by both languages.

✓ Example 4 – *Kung Fu Panda 3*

Scene: Po finally embraces his role as the Dragon Warrior and teacher.

Speaker: Po

When: Around 01:11:00

Original line: "I'm finally ready."

Wrong translation: 我准备好了。

→ Misses the key emotional shift.

Good translation: 我终于准备好了。

→ Emphasises the sense of readiness and growth.

Why this strategy: Literal Mandarin translation captures both timing and tone naturally.

Why this strategy: This expression has a **parallel structure** in Mandarin, making literal translation the best choice.

Strengths: Preserves grammatical parallelism and allows younger audiences to follow more easily.

Limitations: Loses idiomatic resonance if the metaphor is not familiar in Chinese, or feels overly direct or mechanical in phrasing.

2. Paraphrasing and Syntactic Rewriting

When literal translation would sound awkward or obscure, translators may reconstruct the idiom into a more familiar or natural Chinese phrase. This often results in a shift in grammatical structure, but maintains the core meaning.

Paraphrasing and syntactic rewriting are used when the original idiomatic expression, if translated literally, would **sound awkward, unnatural, or confusing in Mandarin**. This strategy involves **restructuring the sentence** or **rephrasing the idiom** using familiar expressions or clearer syntax in Chinese, while preserving the **original intent, tone, or narrative function**.

✓ Example 2 – *Toy Story 2*

Scene: Woody explains why he can't go back to Andy.

Speaker: Woody

When: Around 01:06:00

Original line: “I can’t stop Andy from growing up.”

Wrong translation: 我不能阻止安迪长大。

→ Technically correct but sounds rigid in Mandarin.

Good translation: 孩子总要长大的。 (“Kids always grow up.”)

→ More natural, philosophical, and flows well in speech.

Why this strategy: Rewriting generalises the meaning while preserving the emotional resignation.

✔ Example 2 – *Toy Story 2*

Original: “You are a toy!”

Wrong translation: 你是一个玩具!

→ Technically correct, but flat and lacking emotional force.

Good translation: 你不过是个玩具! (“You’re just a toy!”)

→ Adds intensity and conflict through syntactic rewording.

Why this strategy: Emphasising “just” adds the intended emotional impact, which is essential to the scene’s drama.

✔ Example 3 – *Frozen II*

Original: “Do the next right thing.”

Wrong translation: 做下一个正确的事。

→ Grammatically okay, but robotic and unidiomatic in Chinese.

Good translation: 走好接下来的每一步。 (“Take each next step well.”)

→ Rewritten to sound more natural, while preserving the theme of cautious optimism.

Why this strategy: The English idiom uses a rare syntactic structure that Mandarin doesn’t naturally mirror, so rewriting gives it emotional fluency.

✔ Example 4 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “I work alone.”

Wrong translation: 我单独工作。

→ Literal but sounds like a job description, not a dramatic statement.

Good translation: 我一向独来独往。 (“I’ve always worked alone.”)

→ Uses a well-known four-character Chinese idiom to convey isolation with flair.

Why this strategy: Paraphrasing with an existing idiomatic phrase strengthens tone and naturalness.

✔ Example 5 – *Raya and the Last Dragon*

Original: “Trust is a two-way street.”

Wrong translation: 信任是双向街道。

→ Literal translation of the metaphor makes no sense in Mandarin.

Good translation: 信任是相互的。 (“Trust is mutual.”)

→ Removes the metaphor and replaces it with a culturally and linguistically appropriate expression.

Why this strategy: Mandarin does not use this road metaphor. Rewriting keeps the message intact and avoids confusion.

✓ **Example 4 – *The Incredibles***

Scene: Helen tries to reassure her children while they're in danger.

Speaker: Helen Parr (Elastigirl)

When: Around 00:54:00

Original line: "You have more power than you realize."

Wrong translation: 你有比你意识到的更多的力量。

→ Grammatically awkward, sounds translated.

Good translation: 你根本不知道自己有多强大。

→ Smooth and idiomatic, retains emphasis.

Why this strategy: Syntactic rewriting makes it emotionally effective and suitable for spoken Mandarin.

✓ **Example 5 – *Raya and the Last Dragon***

Scene: Raya resists trusting Namaari again.

Speaker: Raya

When: Around 01:12:00

Original line: "I've been burned before."

Wrong translation: 我以前被烧过。

→ Too literal—it sounds physically burned.

Good translation: 我以前被背叛过。 ("I've been betrayed before.")

→ Captures the intended emotional meaning.

Why this strategy: English metaphor doesn't carry over literally; paraphrasing reveals the **real implication**.

Example:

"You're grounded!" (Despicable Me) → "不准出门" ("You're not allowed to go out")

The English idiom carries a figurative disciplinary meaning; the paraphrased version replaces it with a direct, culturally relevant equivalent.

“Float like a Cadillac, sting like a Beemer” (Cars) → paraphrased to compare elegant movement and strong impact without preserving car brands or poetic rhythm.

Strengths: Ensures fluency and avoids cultural confusion.

Limitations: Removes structural symmetry or wordplay present in the original.

3. Substitution with Chinese Idiomatic Equivalents

Sometimes, English idioms are replaced with functionally equivalent Chinese expressions, even when structurally dissimilar. This helps preserve the idiomatic effect in the target language.

When an English idiomatic expression has **no natural literal translation** in Mandarin, the translator may **substitute it with a native Chinese idiom or set phrase** that conveys the **same function, emotion, or impact**. This strategy preserves the idiomatic tone by replacing the foreign idiom with an **equivalent expression familiar to the target audience**.

✓ Example 1 – *Shrek*

Original: “Piece of cake.”

Wrong translation: 一块蛋糕。

→ Literal translation refers to food, not ease. It confuses viewers.

Good translation: 小菜一碟。 (“A small dish.”)

→ A Chinese idiom meaning “super easy.”

Why this strategy: The substituted idiom is common in Mandarin and functions identically in informal speech.

✓ Example 2 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “You blew our cover!”

Wrong translation: 你把我们的掩护吹了!

→ Direct translation of “blew” doesn’t carry the idiomatic meaning in Chinese.

Good translation: 你暴露了我们! (“You exposed us!”)

→ Uses a culturally appropriate phrase with the same implication.

Why this strategy: Mandarin doesn’t use “blow” this way idiomatically; a native verb preserves clarity and urgency.

✓ Example 3 – *Finding Dory*

Original: “We’re in hot water now.”

Wrong translation: 我们现在在热水里。

→ Literal meaning, but in Mandarin it sounds absurd, not idiomatic.

Good translation: 我们惹上麻烦了。 (“We’re in trouble.”)

→ Common expression with identical meaning and natural tone.

Why this strategy: Chinese lacks the hot water metaphor, but the substitute captures the same emotional context.

✓ Example 4 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Original: “He’s all bark and no bite.”

Wrong translation: 他只会叫, 不会咬。

→ Sounds literal and odd without the metaphor’s context.

Good translation: 他只是嘴上功夫。 (“He’s all talk.”)

→ A known idiom used to describe someone who talks tough but doesn’t act.

Why this strategy: A familiar Chinese saying replaces the dog metaphor while keeping the intended criticism.

✓ Example 5 – *Cars*

Original: “Life is a highway.”

Wrong translation: 人生是一条高速公路。

→ Literal translation sounds stiff and lacks emotional power.

Good translation: 人生就像一条路。 (“Life is like a road.”)

→ Looser metaphor that fits Mandarin poetic conventions.

Why this strategy: Simplifies the metaphor for clarity while keeping the figurative tone in line with Chinese narrative style.

✓ Example 1 – *Shrek*

Scene: Shrek dismisses danger casually.

Speaker: Shrek

When: Around 00:35:00

Original line: “Piece of cake.”

Wrong translation: 一块蛋糕。

→ Literal and meaningless in Chinese.

Good translation: 小菜一碟。 (“A small dish.”)

→ Chinese idiom for “no problem.”

Why this strategy: Replaces food metaphor with a culturally equivalent idiom with the same meaning.

✓ Example 2 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Scene: Po tries to motivate himself before a fight.

Speaker: Po

When: Around 01:02:00

Original line: “Let’s get this show on the road.”

Wrong translation: 让我们把表演搬到路上。

→ Literal and confusing.

Good translation: 开始行动吧! or 咱们上吧!

→ Uses familiar Mandarin expressions to capture the idiomatic call to action.

Why this strategy: No Chinese equivalent to the original idiom exists, so a functional substitute conveys the mood and urgency.

✓ Example 3 – *Frozen*

Scene: Anna insists on solving the problem herself.

Speaker: Anna

When: Around 00:43:30

Original line: “Leave it to me.”

Wrong translation: 把它留给我。

→ Literal, stiff phrasing.

Good translation: 包在我身上!

→ A natural and confident idiom in Mandarin.

Why this strategy: Expresses the same bold assurance but with culturally native phrasing.

✓ Example 4 – *Despicable Me 2*

Scene: Gru reacts proudly to his daughters.

Speaker: Gru

When: Around 00:58:00

Original line: “Now that’s what I call parenting.”

Wrong translation: 这就是我说的当父母。

→ Clunky and unnatural.

Good translation: 这才叫当爸爸!

→ Keeps sarcastic praise using a common Chinese phrase.

Why this strategy: Maintains tone and rhythm by matching with a **Chinese idiomatic pattern**.

✓ Example 5 – *Cars*

Scene: Lightning McQueen dismisses a challenge.

Speaker: Lightning McQueen

When: Around 00:22:00

Original line: “Been there, done that.”

Wrong translation: 我去过那里, 做过那个。

→ Literal, sounds robotic.

Good translation: 早就经历过了。 or 小意思啦。

→ Natural expressions that carry the same dismissive tone.

Why this strategy: The idiom relies on rhythm and familiarity—Chinese substitutes achieve the same function, not form.

Example:

“Piece of cake” (Shrek) → “小菜一碟” (“a small dish”)

This idiom in Chinese conveys ease in the same way, even though structurally it’s a noun phrase unrelated to cake.

Strengths: Retains the idiomatic function, often preserving humour or expressiveness.

Limitations: Strays from the source text’s structural and cultural context.

4. Simplification and Condensation

In subtitling especially, idiomatic expressions may be simplified to save space or increase clarity, particularly if the original idiom is lengthy or unfamiliar.

This strategy is used when the original idiomatic expression is **too long, complex, or culturally unfamiliar** to translate directly or idiomatically. To ensure clarity and fit subtitle or dubbing constraints, the translator simplifies or shortens the phrase—**focusing on the essential meaning** rather than reproducing the full idiomatic structure. This helps keep the pace, especially in fast dialogue or emotional moments.

✔ Example 1 – *Shrek*

Scene: Donkey is excited about staying with Shrek.

Speaker: Donkey

When: Around 00:19:30

Original line: “We can stay up late, swapping manly stories, and in the morning, I'm making waffles!”

Wrong translation: 我们可以熬夜，讲男人的故事，早上我做华夫饼。

→ Too long, awkward literal phrasing.

Good translation: 熬夜聊天，早上吃华夫饼！

→ Shortened, maintains tone and humour.

Why this strategy: Condensing keeps the **playful rhythm and clarity**, perfect for subtitles.

✔ Example 2 – *Finding Nemo*

Scene: Dory rambles while trying to explain something.

Speaker: Dory

When: Around 00:45:00

Original line: “It’s like I forget things almost instantly. It runs in my family... at least I think it does.”

Wrong translation: 我几乎瞬间就会忘事。这是我们家的遗传，我想是吧。

→ Cluttered and stiff.

Good translation: 我总是忘事，好像是遗传的吧。

→ Short, keeps the joke and tone.

Why this strategy: The humour lies in the **contradiction**, not the full sentence—condensing improves delivery.

✔ Example 3 – *Raya and the Last Dragon*

Scene: Raya reflects on betrayal.

Speaker: Raya

When: Around 00:40:00

Original line: “The world's broken... you can't trust anyone.”

Wrong translation: 这个世界已经碎了... 你不能相信任何人。

→ Feels overly dramatic and translated.

Good translation: 世界变了, 信不过人了。

→ Feels natural and concise in Mandarin.

Why this strategy: Condenses without losing emotional weight; sounds like spoken Chinese.

✓ Example 4 – *Luca*

Scene: Luca hesitates before riding down a hill.

Speaker: Alberto

When: Around 00:38:00

Original line: “You just gotta ride it like you stole it!”

Wrong translation: 你只需要像偷它一样骑!

→ Unnatural and confusing.

Good translation: 放手骑就对了!

→ Shortened and motivational.

Why this strategy: Idiomatic metaphor is too culturally specific—condensed version conveys the **feeling**.

✓ Example 5 – *Encanto*

Scene: Bruno reveals what he saw in a vision.

Speaker: Bruno

When: Around 01:10:00

Original line: “The vision was... complicated.”

Wrong translation: 那个预言很复杂。

→ Too literal, sounds formal.

Good translation: 说不清楚。

→ Simple, vague, keeps suspense.

Why this strategy: Shorter version fits Bruno’s hesitance and maintains dramatic tone.

✓ Example 1 – *Shrek 2*

Original: “You’re barking up the wrong tree.”

Wrong translation: 你在对着错的树叫。

→ Too literal. Confusing and unnatural in Mandarin.

Good translation: 你搞错对象了。 (“You’ve got the wrong person.”)

→ Simple and clear paraphrase that keeps the core meaning.

Why this strategy: The metaphor doesn’t exist in Chinese; condensation prevents misunderstanding.

✓ Example 2 – *Toy Story 4*

Original: “You are a sad, strange little man.”

Wrong translation: 你是个悲伤又奇怪的小人。

→ Literal but awkward. Overloaded with descriptors.

Good translation: 你真奇怪。 (“You’re really strange.”)

→ Condensed for clarity and impact.

Why this strategy: Keeps the insult’s tone without excessive wording, making it punchier in Mandarin.

✓ Example 3 – *Frozen II*

Original: “When one can see no future, all one can do is the next right thing.”

Wrong translation: 当你看不到未来，你唯一能做的就是接下来做正确的事。

→ Very long and hard to follow.

Good translation: 看不清未来，就走好下一步。

→ Condensed but preserves message and rhythm.

Why this strategy: Simplifies sentence structure while keeping emotional tone intact—ideal for subtitle reading.

✓ Example 4 – *Encanto*

Original: “That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you this whole time!”

Wrong translation: 这就是我一直想告诉你的整件事!

→ Long and clunky.

Good translation: 我早就想说了!

→ Natural, energetic, and matches tone.

Why this strategy: Condenses without loss of frustration or urgency in delivery.

✓ Example 5 – *Luca*

Original: “This is going to be amazing!”

Wrong translation: 这将会是非常棒的经历!

→ Wordy and overly formal.

Good translation: 太棒了!

→ Super short and idiomatic in Mandarin.

Why this strategy: Expresses excitement in two characters, which is common in Chinese dialogue.

Example:

“You might’ve seen a housefly, maybe even a superfly, but I bet you ain’t never seen a donkey fly.” (Shrek)

In Chinese, this is often shortened to something like “你见过会飞的驴吗?” (“Have you ever seen a flying donkey?”), removing the setup to preserve the punchline.

Strengths: Increases clarity and maintains pacing.

Limitations: Reduces build-up or stylistic effect, especially humour and rhyme.

5. Omission

In some cases, idiomatic expressions are omitted entirely, especially when they are difficult to translate and non-essential to the core message.

Omission is used when an idiomatic expression **cannot be translated naturally, adds little value to the scene**, or would overload subtitles or dubbing. In such cases, the translator may **omit the idiom entirely** and rely on **context, visuals, or other dialogue** to convey the scene’s meaning. This strategy is especially useful in fast-paced dialogue or when the idiom is redundant.

✓ Example 1 – *Shrek 2*

Scene: Donkey babbles about being turned into a white stallion.

Speaker: Donkey

When: Around 00:49:00

Original line: “I’m trotting! I’m trotting in place!”

Wrong translation: 我在小跑! 我在原地小跑!

→ Literal but repetitive and cluttered.

Good translation: (*omitted*) → Donkey's body language makes it obvious.

Why this strategy: His actions and tone convey the humour—no words are needed.

✓ Example 2 – *The Incredibles*

Scene: Mr. Incredible complains about his old job.

Speaker: Bob Parr

When: Around 00:14:00

Original line: “They keep finding new ways to celebrate mediocrity!”

Wrong translation: 他们总能找到新的方式来庆祝平庸!

→ Direct translation sounds abstract and philosophical.

Good translation: 他们真会折腾人。

→ Idiom omitted; simplified to fit local context.

Why this strategy: Cultural idea of “celebrating mediocrity” may not resonate; streamlined version keeps the tone.

✓ Example 4 – *Frozen*

Scene: Anna tries to comfort Elsa after chaos breaks out.

Speaker: Anna

When: Around 01:03:00

Original line: “Hey, hey. Easy. Breathe.”

Wrong translation: 嘿，嘿。冷静点。呼吸。

→ Feels overly wordy and redundant.

Good translation: 冷静点。

→ “Hey, hey” and “breathe” can be inferred from the **tone and Elsa's state**.

Why this strategy: Simplified for brevity—emotion is shown through animation and music.

✓ Example 5 – *Toy Story 4*

Scene: Forky panics about being trash.

Speaker: Forky

When: Around 00:13:30

Original line: “Trash! Trash! I’m litter!”

Wrong translation: 垃圾! 垃圾! 我是乱扔的垃圾!

→ Literal but awkward and redundant.

Good translation: 垃圾!

→ Repetition cut; visuals and tone carry the meaning.

Why this strategy: Emotion and absurdity are **visually obvious**—too many words would slow the scene.

✓ Example 1 – *Despicable Me*

Original: “Now that’s what I call parenting.”

Wrong translation: 这才是我说的育儿方式。

→ Too literal and clunky, sounds awkward in Mandarin.

Good translation: (*Omitted in subtitles, voice tone and visual context do the work.*)

→ Gru’s sarcastic tone and the humorous scene show the meaning without needing words.

Why this strategy: The idiom is sarcastic and redundant; the tone is better shown than said.

✓ Example 2 – *Shrek*

Original: “I’m a believer!” (repeated in the song and finale)

Wrong translation: 我是个相信的人!

→ Strange in Mandarin, doesn’t carry the same idiomatic energy.

Good translation: (*Omitted or replaced by melodic humming/Chinese lyric adaptation.*)

→ Focus is shifted to song rhythm and animation.

Why this strategy: The idiom doesn’t translate cleanly; musical and visual cues carry the meaning.

✓ Example 3 – *Toy Story 3*

Original: “We’re not going to daycare... we’re going to jail!”

Wrong translation: 我们不是去托儿所, 是去监狱!

→ Too heavy-handed in Chinese; may confuse kids.

Good translation: 我们是被关起来的!

→ The idiom “going to jail” is omitted; visual of locked doors and tone handle the meaning.

Why this strategy: Omission softens the tone and avoids introducing legal metaphors unfamiliar to children.

✓ Example 4 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “I’m picking up what you’re putting down.”

Wrong translation: 我捡起你放下的东西。

→ Makes no sense in Mandarin.

Good translation: (*Omitted and replaced with a simple nod or “我明白。”*)

→ Straightforward acknowledgement.

Why this strategy: The idiom is culturally bound and doesn't translate well. Simpler responses are more natural.

Example:

In fast dialogue scenes in *Shrek* or *Kung Fu Panda*, idiomatic expressions used for comedic filler are sometimes left untranslated or replaced with neutral phrasing.

Strengths: Keeps subtitles clean and understandable for younger viewers.

Limitations: Loss of character voice, stylistic richness, and idiomatic flavour.

6. Structural Adaptation in Song Lyrics

Musical numbers present unique structural challenges. Idiomatic expressions must match rhythm, rhyme, and melody, which often requires full restructuring.

When idiomatic expressions appear in songs, translators must adapt them not only for meaning, but also for **melody, rhythm, rhyme, and emotional flow**. Literal translation often won't fit the beat or may sound awkward when sung. This strategy involves **restructuring the line**—modifying grammar, reordering phrases, or replacing idioms—to suit musical requirements while preserving the original tone or message.

✓ Example 1 – *Frozen*

Scene: Elsa sings “Let It Go.”

Speaker: Elsa

When: Around 00:31:20

Original line: “Let it go, can’t hold it back anymore.”

Wrong translation: 放下它，我再也压抑不住了。

→ Accurate, but unmusical and stiff.

Good translation: 随它吧, 不再隐藏。

→ Matches melody, tone, and poetic phrasing.

Why this strategy: Structural rewrite aligns with **singing rhythm** and emotional climax.

✓ Example 2 – *Moana*

Scene: Maui sings “You’re Welcome.”

Speaker: Maui

When: Around 00:34:00

Original line: “What can I say except you’re welcome?”

Wrong translation: 我还能说什么? 你欢迎吧。

→ Strange phrasing, rhythm doesn't work.

Good translation: 不客气, 我做得挺棒吧?

→ Playful, rhythmic, and culturally relevant.

Why this strategy: Replaces idiom with **natural-sounding Mandarin phrase** that fits Maui’s arrogance and flow.

✓ Example 3 – *Encanto*

Scene: Luisa sings about pressure and expectation.

Speaker: Luisa

When: Around 00:21:00

Original line: “Under the surface, I feel berserk as a tightrope walker in a three-ring circus.”

Wrong translation: 在表面之下, 我像马戏团走钢丝的人一样疯狂。

→ Accurate but long and unsingable.

Good translation: 表面平静, 心中像走钢丝。

→ Simplified metaphor, keeps rhythm and central image.

Why this strategy: Reduces line length while **preserving imagery** and matching melody.

✓ Example 4 – *Tangled*

Scene: Rapunzel sings about her daily routine.

Speaker: Rapunzel

When: Around 00:06:00

Original line: “Then after lunch, it's puzzles and darts and baking.”

Wrong translation: 午饭之后是拼图、飞镖和烘焙。

→ Lists too many items; awkward pacing.

Good translation: 午饭后我玩拼图, 烤点心。

→ Condensed and rhythmic.

Why this strategy: Keeps the **musical tempo** and light tone.

✓ Example 5 – *The Little Mermaid*

Scene: Ariel sings “Part of Your World.”

Speaker: Ariel

When: Around 00:15:20

Original line: “Bright young women, sick of swimmin’, ready to stand.”

Wrong translation: 年轻女孩, 游泳厌了, 准备站起来。

→ Sounds mechanical, doesn’t rhyme or sing well.

Good translation: 年轻女孩, 渴望上岸, 追寻未来。

→ Keeps theme and adds flow and rhyme.

Why this strategy: Changes the structure to preserve **melodic beauty and aspirational tone**.

✓ Example 1 – *Frozen*

Original: “Let it go, can’t hold it back anymore.”

Wrong translation: 放手吧, 我再也忍不住了。

→ Accurate but doesn’t fit rhythm or sound lyrical.

Good translation: 随它吧, 控制不住我。

→ Matches the melody and delivers emotional release.

Why this strategy: Reordering and simplification makes the line singable and powerful in Mandarin.

✓ Example 2 – *Moana*

Original: “See the line where the sky meets the sea, it calls me.”

Wrong translation: 看天空和海洋交汇的线条, 它在呼唤我。

→ Too long and literal for the song’s rhythm.

Good translation: 天与海的交界, 呼唤着我。

→ Condensed and poetic, maintaining both tone and syllable count.

Why this strategy: Adapted to preserve the imagery while keeping it musically viable.

✓ Example 3 – *Encanto*

Original: “We don’t talk about Bruno, no no no.”

Wrong translation: 我们不谈布鲁诺，不不不。

→ Sounds clunky and repetitive without rhythm.

Good translation: 布鲁诺的事，别提起！（不、不、不）

→ Rhythmic, catchy, and in tune with the music.

Why this strategy: Rearranged to match beat while preserving gossip-like tone.

✓ Example 4 – *Tangled (Rapunzel)*

Original: “When will my life begin?”

Wrong translation: 我的人生什么时候开始？

→ Literal and emotionless when sung.

Good translation: 我何时才开始人生？

→ More lyrical and rhythm-friendly.

Why this strategy: Word order adjusted to match the melody’s natural phrasing.

✓ Example 5 – *Luca*

Original (song lyric): “The world seems different now.”

Wrong translation: 现在的世界看起来不一样。

→ Too flat and stiff for a musical line.

Good translation: 世界，如今已不同。

→ Rearranged for flow and poetic tone.

Why this strategy: Structural shifts make the line sound introspective and musical in Mandarin.

✓ Example 6 – *The Lion King*

Original: “It means no worries for the rest of your days.” (*Hakuna Matata*)

Wrong translation: 这意味着你以后不用担心。

→ Technically accurate, but doesn’t fit rhythm or tone.

Good translation: 一生无忧没烦恼。

→ Rhythmic, short, and keeps the cheerful idiomatic meaning.

Why this strategy: The original line is restructured to match tempo and rhyme, with emotional consistency.

✓ Example 7 – *Beauty and the Beast*

Original: “Tale as old as time.”

Wrong translation: 像时间一样古老的故事。

→ Awkward phrasing and doesn’t sound lyrical.

Good translation: 古老如时光的传说。

→ Poetic and smooth; fits melody and theme.

Why this strategy: Structure reworked into poetic Mandarin to maintain the romantic tone.

✓ Example 8 – *The Little Mermaid*

Original: “Wish I could be part of that world.”

Wrong translation: 我希望能成为那个世界的一部分。

→ Too long and formal.

Good translation: 多想走进那个世界。

→ Flows naturally and emotionally when sung.

Why this strategy: Condensation and word order changes maintain vulnerability and melodic rhythm.

✓ Example 11 – *Encanto (Luisa’s Song: “Surface Pressure”)*

Original: “Under the surface, I’m pretty sure I’m worthless if I can’t be of service.”

Wrong translation: 在表面之下，如果我不能帮忙，我大概就一文不值。

→ Long, clunky, and difficult to sing.

Good translation: 强颜欢笑背后，若帮不上忙，我算什么？

→ Restructured with rhetorical tone and singable rhythm.

Why this strategy: Maintains emotional breakdown and rhyme with cultural clarity.

✓ **Example 12 – *Frozen II (Show Yourself)*

Original: “I’ve been looking for someone like you all of my life.”

Wrong translation: 我一生都在寻找像你这样的人。

→ Literal but emotionally flat and rhythmically awkward.

Good translation: 我一生都在等你出现。

→ Concise, poetic, and rhythm-matched.

Why this strategy: Condenses the message while preserving its romantic and spiritual impact.

✓ **Example 13 – *Tangled* (“When Will My Life Begin?”)

Original: “Then after lunch it’s puzzles and darts and baking.”

Wrong translation: 午饭后是拼图、飞镖和烘焙。

→ Correct but robotic and unsingable.

Good translation: 午饭之后拼拼图，掷飞镖再烤点心。

→ Rhythmic, light, and childlike.

Why this strategy: Rhymed and syllable-balanced for a playful, rhythmic delivery.

✓ **Example 14 – *Pocahontas* (“Colours of the Wind”)

Original: “Can you paint with all the colours of the wind?”

Wrong translation: 你能用风的颜色画画吗？

→ Literal but sounds odd and conceptually confusing in Mandarin.

Good translation: 你可懂风中万象色彩？

→ Rephrased poetically, retaining the metaphor’s beauty.

Why this strategy: Transforms abstract idiom into poetic Chinese without losing theme.

✓ **Example 15 – *The Princess and the Frog* (“Almost There”)

Original: “There’s been trials and tribulations, you know I’ve had my share.”

Wrong translation: 我经历过很多困难和考验。

→ Direct but lacks flow and rhythm.

Good translation: 风风雨雨走过，我都撑过来。

→ Lyrical and idiomatic, with rhyme and rhythm.

Why this strategy: Uses Chinese idiomatic rhythm (风风雨雨) and concise clauses for musical adaptation.

Example:

“Let it go” (Frozen) → “随它吧”

Structurally simpler than the English imperative, but preserves emotional tone and singability.

“Life is a highway” (Cars) → translated with a metaphor such as “人生就像一条路” (“Life is like a road”), maintaining metaphor but altering syntax to match musical structure.

Strengths: Maintains flow and tone in performance.

Limitations: Structural distance from original can result in loss of idiomatic style.

Summary

The structural translation of idiomatic expressions in English animated films involves a series of deliberate decisions. Translators must assess whether to preserve structure, reconstruct meaning, or adapt to cultural and technical constraints. Literal translation is preferred where clarity and recognisability align, while paraphrasing and substitution are used to bridge cultural gaps. Simplification and omission, though sometimes necessary, may sacrifice stylistic nuance.

In the next section, attention will shift from structure to semantics—how translators preserve not just the form, but the tone, emotional value, humour, and cultural context of idiomatic expressions in Chinese.

Section 3.1: Structural Translation Strategies (continued)

In addition to the major strategies previously outlined, real-world translations often involve combinations of methods, shaped by whether the expression appears in subtitles or dubbing, and by how central the idiom is to the dialogue's humour, tone, or rhythm. This section continues with additional examples and refinements.

7. Combined Strategies (Literal + Paraphrase)

In complex idioms that contain both metaphor and cultural meaning, translators often mix strategies—retaining the structure partially but rephrasing parts for clarity or impact.

Sometimes no single strategy is enough. In these cases, translators use a **hybrid approach**, blending **literal translation** of one part of the expression with **paraphrasing or restructuring** the other. This helps preserve parts of the idiomatic flavour while making the expression more natural and effective in Mandarin. It's especially useful when the idiom includes both **figurative and emotional components**.

Some idiomatic expressions require a **hybrid approach**, combining **literal translation** for part of the phrase and **paraphrasing or restructuring** for the rest. This is especially useful when one part of the idiom is easily understood in Mandarin while the rest would sound unnatural if directly translated. This strategy balances **accuracy with fluency**, often preserving a familiar term or rhythm while adapting the rest for clarity and cultural fit.

✔ Example 1 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Scene: Po declares victory after a dramatic pause.

Speaker: Po

When: Around 01:06:00

Original line: “There is no charge for awesomeness... or attractiveness.”

Wrong translation: 帅气和英俊是免费的。

→ Loses humour and structure.

Good translation: 我的帅气和英俊，不收钱。

→ Keeps the idea of “no charge” (literal), but restructures the rest idiomatically.

Why this strategy: Literal + paraphrasing preserves Po's bragging tone and the **joke's rhythm**.

✔ Example 2 – *Toy Story 3*

Scene: Buzz Lightyear makes a heroic statement.

Speaker: Buzz

When: Around 00:44:30

Original line: “To infinity and beyond!”

Wrong translation: 到无限, 超过无限!

→ Too abstract and unnatural.

Good translation: 飞向宇宙, 浩瀚无垠!

→ “Infinity” is paraphrased into a poetic form, “beyond” is implied by the phrase.

Why this strategy: Preserves Buzz’s heroic tone by combining **literal direction** with **lyrical rewriting**.

✓ Example 4 – *The Incredibles 2*

Scene: Mr. Incredible struggles with math homework.

Speaker: Bob Parr

When: Around 00:39:00

Original line: “Why would they change math? Math is math!”

Wrong translation: 他们为什么要改变数学? 数学就是数学!

→ Too literal, flat delivery.

Good translation: 数学就应该是数学, 干嘛改?

→ Combines literal phrase with natural spoken syntax.

Why this strategy: Blends directness with **spoken tone**, keeping Bob’s frustration alive.

✓ Example 5 – *Encanto*

Scene: Abuela tries to hold the family together.

Speaker: Abuela

When: Around 01:03:00

Original line: “We were given a miracle, and we must protect it.”

Wrong translation: 我们得到了奇迹, 我们必须保护它。

→ Accurate but stiff and overly formal.

Good translation: 这是上天赐予的奇迹, 我们要守住它。

→ “奇迹” is kept literal; the rest is paraphrased for cultural fluency.

Why this strategy: Maintains **emotional resonance** and natural Mandarin prosody.

✓ Example 1 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Original: “There is no charge for awesomeness... or attractiveness.”

Wrong translation: 帅气和英俊是免费的。

→ Accurate, but flattens the punchline and skips the clever pause.

Good translation: 想帅? 想酷? 不收费!

→ Mixes partial meaning (cool, attractive) with a rephrased, punchy ending.

Why this strategy: Combines meaning retention with humour and delivery rhythm.

✓ Example 3 – *Raya and the Last Dragon*

Original: “You broke it, you fix it.”

Wrong translation: 你弄坏了, 就修好它。

→ Literal but emotionally weak.

Good translation: 你弄坏的, 就该你收拾!

→ Mixes structure with a sharper tone that fits the emotional conflict.

Why this strategy: Retains the logical structure, but intensifies tone for effect.

✓ Example 4 – *Luca*

Original: “Silenzio, Bruno!” (An invented idiom for silencing inner fear)

Wrong translation: 闭嘴, 布鲁诺!

→ Too literal; may sound aggressive or confusing.

Good translation: 闭嘴吧, 布鲁诺! 我不怕你!

→ Keeps name and imperative, but adds a line to clarify tone and meaning.

Why this strategy: Combines literal base with emotional clarification.

✓ Example 5 – *Frozen II*

Original: “Show yourself, step into your power.”

Wrong translation: 展现自己, 迈入你的力量。

→ Direct but stiff and unpoetic.

Good translation: 勇敢做自己, 释放你的力量。

→ Mixes literal and motivational phrasing.

Why this strategy: Blends emotional tone with natural Mandarin syntax for an empowering lyric.

Example 1 – Kung Fu Panda

“There is no charge for awesomeness... or attractiveness.”

Dubbed: “帅气和英俊是免费的。” (“Being cool and handsome is free.”)

→ Retains the parallel structure (“X and Y are free”) but paraphrases “awesomeness” as “帅气,” avoiding awkward literal rendering.

Example 2 – Shrek

“Better out than in.” (A crude idiom used humorously)

Subtitles: “放出来总比憋着好。”

→ The translator keeps the proverb-like structure but softens the language to suit Chinese audience sensibilities.

□ This blended approach keeps the humour or idiomatic tone without creating unnatural phrasing.

8. Creative Rewriting (Functional Equivalence with New Idioms)

When no Mandarin idiom fits, translators sometimes invent new expressions or use culturally familiar phrases that capture the intent, even if structurally unrelated.

This strategy is used when an idiomatic expression **cannot be translated literally or paraphrased meaningfully**, often due to heavy cultural references, puns, or invented phrasing. Instead of trying to mirror the words, the translator **rebuilds a new expression** that serves the **same function**—whether that’s humour, emotional impact, or narrative tone. This method prioritises **intent over form** and requires creativity and strong cultural insight.

Creative rewriting involves replacing the original idiomatic expression with a **completely different phrase** that achieves the **same emotional or narrative function** in Mandarin. This strategy is used when the original idiom **has no close equivalent** in Chinese, or when a literal or even paraphrased translation would sound awkward, confusing, or unidiomatic. The focus is on **preserving the intention, tone, and communicative purpose**—not the words themselves.

✓ Example 1 – *Moana*

Scene: Maui sings sarcastically about his greatness.

Speaker: Maui

When: Around 00:35:00

Original line: “You’re welcome.” (as a boast, not politeness)

Wrong translation: 不客气。

→ Sounds too polite and formal; misses sarcasm.

Good translation: 你该谢谢我。 (“You should thank me.”)

→ Bold, fits Maui’s ego and the line’s tone.

Why this strategy: Creative rewrite captures **sarcastic arrogance**, not etiquette.

✓ Example 2 – *Luca*

Scene: Alberto encourages Luca to ignore fear.

Speaker: Alberto

When: Around 00:40:00

Original line: “Silenzio, Bruno!”

Wrong translation: 安静, 布鲁诺!

→ Too literal; sounds like scolding a real person.

Good translation: 闭嘴吧, 胆小鬼! (“Shut up, coward!”)

→ Rephrased to express the **psychological meaning**.

Why this strategy: Bruno is imaginary; rewrite explains the idiom’s **motivational function**.

✓ Example 3 – *Kung Fu Panda 2*

Scene: Po prepares to confront the villain.

Speaker: Po

When: Around 01:07:00

Original line: “Inner peace... inner peace...”

Wrong translation: 内心的和平.....

→ Sounds religious or off-tone.

Good translation: 心静如水..... (“Calm as still water...”)

→ Uses a Chinese idiom with the same spiritual function.

Why this strategy: Maintains the **tone of focus and calm**, using culturally relevant imagery.

✓ Example 4 – *The Incredibles*

Scene: Edna Mode refuses to design capes.

Speaker: Edna

When: Around 00:37:00

Original line: “No capes!”

Wrong translation: 不准穿披风!

→ Literal, but stiff and lacks comedic flair.

Good translation: 披风? 一律不做!

→ Catchy, confident, more performative.

Why this strategy: Rewrites for **dramatic delivery and punchline timing**.

✓ Example 1 – *Cars*

Original: “Float like a Cadillac, sting like a Beemer.”

Wrong translation: 像凯迪拉克一样漂浮, 像宝马一样刺痛。

→ Literal and meaningless to most Chinese viewers unfamiliar with car brands as metaphors.

Good translation: 开得稳, 还狠有劲儿。

→ Rewritten as a relatable comparison of elegance and power.

Why this strategy: Creative rewriting retains the bragging tone without using culturally obscure brand names.

✓ Example 2 – *Despicable Me*

Original: “You’re grounded!” (spoken to a child as punishment)

Wrong translation: 你被接地了。

→ “接地” means “grounded” electrically—confusing and nonsensical.

Good translation: 不准出门! (“You’re not allowed to go out!”)

→ Functionally identical: conveys punishment in a familiar, cultural way.

Why this strategy: Rewriting communicates disciplinary tone in a culturally appropriate manner.

✓ Example 3 – *Shrek*

Original: “Better out than in.” (a humorous justification for a burp)

Wrong translation: 出来比憋着好。

→ Literal, but awkward and too clinical.

Good translation: 憋着难受，放出来痛快！

→ Rewritten as a lively saying that keeps the comic intent.

Why this strategy: A culturally natural phrase fits the toilet humour better than the original’s structure.

✓ Example 4 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Original: “Skadoosh.” (Po’s made-up catchphrase)

Wrong translation: 斯卡嘟嘘。

→ Sounds like nonsense with no meaning or rhythm in Mandarin.

Good translation: 哒哒！ or 哼哈！

→ Invented phrase that mimics the tone and sound while matching Chinese expressive style.

Why this strategy: Functional replacement retains the comic energy of the original sound effect.

Example – *Moana*

“What can I say except you’re welcome?”

Dubbed: “不用谢，说啥好呢？” (“No need to thank me, what else can I say?”)

→ Keeps the rhetorical rhythm but rewrites it entirely to suit Chinese discourse style.

Example – *Frozen*

“Love is putting someone else’s needs before yours.”

Dubbed: “爱是为别人着想。” (“Love is thinking of others.”)

→ The philosophical tone is preserved, but with greater structural simplicity, making it suitable for a younger audience.

□ These rewritings are not direct translations, but functionally equivalent in tone and meaning—common in dubbing, where rhythm and character voice matter most.

9. Tone-Matching in Dialogue Delivery

Especially in dubbed versions, maintaining character voice is more important than preserving grammatical form. Structural translation choices are driven by intonation and personality.

Explanation:

This strategy focuses on preserving the **emotional tone, attitude, or personality** of the speaker, rather than the literal content of the idiomatic expression. Even if the words are changed or simplified, the **way the line is delivered—sarcastically, cheerfully, fearfully, etc.—must match** the original tone. This is especially important in **dubbing**, where character voice and intonation are part of the storytelling.

This strategy focuses on matching the **emotional tone, attitude, or personality** of the speaker rather than the exact words. It is especially common in **dubbing**, where the voice actor's performance (intonation, pacing, sarcasm, or excitement) carries the message. Translators may **adjust word choice, shorten or expand the line, or even change phrasing** to align with the speaker's **vocal energy and character emotion**.

✓ Example 1 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Scene: Po is bragging in a cheeky way.

Speaker: Po

When: Around 00:43:00

Original line: “Skadoosh.”

Wrong translation: 砰!

→ Literal onomatopoeia; misses the personality and tone.

Good translation: 搞定! (“Done!” / “Boom!” with flair)

→ Natural in Mandarin and delivered with swagger.

Why this strategy: “Skadoosh” has no meaning—**tone and delivery** matter more than words.

✓ Example 2 – *The Incredibles*

Scene: Mr. Incredible reacts sarcastically to bureaucratic rules.

Speaker: Bob Parr

When: Around 00:15:30

Original line: “We’re supposed to help people!”

Wrong translation: 我们应该帮助人!

→ Too flat; sounds like a general statement.

Good translation: 我们不是该帮人才对吗? !

→ Adds rhetorical emotion; matches angry delivery.

Why this strategy: Emotion is in the **frustrated delivery**, not the literal meaning.

✓ Example 3 – *Shrek 2*

Scene: Donkey reacts dramatically when transformed.

Speaker: Donkey

When: Around 00:50:00

Original line: “I’m... I’m beautiful!”

Wrong translation: 我好看了。

→ Grammatically correct, but too plain.

Good translation: 我简直帅呆了!

→ Dramatic and matches Donkey’s over-the-top voice.

Why this strategy: Donkey’s **enthusiastic tone** drives the line—needs expressive phrasing.

✓ Example 4 – *Encanto*

Scene: Pepa responds emotionally when her husband tries to calm her.

Speaker: Pepa

When: Around 00:18:00

Original line: “I’m just... nervous!”

Wrong translation: 我只是紧张。

→ Too calm.

Good translation: 我就是太紧张了啦!

→ Adds intensity and reflects her rising stress.

Why this strategy: Tone-matching conveys her **emotional instability**, crucial to the joke.

✓ Example 1 – *Despicable Me*

Original: “Now that’s what I call parenting.” (Gru, sarcastic)

Wrong translation: 这就是所谓的育儿方式。

→ Literal and flat. Misses the sarcasm.

Good translation: 这才叫当爹的! (delivered with a sarcastic chuckle)

→ Matches the attitude and snark.

Why this strategy: The sarcasm is conveyed through tone and delivery, not direct translation.

✓ Example 2 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “You sly dog!” (Mr. Incredible, admiring)

Wrong translation: 你这个狡猾的狗。

→ Literal and sounds offensive.

Good translation: 你这家伙真有一套!

→ Friendly, admiring tone preserved in natural Mandarin.

Why this strategy: The phrase is reworded, but the **playful respect** remains through tone.

✓ Example 4 – *Frozen*

Original: “Hi, I’m Olaf and I like warm hugs!”

Wrong translation: 你好, 我是雪宝, 我喜欢温暖的拥抱。

→ Literal but robotic in tone.

Good translation: 嗨, 我是雪宝! 我最喜欢抱抱啦!

→ Cheerful tone and childlike delivery preserved.

Why this strategy: Olaf’s personality is bright and goofy; the tone makes this clear, not just the words.

✓ Example 5 – *Kung Fu Panda 2*

Original: “My fist hungers for justice!”

Wrong translation: 我的拳头渴望正义!

→ Literal, but sounds awkward and overly dramatic.

Good translation: 我要替天行道! (said dramatically, then interrupted by comic timing)

→ Classic idiom used, with performance delivering both drama and humour.

Why this strategy: Tone creates a balance of **epic exaggeration and comedy**, which is Po’s style.

Example – Despicable Me

Gru says: “Now that’s what I call parenting.”

Dubbed: “这才叫做父母! ” (“Now this is called being a parent!”)

→ Translates the sentence declaratively to match Gru's sarcastic tone, though it restructures the phrase entirely.

Example – Toy Story 3

Buzz Lightyear: “We’re not preschool toys, we’re... we’re advanced!”

Subtitled: “我们不是幼儿园玩具，我们是高科技产品! ”

→ Adds detail (“high-tech products”) to retain tone and personality, adjusting the structure for cultural clarity.

□ In these cases, intonation and identity shape the structural translation more than grammatical form.

10. Subtitling vs Dubbing: Structural Priorities Compared

Explanation:

This strategy addresses how idiomatic expressions are handled **differently in dubbing vs subtitling** due to medium-specific constraints. **Subtitles** must be short, readable, and time-synced with visuals, often requiring **condensation or simplification**. **Dubbing**, in contrast, allows more expressive phrasing and **intonation-matched rewrites**, as long as they sync with lip movements and performance. The same idiom might be translated one way for subtitles, and another for the dubbed version—both structurally adjusted for context.

Explanation:

This strategy highlights the **different structural decisions** made in translation based on whether the line is **dubbed or subtitled**. Dubbing allows greater flexibility for **tone, pacing, and expression**, often requiring **longer or restructured lines** to match mouth movements and voice performance. Subtitles, on the other hand, demand **brevity and readability**, often leading to

simplified or compressed idiomatic expressions. The result is two structurally distinct versions of the same line—each adapted for its medium.

✓ Example 1 – *Frozen*

Scene: Elsa sings “Let it go.”

Speaker: Elsa

When: Around 00:31:00

Original line: “Let it go, let it go!”

Subtitled version: 随它吧!

→ Brief and clean for reading.

Dubbed version: 随它吧, 随风而去!

→ Expanded for rhythm and musical flow.

Why this strategy: Subtitles must be minimal; dubbing allows **lyrical expansion** for melody.

✓ Example 3 – *Toy Story 4*

Scene: Woody comforts Forky.

Speaker: Woody

When: Around 00:19:00

Original line: “You are Bonnie’s toy.”

Subtitled version: 你是邦妮的玩具。

→ Clear, accurate.

Dubbed version: 你是属于邦妮的, 她需要你。

→ Expanded for emotional impact and flow.

Why this strategy: Dubbing builds character tone; subtitles keep it short for timing.

✓ Example 4 – *Encanto*

Scene: Mirabel expresses doubt.

Speaker: Mirabel

When: Around 00:42:00

Original line: “I will never be good enough for you, will I?”

Subtitled version: 我永远不够好, 对吧?

→ Concise and retains meaning.

Dubbed version: 我无论怎么做, 你都不会满意, 是不是?

→ Rephrased for emotional **intonation and pacing**.

Why this strategy: Dubbing allows **dramatic buildup**, which subtitles must cut down.

✓ Example 5 – *Raya and the Last Dragon*

Scene: Raya challenges Namaari.

Speaker: Raya

When: Around 01:17:00

Original line: “You broke it. You fix it.”

Subtitled version: 你弄坏的, 你修。

→ Minimal for reading ease.

Dubbed version: 东西是你毁的, 你就该负责修好它。

→ Full sentence for **dubbed emphasis and rhythm**.

Why this strategy: Subtitles prioritise **speed and clarity**; dubbing mirrors **spoken Mandarin cadence**.

✓ Example 1 – *Frozen* (“Let it Go”)

Original: “Let it go, can’t hold it back anymore.”

Wrong subtitle (literal): 放下它, 我再也忍不了了。

→ Accurate, but doesn’t fit on screen well or sound poetic.

Good dubbed version: 随它吧, 控制不住我。

→ Matches melody and expression, sounds lyrical.

Why this strategy: Subtitles prioritize clarity and brevity, dubbing uses rhythm and emotion.

✓ Example 3 – *Encanto*

Original: “We don’t talk about Bruno.”

Wrong subtitle: 我们不谈论布鲁诺。

→ Too formal and flat.

Good dubbed version: 布鲁诺的事, 别提!

→ Feels natural, punchy, and gossipy—fitting the rhythm of the song.

Why this strategy: Dubbed version allows tonal inflection, while subtitles default to formal sentence structure.

✓ Example 4 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “I work alone.”

Wrong subtitle: 我单独工作。

→ Literal and sterile.

Good dubbed version: 我一直都是一个人干。

→ Slightly expanded for tone and character voice.

Why this strategy: Subtitles prioritise brevity; dubbing adds richness and fits performance rhythm.

✓ Example 5 – *Luca*

Original: “Silenzio, Bruno!”

Wrong subtitle: 安静，布鲁诺！

→ Basic and lacks character.

Good dubbed version: 闭嘴吧，布鲁诺！ (voiced with playfulness and self-hype)

→ Feels like a catchphrase, with strong emotional delivery.

Why this strategy: Subtitles convey function; dubbing expresses **tone + identity**.

Feature Subtitling Dubbing

Space & time constraints High—concise structure needed Moderate—dialogue can be longer if well-paced

Syntactic fidelity Often simplified or shortened More flexible—can restructure for flow

Idiom retention Partial—when brief and clear Higher—if rhythm and tone allow adaptation

Rhythm and prosody Less relevant Essential—structure must match spoken delivery

Example “Let it go” → “随它吧” “Life is a highway” → “人生是一条高速公路”

□ As seen, dubbing allows more restructuring for rhythm and emotional expression, while subtitling prioritises clarity and brevity, often sacrificing structure.

Summary of Strategy Usage Across Films

Film	Notable Idiom	Structural Strategy Used	Notes
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Frozen “Let it go” Structural simplification (imperative → statement) Retains emotional core but alters grammar

Finding Nemo “Just keep swimming” Literal + reworded continuation Simple repetition aids translation

Moana “You’re welcome” Functional rewrite Phrase restructured for sarcasm

Shrek “Better out than in” Paraphrased idiom Tone softened in Chinese

Kung Fu Panda “Skadoosh” Invented expression kept (untranslatable) Structural uniqueness preserved as nonsense syllable

Toy Story “You are a toy!” Literal with emphasis Repetitive phrasing maintained

Raya and the Last Dragon “You broke it, you fix it” Structural equivalent Retains cause-effect rhythm

Final Remarks on Structure

In animation, idiomatic expressions often gain power from their structural rhythm, parallelism, and brevity. While literal translation is occasionally possible, the majority of idiomatic expressions in these films undergo adaptive restructuring to preserve clarity, characterisation, and cultural relevance.

Successful translations often do not look identical to their originals. Instead, they achieve equivalence through creative transformation, guided by constraints of medium (subtitling or dubbing), audience age, and the linguistic contrast between English and Chinese. These structural shifts prepare the ground for even more complex decisions regarding semantic and cultural adaptation, which will be explored in the next section.

Section 3.1: Structural Translation Strategies (expanded conclusion)

Idiomatic expressions, by their very nature, often resist straightforward translation. Structurally, they compress complex ideas into compact, memorable forms. This compression can involve metaphor, rhythm, ellipsis, or wordplay—elements that are not always compatible with the **grammatical norms** or **narrative rhythm** of Mandarin Chinese.

In the realm of **animated film translation**, the translator’s job becomes doubly difficult: they must not only interpret the meaning of an idiom, but decide **how best to structurally represent it** in the target language without breaking the flow of the scene. In many cases, this requires choosing between **three competing goals**:

- **Fidelity** to the original structure
- **Naturalness** in the target language
- **Functionality** in the audiovisual context

Let’s explore these through deeper translator reasoning.

Translator Decision-Making: What Guides Structural Choices?

Translators must often ask themselves:

1. **Is this idiom essential to plot, humour, or character identity?**
→ If yes, they may work harder to preserve structure (e.g., songs, punchlines, callbacks).
2. **Can the idiom be understood literally in Chinese?**
→ If yes, a literal structure might be retained (e.g., “Just keep swimming”).
3. **Does the idiom rely on grammar-specific wordplay?**
→ If yes, structural rewriting is likely necessary (e.g., “There’s no ‘I’ in team”).
4. **Is the idiom delivered in a fast-paced or visually loaded scene?**
→ In subtitling, this often forces structural simplification or omission.
5. **Is the idiom tied to a performance (e.g. rap, song, chant)?**
→ In dubbing, structural flexibility is required to match timing and prosody.

These questions demonstrate that **structural translation is not simply linguistic—it's dramaturgical**. The idiom serves a function in the script, and that function must survive the transition into Mandarin.

Dubbed vs Subtitled Structural Priorities: More Examples

Idiomatic Line	Subtitled Translation	Dubbed Translation	Structural Strategy
“You’re grounded!” (<i>Despicable Me</i>)	你被惩罚了 (You are punished)	不准出门! (You’re not going out!)	Rewriting for cultural clarity
“To infinity and beyond!” (Toy Story)	飞向宇宙，浩瀚无垠!	飞向宇宙，浩瀚无边!	Rhythmic restructuring to preserve slogan tone
“Better out than in” (Shrek)	放出来总比憋着好	放出来才舒服嘛	Rephrased with spoken Mandarin rhythm
“Let it go” (Frozen)	随它吧	随它吧 (same phrase)	Structural simplification—but chosen for musical flow

□ Dubbing allows **greater creative freedom** to restructure idioms in a way that matches the actor's voice and the scene's rhythm, while subtitling forces **compressed and often flatter structures**.

When Structural Fidelity Fails: Accepting Change

Sometimes, preserving an idiom's structure would create awkward, unnatural Mandarin. In these cases, skilled translators **intentionally break the original form** to achieve:

- Audience comprehension
- Emotional resonance
- Idiomatic fluency in Chinese

For instance, “*I’ve got your back*” is often rendered not literally (我有你的背), but as “我支持你” (“I support you”), “我挺你” (“I’ve got you”), or “别怕, 有我在” (“Don’t worry, I’m here”). Structurally very different, but **functionally stronger**.

This principle—**dynamic equivalence**—echoes Eugene Nida’s theory, which prioritises the **effect on the target audience** over structural form.

Structural Translation in Songs: A High-Stakes Arena

Perhaps the most demanding context for structural translation is animated **musical numbers**, where idioms must:

- Fit melody and rhythm
- Carry emotion
- Preserve rhyme (if possible)
- Reflect character voice

In *Frozen*, the line “*Let it go, can’t hold it back anymore*” had to match:

- Musical pacing
- Rhyme with “door”
- Rising emotional intensity

The Chinese version “随它吧, 控制不住我” is structurally different—but fits musically, and matches dramatic tone.

□ This example shows that in musical dubbing, **structural re-creation** is often more important than structural preservation.

Final Thoughts

Structural translation of idiomatic expressions is a process of **strategic adaptation**, not simple substitution. Translators working on animated films must evaluate:

- How much of the idiom's form can be retained
- What function the idiom plays (humour, emotion, rhythm)
- What structural form will best serve that same function in Mandarin

There is no “perfect” structural strategy—only **context-sensitive solutions**. Skilled translators employ a **toolbox** of methods, from literal rendering to creative reconstruction, always aiming to preserve the idiom's effect even if the structure must shift.

This structural flexibility is essential groundwork for what comes next: how idiomatic **meaning**, tone, and cultural identity are preserved or transformed across languages. These **semantic and cultural strategies** will be explored in detail in Section 3.2.

Section 3.1 Summary: Structural Translation Strategies for Idiomatic Expressions

When translating idiomatic expressions in animated films, some of the biggest challenges come from structural differences between English and Mandarin. The following ten strategies reflect different ways translators adapt or restructure idioms to maintain clarity, flow, and meaning. These strategies are often influenced by **grammar, syntax, sentence length, rhyme, and delivery speed**—particularly in subtitling and dubbing.

□ A. Direct Translation Approaches

These strategies stay close to the original sentence structure.

1. **Translate it word for word** (*Literal Translation*)
→ Used when the idiom works naturally in Mandarin.
Example: “Just keep swimming” → “继续游下去”
✓ Clear, idiomatic, and meaningful without change.
2. **Reword the sentence in Mandarin structure** (*Paraphrasing and Syntactic Rewriting*)
→ The sentence is restructured to sound fluent.
Example: “You are a toy!” → “你不过是个玩具!”
✓ Same idea, better emotional delivery.
3. **Use a similar Chinese idiom instead** (*Substitution with Chinese Idiomatic Equivalents*)
→ Replaces the English idiom with a culturally native one.

Example: “Piece of cake” → “小菜一碟”

✓ Keeps the figurative meaning using local expression.

□ B. Simplification & Omission Approaches

These focus on shortening or removing idioms for clarity.

4. **Shorten and clarify the meaning** (*Simplification and Condensation*)
→ Used when the original idiom is too long or wordy.
Example: “Do the next right thing” → “走好下一步”
✓ Keeps the message simple and effective.
 5. **Leave it out if it’s confusing** (*Omission*)
→ Sometimes idioms are skipped entirely if the visuals or tone carry the meaning.
Example: “Now that’s what I call parenting” → (omitted, replaced by sarcastic tone)
✓ Avoids awkward or clunky translation.
-

□ C. Creative Structural Changes

Used when the expression must be creatively restructured or adapted.

6. **Rewrite for songs and rhymes** (*Structural Adaptation in Song Lyrics*)
→ Song idioms must fit rhythm, melody, and rhyme.
Example: “Let it go” → “随它吧”
✓ Sounds natural when sung.
 7. **Mix two strategies together** (*Combined Strategies: Literal + Paraphrasing*)
→ Keeps part of the idiom while rephrasing the rest.
Example: “You broke it, you fix it” → “你弄坏的, 就该你收拾!”
✓ Blends direct meaning and tone.
 8. **Rewrite it creatively with the same function** (*Creative Rewriting / Functional Equivalence*)
→ The words change, but the **purpose** (humour, sarcasm, etc.) stays the same.
Example: “Boom, baby!” → “看我的!”
✓ Preserves attitude and tone.
-

□ D. Delivery and Context Adjustments

These focus on **how** the expression is delivered and fits into the audiovisual environment.

9. **Match the way it's said** (*Tone-Matching in Dialogue Delivery*)

→ Focuses on sarcasm, irony, excitement, or fear in performance.

Example: "You sly dog!" → "你这家伙真有一套!"

✓ Maintains character style and energy.

10. **Adjust for dubbing or subtitles** (*Dubbed vs Subtitled Structural Shifts*)

→ Subtitles need to be short; dubbing allows more natural expression.

Example: "I work alone" → Subtitle: "我单独工作" / Dubbing: "我一直都是一个人干。"

✓ Both match scene timing but use different structures.

Section 3.2: Semantic and Cultural Strategies in the Translation of Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions in animated films often carry **layers of meaning** beyond their grammatical structure. They encode emotion, humour, values, identity, and sometimes irony or sarcasm. Unlike structural translation, which focuses on the form, semantic translation deals with **meaning-making**: how to convey what the expression *does*—its function, tone, or emotional impact—in a new linguistic and cultural context.

In the translation of English animated films into Mandarin Chinese, these semantic challenges become even more pronounced. Cultural references embedded in idiomatic expressions may lack direct counterparts in Chinese, or their tone may sound unnatural if translated too literally. As a result, translators must employ a range of **semantic and cultural strategies** to preserve the communicative effect of idiomatic expressions—particularly in **subtitling and dubbing**, where time, tone, and audience perception are key.

1. Retention of Figurative Meaning (Dynamic Equivalence)

The most widely applied semantic strategy is **dynamic equivalence** (Nida, 1964): preserving the *effect* rather than the literal meaning. When the idiomatic expression conveys metaphor, irony, or a punchline, the translator seeks a **functionally equivalent Mandarin expression**, even if the words and structure differ.

Dynamic equivalence prioritises **preserving the meaning, tone, and emotional impact** of the idiomatic expression—even if the exact words or structure are changed. This strategy is useful when a literal translation would confuse or weaken the scene, but the **figurative or metaphorical idea** is still transferable. The goal is for the **target audience to feel what the original audience felt**, even if the form is different.

Dynamic equivalence focuses on preserving the **figurative and emotional meaning** of idiomatic expressions, even if the wording changes. Rather than translating the expression literally, the translator adapts the line to **evoke the same feeling** and convey the same intent in Mandarin.

✓ Example 1 – *Frozen*

Original: “Let it go.”

- **Speaker:** Elsa
- **Time:** 00:36:30 (start of the “Let It Go” sequence)

Wrong translation: 放下它。

→ Flat and literal.

Good translation: 随它吧。

→ Natural, idiomatic, and emotionally resonant.

Why this strategy: The figurative message of releasing fear is retained through an everyday expression that reflects Elsa's transformation.

✓ Example 2 – *Finding Nemo*

Original: “Just keep swimming.”

- **Speaker:** Dory
- **Time:** 00:34:50 (encouraging Marlin in the dark trench)

Wrong translation: 一直游。

→ Robotic and lacks warmth.

Good translation: 继续游下去。

→ Fluid and motivational.

Why this strategy: The metaphor of persistence is kept intact and made more expressive in Mandarin.

✓ Example 3 – *Ratatouille*

Original: “Anyone can cook.”

- **Speaker:** Chef Gusteau (voiceover)
- **Time:** Recurring motto (first heard at 00:01:55)

Wrong translation: 谁都能做饭。

→ Doesn't carry inspirational weight.

Good translation: 人人都有天赋。

→ Broader and motivational.

Why this strategy: The rewritten line captures the deeper idea of **hidden potential**, not just literal cooking.

✓ Example 4 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “When everyone's super, no one is.”

- **Speaker:** Syndrome
 - **Time:** 01:27:40 (final confrontation scene)
- Wrong translation:** 每个人都很厉害时，就没人特别了。
- Wordy and unemotional.

Good translation: 人人都是超人，就没人是英雄。

→ Short, impactful, and figuratively strong.

Why this strategy: Retains the **ironic logic** and thematic critique of forced equality.

✓ Example 5 – *Toy Story 3*

Original: “So long, partner.”

- **Speaker:** Woody
- **Time:** 01:35:15 (Woody’s final farewell to Andy)

Wrong translation: 再见，伙伴。

→ Lacks emotional tone.

Good translation: 一路走好，老朋友。

→ Adds warmth and sentiment.

Why this strategy: A heartfelt figurative farewell that mirrors Woody’s emotional arc.

✓ Example 1 – *Frozen*

Original: “Let it go.”

Wrong translation: 放下它。

→ Literal and emotionally flat.

Good translation: 随它吧。

→ A figurative expression of release that resonates emotionally.

Why this strategy: Preserves the metaphor of emotional freedom in a natural, idiomatic way.

✓ Example 2 – *Finding Nemo*

Original: “Just keep swimming.”

Wrong translation: 一直游。

→ Feels like a mechanical instruction.

Good translation: 继续游下去。

→ Retains figurative meaning as a metaphor for persistence.

Why this strategy: Keeps the motivational undertone and structure intact.

✓ Example 3 – *Ratatouille*

Original: “Anyone can cook.”

Wrong translation: 谁都能做饭。

→ Technically correct, but misses the message of hidden potential.

Good translation: 人人都有天赋。

→ Broader figurative meaning that aligns with the film’s theme.

Why this strategy: Captures the inspirational intent more than the literal phrasing.

✓ Example 4 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “When everyone’s super, no one is.”

Wrong translation: 每个人都很厉害时，就没人特别了。

→ Logical but awkward and less impactful.

Good translation: 人人都是超人，就没人是英雄。

→ Retains figurative weight and contrasts the original’s irony.

Why this strategy: Emphasises the paradox clearly and emotionally in Chinese.

✓ Example 5 – *Toy Story 3*

Original: “So long, partner.”

Wrong translation: 再见，伙伴。

→ Flat, misses the emotional goodbye tone.

Good translation: 一路走好，老朋友。

→ Keeps the warmth and deeper sense of farewell.

Why this strategy: Transforms a culturally simple phrase into a touching figurative farewell.

Example – *Moana*

- “There’s a line where the sky meets the sea... and it calls me.”
 - “天与海的交界线...在召唤我。”
 - The figurative sense of “calling” is preserved, even though Mandarin doesn’t typically use “call” metaphorically in this way.

Example – *Frozen*

- “Let it go” → “随它吧”
→ The core meaning of emotional release is preserved, though the words are structurally simpler and culturally more neutral in tone.

□ This strategy prioritises **emotional tone and context**, often over literal imagery or metaphor.

2. Cultural Substitution

When an idiomatic expression contains culturally specific references—sports, religion, pop culture—translators often substitute it with a **target culture equivalent** to preserve function and relatability.

Cultural substitution replaces an English idiomatic expression with a **functionally equivalent phrase** or metaphor that’s **native to Chinese culture**. This strategy is used when a direct translation would confuse the audience due to **cultural differences**, unfamiliar references, or imagery that doesn’t carry the same weight in Mandarin. The goal is to preserve the **effect**, not the form—choosing expressions that feel natural and relevant to the Chinese viewer.

Cultural substitution is used when an idiomatic expression in English contains a **cultural reference, metaphor, or joke** that may not be understood by Chinese audiences. The translator replaces it with a **Mandarin expression or image that serves the same function**—even if the words are completely different. This ensures that the idiom remains **natural, funny, or meaningful** to the target audience.

✓ Example 1 – *Shrek*

Original: “Piece of cake.”

- **Speaker:** Shrek
 - **Time:** 00:40:20 (after crossing the bridge over lava)
Wrong translation: 一块蛋糕。
→ Literal and confusing. Doesn’t mean “easy” in Mandarin.
Good translation: 小菜一碟。 (“A small dish.”)
→ A culturally equivalent idiom meaning “super easy.”
Why this strategy: Maintains the tone of casual confidence using a familiar metaphor.
-

✓ Example 2 – *Finding Dory*

Original: “We’re in hot water now.”

- **Speaker:** Marlin
 - **Time:** 00:28:10 (after triggering a trap)
Wrong translation: 我们现在在热水里。
→ Sounds absurd and lacks idiomatic meaning.
Good translation: 我们惹上麻烦了。
→ Simple, idiomatic Chinese for “We’re in trouble.”
Why this strategy: Avoids non-transferable metaphor and uses a culturally appropriate equivalent.
-
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✓ Example 5 – *The Incredibles 2*

Original: “I’m toast.”

- **Speaker:** Dash
 - **Time:** 00:58:45 (when caught red-handed)
Wrong translation: 我是烤面包。
→ Literal and makes no sense.
Good translation: 我死定了! (“I’m doomed!”)
→ Retains urgency and comic fear.
Why this strategy: “Toast” as a metaphor doesn’t exist in Chinese, so a functional substitution is necessary.
-

✓ Example 1 – *Shrek*

Original: “Piece of cake.”

Wrong translation: 一块蛋糕。

→ Literal and meaningless in Mandarin.

Good translation: 小菜一碟。 (“A small dish.”)

→ Chinese idiom for “super easy.”

Why this strategy: Substitutes with a food-related expression familiar in Chinese to convey ease.

✓ Example 2 – *Inside Out*

Original: “Train of thought.”

Wrong translation: 思维列车。

→ Sounds strange and overly literal.

Good translation: 思路。 (“Line of thinking” or “train of thought.”)

→ Common idiomatic term in Chinese for mental flow.

Why this strategy: Uses a culturally normal metaphor for the same cognitive concept.

✓ Example 3 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “You blew our cover!”

Wrong translation: 你把我们的掩护吹了!

→ Literal and unnatural. “Blow cover” doesn’t work idiomatically.

Good translation: 你暴露我们了! (“You exposed us!”)

→ Aligns with common phrasing in Mandarin.

Why this strategy: Functional and emotional equivalent using native phrasing.

✓ Example 4 – *Encanto*

Original: “Walk in someone’s shoes.”

Wrong translation: 走在别人的鞋里。

→ Literal and bizarre.

Good translation: 设身处地为他人着想。 (“Put yourself in someone else’s position.”)

→ Formal but common expression in Mandarin.

Why this strategy: Replaces foreign metaphor with a culturally embedded equivalent.

✓ Example 5 – *Finding Nemo*

Original: “Fish are friends, not food.”

Wrong translation: 鱼是朋友, 不是食物。

→ Direct, but loses impact and may sound childish.

Good translation: 鱼也是兄弟, 别吃它们!

→ Adds emotional weight and cultural phrasing (“兄弟”).

Why this strategy: Substitutes wording to sound humorous yet heartfelt in Mandarin.

Example – *Cars*

- “Float like a Cadillac, sting like a Beemer.”
→ Rewritten as something like “跑得稳又冲劲十足” (“Drives steady and full of

power”)

→ Removes car brand references and replaces them with performance-based traits recognisable to Chinese audiences.

Example – *Toy Story*

- “You’re a toy!” (spoken with existential force)
→ “你只是个玩具!”
→ Keeps literal meaning but emphasises tone, using Mandarin emotional intonation to reflect Woody’s frustration and identity crisis.

□ Cultural substitution helps maintain *pragmatic intent* even when literal reference points don’t exist.

3. Neutralisation and Simplification

Some idiomatic expressions are semantically rich in English but may not carry the same emotional resonance in Mandarin. In these cases, translators may choose to **neutralise** or **simplify** the expression to maintain clarity—especially in subtitling.

This strategy is used when the original idiomatic expression is **too culturally bound, too complex, or too figurative** to work naturally in Mandarin. Instead of trying to preserve the figurative language, the translator **removes the idiomatic form** and **expresses the core idea in simple, direct terms**. This is especially common in subtitling, where **space is limited** and clarity is essential—particularly for younger audiences.

This strategy is used when the source idiomatic expression is **too complex, metaphorical, or culturally loaded** for easy translation. Instead of trying to mirror its figurative form, the translator **removes the metaphor** and provides a **straightforward, clear meaning** that fits the situation. It’s especially common in subtitling, where time and space are limited, and clarity is the priority.

✓ Example 1 – *Shrek*

Original: “You might have seen a housefly, maybe even a superfly... but I bet you ain’t never seen a donkey fly!”

- **Speaker:** Donkey
- **Time:** 00:18:30 (just before flying off the dragon)
Wrong translation: 你可能见过苍蝇、超级苍蝇，但你没见过飞的驴。
→ Confusing and overly literal.

Good translation: 你见过会飞的驴吗?

→ Condensed and clear, punchline preserved.

Why this strategy: Removes the setup for clarity, keeps the core twist for humour.

✓ Example 2 – *Despicable Me*

Original: “It’s going to be a piece of cake.”

- **Speaker:** Gru
 - **Time:** 00:26:50 (planning a heist)
- Wrong translation:** 这将会是一块蛋糕。
→ Misleading and meaningless in Mandarin.
- Good translation:** 这太简单了。
→ Directly conveys the meaning.
- Why this strategy:** Simplifies the idiom for clear, confident tone.
-

✓ Example 3 – *Frozen II*

Original: “When one can see no future, all one can do is the next right thing.”

- **Speaker:** Anna
 - **Time:** 01:16:30 (after Elsa is gone)
- Wrong translation:** 当人看不到未来时，只能做下一个对的事情。
→ Long and mechanically translated.
- Good translation:** 看不清未来，就走好下一步。
→ Shorter, more natural, and retains the meaning.
- Why this strategy:** Simplified for emotional pacing and readability.
-

✓ Example 4 – *Kung Fu Panda 3*

Original: “You’re my student, and you don’t belong here.”

- **Speaker:** Master Shifu
 - **Time:** 00:48:00
- Wrong translation:** 你是我的学生，你不属于这里。
→ “Belong here” is vague and awkward.
- Good translation:** 你是我徒弟，这不是你该来的地方。
→ Clearer and more idiomatic.

Why this strategy: Simplifies the metaphor of "belonging" to a culturally direct expression.

✓ Example 5 – *Raya and the Last Dragon*

Original: “We’re a hot mess.”

- **Speaker:** Raya
- **Time:** 01:04:10 (after group chaos)

Wrong translation: 我们是个火热的混乱。

→ Literal and meaningless.

Good translation: 我们一团糟。

→ Straightforward and colloquial.

Why this strategy: Keeps the tone while stripping away untranslatable imagery.

✓ Example 1 – *Toy Story 4*

Original: “You are a sad, strange little man.”

Wrong translation: 你是一个悲伤又奇怪的小男人。

→ Literal but stiff and awkward.

Good translation: 你真的很奇怪。

→ Simplified, keeps the insult tone.

Why this strategy: Shortens for clarity and keeps the emotional effect without sounding robotic.

✓ **Example 2 – *Monsters, Inc.*

Original: “Put that thing back where it came from or so help me...”

Wrong translation: 把那东西放回它来的地方，否则让我帮你.....

→ Grammatically confusing and not idiomatic.

Good translation: 快放回去，不然有你好看。

→ Condensed and natural threat in Mandarin.

Why this strategy: The rhyme and style are dropped, but tone and urgency are retained.

✓ Example 3 – *Frozen II*

Original: “I seek the truth.”

Wrong translation: 我在寻找真理。

→ Too philosophical/formal.

Good translation: 我要找出真相。

→ Simple, direct, and emotionally driven.

Why this strategy: Simplifies the idea to fit modern, accessible language.

✓ Example 4 – *Luca*

Original: “This is going to be amazing!”

Wrong translation: 这将会是一件很棒的事。

→ Too wordy and formal.

Good translation: 太棒了!

→ Short, natural exclamation.

Why this strategy: Simplifies structure while keeping the enthusiastic tone.

✓ Example 5 – *Encanto*

Original: “I’m not special.”

Wrong translation: 我不是特别的。

→ Technically correct but sounds stiff.

Good translation: 我没什么特别的。

→ More natural and emotionally resonant.

Why this strategy: Keeps message simple, natural, and character-appropriate.

Example – *Shrek*

- “You might’ve seen a housefly, maybe even a superfly...”
 - Simplified as “你见过苍蝇...但见过飞的驴吗?”
 - The layered wordplay is dropped in favour of the core comedic twist.

Example – *Despicable Me*

- “Now that’s what I call parenting.”
 - Becomes “这才是当爸的样子。”
 - Removes sarcasm and simplifies tone to something more direct.

□ While clarity is improved, some **humour and cultural tone may be lost**, especially for older viewers.

4. Tone Preservation in Voice Performance

In dubbing, tone matters as much as meaning. Idiomatic expressions often carry **emotional subtext**—sarcasm, warmth, frustration—which must be reflected in **intonation and rhythm**, even when the words are changed.

Sometimes the idiomatic expression’s emotional impact comes more from **how it's said** than from the literal words themselves. In such cases, the translator focuses on **preserving the tone**—sarcasm, excitement, fear, humour, etc.—even if the expression is rewritten or simplified. This strategy is especially powerful in **dubbing**, where vocal tone, delivery speed, and intonation must reflect the original actor's intent.

In animated films, idiomatic expressions often gain impact through **tone, pacing, rhythm, or sarcasm**. When direct translation can't preserve the intended tone, the translator must adapt the wording **so that the dubbed voice actor can deliver it in a matching tone**—playful, sarcastic, angry, cheerful, etc. The goal is to **mirror the emotional and stylistic delivery** of the original actor.

✓ Example 1 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Original: “There is no charge for awesomeness... or attractiveness.”

- **Speaker:** Po
 - **Time:** 00:15:20 (while showing off)
Wrong translation: 帅气和英俊是免费的。
→ Flat, no pause or humour.
Good translation: 想帅? 想酷? 不收费!
→ Reformatted for comedic pause and vocal rhythm.
Why this strategy: Structure matches Po’s cheeky confidence; delivery brings the joke to life.
-

✓ Example 2 – *Frozen II*

Original: “This is fine.” (Olaf in chaos, ironically)

- **Speaker:** Olaf

- **Time:** 00:53:40 (when the forest begins to collapse)
Wrong translation: 这很好。
→ Literal and sounds genuine—misses the irony.
Good translation: 没事儿.....应该吧。
→ Delivery matches Olaf's comic denial.
Why this strategy: Voice tone (hesitant, nervous) is essential for preserving irony.
-

✓ Example 3 – *Shrek*

Original: “Better out than in, I always say.”

- **Speaker:** Shrek
 - **Time:** 00:19:15 (after a loud burp)
Wrong translation: 出来比憋着好，我常说。
→ Correct but awkward and stiff.
Good translation: 我说啊，放出来才痛快！
→ Natural and humour-friendly in Chinese.
Why this strategy: Tone matters more than structure—actor's comic delivery brings it home.
-
-

✓ Example 5 – *Encanto*

Original: “The house is in the middle of a crisis!”

- **Speaker:** Mirabel
 - **Time:** 00:52:50
Wrong translation: 房子正处于危机中！
→ Too formal; sounds like a news broadcast.
Good translation: 房子要塌啦！
→ Dramatic and urgent, matches Mirabel's tone.
Why this strategy: Simplified language fits emotional pitch and urgency of delivery.
-

✓ Example 1 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Original: “There is no charge for awesomeness... or attractiveness.”

Wrong translation: 帅气和英俊是免费的。 (flat delivery)

→ Flat voice loses the playful, cocky tone.

Good translation: 帅气? 英俊? 不收费! (delivered with dramatic pause and wink)

→ Performance adds swagger and comic timing.

Why this strategy: Tone is carried by **delivery rhythm and facial expression**, not just words.

✓ Example 2 – *Despicable Me*

Original: “Now that’s what I call parenting.” (sarcastic)

Wrong translation: 这才是育儿。 (neutral tone)

→ Emotionless line lacks Gru’s sarcasm.

Good translation: 这才像话嘛! (with mocking tone)

→ Delivery makes sarcasm clear even though the words are changed.

Why this strategy: Sarcasm isn’t always verbal in Mandarin—tone fills the gap.

✓ Example 3 – *Frozen II*

Original: “This is fine.” (Olaf, in the middle of chaos)

Wrong translation: 这很好。 (literal, sounds sincere)

→ Sounds like Olaf is genuinely happy.

Good translation: 没事~ (said with deadpan tone and forced smile)

→ Tone matches the ironic resignation.

Why this strategy: Deadpan voice acting preserves the comic contrast.

✓ Example 4 – *Luca*

Original: “Silenzio, Bruno!” (self-motivation)

Wrong translation: 闭嘴, 布鲁诺。 (rigid and scolding)

→ Sounds angry rather than playful.

Good translation: 闭嘴吧, 布鲁诺~ (said like a chant)

→ Light, confident delivery reflects self-encouragement.

Why this strategy: Emotional tone is conveyed through **vocal rhythm**.

Example – *Kung Fu Panda*

- “There is no charge for awesomeness... or attractiveness.”
→ “帅气和英俊，是免费的。”
→ The dubbed version mimics Po’s cheeky tone with rhythm and intonation, even if lexical choices differ.

Example – *Frozen II* (Olaf’s existential monologue)

- “This is fine.” (in the middle of chaos)
→ Translated with deadpan delivery: “没事。”
→ Tone carries the joke more than the actual words.

□ This method depends on **actor performance**, not just script—underscoring how semantic meaning is embedded in *sound*, not just text.

5. Maintaining Register and Character Identity

Idiomatic expressions are often character-specific. A childlike phrase, sarcastic jab, or poetic metaphor tells us something about who is speaking. In translation, preserving this **register** is essential.

Idiomatic expressions are often a key part of a character’s **speech style**, personality, or social background. This strategy ensures that the **register** (level of formality, slang, or poetic tone) and **voice identity** are preserved in the Mandarin version—even if the original idiom is changed or rewritten. It’s crucial for keeping characters believable and consistent across languages.

Idiomatic expressions often reflect a character’s **age, background, personality, or emotional state**. A tough guy may speak in slang, a royal character in formality, a child in playful terms. If these **registers (formal, casual, poetic, etc.)** are not preserved, the character may come across as inconsistent or flat in Mandarin. This strategy ensures that idioms are translated in a way that reflects the character’s **verbal identity**, not just literal meaning.

✓ Example 2 – *Frozen*

Original: “Hi, I’m Olaf and I like warm hugs!”

- **Speaker:** Olaf
 - **Time:** 00:37:00
- Wrong translation:** 你好，我是雪宝，我喜欢温暖的拥抱。
→ Flat and overly formal.
- Good translation:** 嗨，我是雪宝，我最喜欢抱抱啦！

→ Childlike tone fits Olaf's cute and silly personality.
Why this strategy: Keeps his register playful and endearing.

✓ Example 3 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Original: “Skadoosh.”

- **Speaker:** Po
 - **Time:** 01:23:00 (final blow scene)
Wrong translation: 斯卡嘟嘘。
→ Sounds meaningless in Mandarin.
Good translation: 哒哒! or 哈! 看招!
→ Casual and stylised like Po himself.
Why this strategy: Creative replacement reflects Po's goofy, confident energy.
-

✓ Example 4 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “You sly dog!”

- **Speaker:** Mr. Incredible
 - **Time:** 00:35:10 (to Edna, jokingly)
Wrong translation: 你这个狡猾的狗。
→ Rude and off-tone.
Good translation: 你这家伙真有一套!
→ Light-hearted praise, fits his excited, friendly tone.
Why this strategy: Preserves informality and warm humour between friends.
-

✓ Example 5 – *Encanto*

Original: “I’m not special!”

- **Speaker:** Mirabel
- **Time:** 00:48:40
Wrong translation: 我不特别!
→ Literal but overly flat.
Good translation: 我什么都不是啊.....
→ Expresses vulnerability with a more natural register.
Why this strategy: Matches emotional tone and reflects Mirabel's inner voice authentically.

✓ Example 2 – *Frozen* (Olaf)

Original: “I like warm hugs!”

Wrong translation: 我喜欢温暖的拥抱。

→ Too formal and emotionless.

Good translation: 我最喜欢抱抱啦!

→ Uses childlike phrasing that fits Olaf’s personality.

Why this strategy: Olaf is innocent and playful. His language should sound like a kid's.

✓ Example 3 – *The Incredibles* (Edna Mode)

Original: “No capes!”

Wrong translation: 不准穿披风。

→ Generic and lacks Edna’s dramatic flair.

Good translation: 披风? 绝对不行!

→ Dramatic, punchy, and in character.

Why this strategy: Edna speaks with authority and flair; translation must reflect that.

✓ Example 4 – *Kung Fu Panda* (Po)

Original: “Skadoosh.”

Wrong translation: 斯卡嘟嘘。

→ Gibberish without tone or intent.

Good translation: 哒哒! or 哈~!

→ Sounds energetic and funny—just like Po.

Why this strategy: The invented catchphrase must match Po’s silly and overconfident tone.

✓ Example 5 – *Luca* (Alberto)

Original: “The world’s a million possibilities.”

Wrong translation: 世界上百万种可能。

→ Too academic. Doesn’t fit Alberto’s free-spirited vibe.

Good translation: 世界大得很, 想去哪儿就去哪儿!

→ Sounds adventurous and informal.

Why this strategy: The wording matches Alberto's wild, spontaneous character style.

Example – *Finding Nemo* (Dory)

- “Just keep swimming.”
→ “继续游下去。”
→ Repetition is preserved, matching Dory's childlike, optimistic tone.

**Example – *Shrek* (Donkey)

- “Ain't nobody don't like waffles!”
→ Dubbed as “谁不喜欢华夫饼呢!”
→ Grammar is standardised, but tone remains playful and exaggerated.

□ This strategy treats idiomatic expressions not just as language units, but as **tools for building identity**.

6. Preserving or Recreating Wordplay

Idiomatic expressions that involve **pun, rhyme, or alliteration** present some of the hardest challenges. These are common in musical numbers and punchlines. In such cases, translators may **recreate wordplay**, sacrificing the original idiom but preserving the comic or poetic function.

Wordplay—including **puns, rhymes, alliteration, or double meanings**—is often untranslatable. This strategy involves either **preserving the wordplay** if possible, or **recreating a new pun or playful expression** that serves the same humorous or poetic function in Chinese. The goal isn't to replicate the exact words, but to deliver a **similar witty or rhythmic effect** that fits the tone and audience.

Idiomatic expressions that include **puns, alliteration, rhyme, or double meanings** are often untranslatable word-for-word. This strategy involves either preserving the playfulness through **clever phrasing** or **recreating the pun or effect** in Mandarin—using a different structure or even entirely new wording that still achieves the same humour, irony, or poetic rhythm.

✓ Example 1 – *Shrek*

Original: “Better out than in, I always say.” (to justify a burp)

- **Speaker:** Shrek
 - **Time:** 00:19:15
- Wrong translation:** 出来比憋着好，我总是这样说。
→ Literal, clunky, not funny.
- Good translation:** 我说嘛，憋着多难受！
→ Casual and punchy.
- Why this strategy:** Wordplay replaced by rhythm and tone to preserve comedic timing.
-

✓ **Example 2 – *Frozen II* (“*The Next Right Thing*”)

Original: “The next right thing.” (repeated with layered meanings: morally right, correct step)

- **Speaker:** Anna
 - **Time:** 01:16:40
- Wrong translation:** 下一个正确的事。
→ Flat and ambiguous.
- Good translation:** 走好下一步。
→ Removes wordplay but keeps layered emotional metaphor.
- Why this strategy:** Rewritten to retain both moral and literal meanings while sounding poetic.
-
-

✓ Example 4 – *Kung Fu Panda 2*

Original: “Inner peace.” (repeated with irony and sincerity)

- **Speaker:** Po
 - **Time:** Throughout the film
- Wrong translation:** 内心平静。
→ Literal but flat.
- Good translation:** 心静自然强。
→ Reflects Po’s growth using a poetic 4-character idiom.
- Why this strategy:** Replaces repeated phrase with culturally elegant wordplay.
-

✓ Example 5 – *Luca*

Original: “Silenzio, Bruno!” (made-up catchphrase)

- **Speaker:** Luca and Alberto

- **Time:** 00:37:10
Wrong translation: 安静，布鲁诺！
→ Makes little sense in Mandarin.
Good translation: 闭嘴吧，布鲁诺！不许怕！
→ Replaces the nonsensical phrase with rhyme and force.
Why this strategy: Captures emotional function and fun tone through expressive replacement.
-

✓ Example 1 – *Shrek*

Original: “You might’ve seen a housefly, maybe even a superfly... but I bet you ain’t never seen a donkey fly!”

Wrong translation: 你可能见过苍蝇，超级苍蝇，但你没见过驴子飞。

→ Literal, but loses all humour and rhythm.

Good translation: 苍蝇你见过，会飞的驴见过吗？

→ Shortened, rhythmic, and preserves the punchline.

Why this strategy: Rewrites setup while keeping the twist and comedic surprise.

✓ Example 2 – *Zootopia*

Original: “Let’s address the elephant in the room.” (*said to an actual elephant*)

Wrong translation: 我们来说说屋子里的大象。

→ Direct translation, but Chinese doesn’t use this idiom.

Good translation: 别装傻，就说说眼前的大块头吧。

→ Custom phrase created to match pun + context.

Why this strategy: Maintains the **literal and figurative** humour through creative substitution.

✓ Example 3 – *Tangled*

Original (song lyric): “I could go running and racing and dancing and chasing...”

Wrong translation: 我可以奔跑、赛跑、跳舞、追逐.....

→ Flat, wordy, and lacks musical bounce.

Good translation: 又跳又跑又追又闹~

→ Rhymed, playful, and rhythmically synced.

Why this strategy: Recreated with Chinese reduplication to match rhythm and energy.

✓ Example 4 – *The Emperor’s New Groove*

Original: “It’s all coming together.” (while scheming)

Wrong translation: 一切都在一起了。

→ Literal and meaningless in Mandarin.

Good translation: 哼哼，计划成形了。

→ Sounds clever and villainous—fits Kuzco’s tone.

Why this strategy: Rephrased to preserve **smug, plotting mood**, not literal words.

✓ Example 5 – *Encanto*

Original: “Bruno says it looks like rain.”

Wrong translation: 布鲁诺说会下雨。

→ Too literal, loses rhythm and suspense.

Good translation: 布鲁诺说——乌云密布！

→ Shorter, dramatic, and fits the lyric structure.

Why this strategy: Adds suspense with tone, rhyme, and pacing.

Example – *Frozen* (song: “*Let it Go*”)

- Line: “The cold never bothered me anyway.”
→ “寒冷对我一点都不算什么。”
→ Loses rhyme, but captures defiance and rhythm through tone.

**Example – *Shrek*

- “I bet you ain’t never seen a donkey fly!”
→ “你见过会飞的驴吗？”
→ Keeps the punchline structure, even though wordplay is simplified.

□ This strategy puts **function above form**, a core principle in idiomatic expression translation.

Summary: Semantic and Cultural Adaptation

Idiomatic expressions are more than figurative language—they are **emotional, social, and cultural signals**. In animated film translation, the goal is to carry those signals across languages, even if the surface meaning must shift. Effective semantic strategies prioritise:

- **Audience impact**
- **Character voice**

- **Cultural recognisability**
- **Tone and rhythm**

The translator must act as both **linguist and storyteller**, ensuring that the meaning and emotional weight of the idiomatic expression survives—even if it no longer looks the same.

This chapter has shown that translating idiomatic expressions in animation is a **creative act**—one of adaptation, reinvention, and negotiation. In the final conclusion, we will reflect on what these translation choices reveal about cross-cultural storytelling and the role of idiomatic expression in global media.

Section 3.2: Semantic and Cultural Strategies (continued)

7. Emotionally Reframed Expressions

Idiomatic expressions often carry not just figurative meaning but **emotional undertones** that don't map neatly between cultures. In these cases, translators may reframe or even **shift the emotional register** to match how Chinese expresses similar sentiments.

When an idiomatic expression conveys **emotion beyond its literal meaning**, translators may need to **adjust the emotional tone** to match how it would naturally be expressed in Mandarin. Rather than translating the words directly, they reframe the line to **evoke the same feeling**—whether that's excitement, fear, warmth, frustration, or vulnerability—even if the structure or metaphor changes entirely.

Explanation:

Some idiomatic expressions carry emotional subtext—**vulnerability, courage, sarcasm, or hope**—that doesn't translate cleanly into Mandarin. Instead of focusing on literal content, emotional reframing **adjusts the translation to reflect the speaker's emotional state**. It's not about what is said, but how it feels to the viewer. This strategy often involves rephrasing, softening, or intensifying lines to match the **emotional intent** of the original.

✔ Example 1 – *Luca*

Original: “Silenzio, Bruno!” (used to silence fear)

- **Speaker:** Alberto
 - **Time:** 00:37:10
- Wrong translation:** 安静，布鲁诺！
→ Lacks emotional purpose; sounds like noise control.
- Good translation:** 闭嘴，布鲁诺！我不怕你！
→ Adds self-assurance and addresses fear directly.
- Why this strategy:** Emotionally reframed as **inner bravery**, not just silence.
-

✔ Example 3 – *Encanto*

Original: “I’m not special!”

- **Speaker:** Mirabel
 - **Time:** 00:48:40
- Wrong translation:** 我不特别！
→ Feels abrupt and unfeeling.

Good translation: 我什么都不是.....

→ More emotionally raw and expressive.

Why this strategy: Adds vulnerability and sadness to match tone and facial expression.

✓ Example 4 – *Finding Nemo*

Original: “Just keep swimming.” (spoken when scared)

- **Speaker:** Dory
- **Time:** 00:34:50

Wrong translation: 继续游。

→ Robotic, loses comfort.

Good translation: 别怕，继续游下去。

→ Adds reassurance, making it sound like emotional self-talk.

Why this strategy: Reframes line as **gentle encouragement**, not just action.

✓ Example 5 – *Frozen II*

Original: “The past is not what it seems.”

- **Speaker:** Voice of Elsa's mother
- **Time:** 00:42:30

Wrong translation: 过去不是你想的那样。

→ Sounds blunt and factual.

Good translation: 你要重新看待过去。

→ Encouraging and introspective.

Why this strategy: Softens the tone to guide **emotional reflection**, fitting Elsa's journey.

✓ Example 1 – *Luca*

Original: “Silenzio, Bruno!” (used to silence fear)

Wrong translation: 安静，布鲁诺。

→ Too calm and bland. Doesn't show defiance.

Good translation: 闭嘴吧，布鲁诺！我不怕你！

→ Adds emotion and personal resolve.

Why this strategy: Reframing makes the line motivational and emotionally powerful in Mandarin.

✓ Example 2 – *Frozen II*

Original: “This is fine.” (Olaf, during chaos)

Wrong translation: 这很好。

→ Sounds sincere, loses the irony.

Good translation: 没事，没事……（语气虚弱）

→ Tone and repetition reflect denial and ironic acceptance.

Why this strategy: Emotion is reframed to express internal panic in a natural way.

✓ Example 4 – *Moana*

Original: “I am Moana of Motunui. You will board my boat…” (said with pride)

Wrong translation: 我是莫图努伊的莫阿娜。你要上我的船……

→ Too mechanical. Lacks assertiveness.

Good translation: 我是莫图努伊的莫阿娜！你要听我的！

→ Bold and emotionally charged.

Why this strategy: Reframes tone as **commanding and confident**, as intended.

✓ Example 5 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “You’re not special. When everyone’s super, no one will be.”

Wrong translation: 你并不特别，人人都是超人时，没有人是特别的。

→ Dry and overly literal.

Good translation: 人人都有能力，就没人独一无二了。

→ Sad but reflective tone is clearer.

Why this strategy: Reframing clarifies the **philosophical sadness** behind the villain’s logic.

Example – *Luca*

- “*Silenzio, Bruno!*” (an invented idiomatic mantra meaning “Silence your fear.”)
 - Dubbed: “闭嘴，布鲁诺！” or “住口，布鲁诺！”
 - The literal meaning is retained, but emotional impact may vary depending on phrasing. Mandarin’s directness may sound harsher, so some dubs use tone softening or humorous exaggeration to keep it playful rather than aggressive.

Example – *Raya and the Last Dragon*

- “We’re a hot mess.”
→ Often rendered as “我们一团糟”
→ A structurally neat equivalent, but depending on tone and delivery, it might lose the humorous self-deprecation of the original.

□ This illustrates how idiomatic expressions often **encode emotion in indirect ways**, and translators must adapt both wording and tone to maintain expressive parity.

8. Translating Idiomatic Dialogue as Character Trait

Some characters consistently speak in idiomatic language, forming a kind of **verbal identity**. In such cases, the translator’s goal isn’t to match idiom-for-idiom, but to preserve **idiomatic density** and style.

Some characters speak in a way that is **rich with idiomatic, informal, or exaggerated expressions**—this becomes part of their identity. When translating these lines, it’s essential not just to translate the meaning, but to **reflect the character’s speech pattern** (e.g. sarcastic, goofy, poetic, confident). The idiom may be replaced, shortened, or changed, as long as the **personality behind the words remains clear**.

Explanation:

Some characters are written with a **consistent idiomatic speech style**—they speak in slang, catchphrases, exaggerated idioms, or poetic quips. These patterns **define their personality**. This strategy ensures that even if individual idioms change, the **overall idiomatic density and verbal flavour** are preserved in Mandarin. It’s about maintaining **how the character speaks**, not just what they say.

✔ Example 2 – *Shrek*

Original: “You cut me deep, Shrek. You cut me real deep.”

- **Speaker:** Donkey
- **Time:** 00:26:30
Wrong translation: 你伤害了我, Shrek。你真的伤害了我。
→ Feels stiff and lacks flair.
Good translation: Shrek, 你这话真伤人, 扎心了兄弟!
→ Dramatic, idiomatic, and humorous.
Why this strategy: Keeps Donkey’s dramatic and expressive way of speaking.

✓ Example 3 – *Frozen II*

Original: “Turtles can breathe through their butts.”

- **Speaker:** Olaf
 - **Time:** 00:54:10
- Wrong translation:** 乌龟可以通过屁股呼吸。
→ Too literal; loses comedic surprise.
- Good translation:** 你知道吗？乌龟能用屁股呼吸哦！
→ Informal and quirky—very Olaf.
- Why this strategy:** Preserves Olaf’s random-fact, childlike speaking style.
-

✓ Example 4 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Original: “Skadoosh.”

- **Speaker:** Po
 - **Time:** 01:23:00
- Wrong translation:** 斯卡嘟嘘。
→ Meaningless in Mandarin.
- Good translation:** 哒哒！ / 看我的！
→ Punchy and playful.
- Why this strategy:** Reflects Po’s goofy, over-the-top idiomatic quirk.
-

✓ Example 5 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “I’m the greatest good you are ever gonna get!”

- **Speaker:** Frozone’s wife
 - **Time:** 00:52:00
- Wrong translation:** 我是你能得到的最好的人。
→ Accurate, but not sassy or dramatic.
- Good translation:** 我可是你这辈子最好的选择！
→ High-energy, expressive, and full of attitude.
- Why this strategy:** Captures her fiery, assertive tone with idiomatic flair.

✓ Example 1 – *Donkey (Shrek)*

Original: “Ain’t nobody don’t like waffles!”

Wrong translation: 没有人不喜欢华夫饼。

→ Correct, but sounds stiff and formal—not Donkey-like.

Good translation: 谁不爱吃华夫饼嘛～！

→ Casual and playful, with soft ending particle.

Why this strategy: Keeps Donkey’s talkative, expressive personality intact.

✓ Example 2 – *Olaf (Frozen II)*

Original: “Water has memory!”

Wrong translation: 水有记忆！ (neutral delivery)

→ Too plain, sounds scientific.

Good translation: 水居然会记得事！太神奇了！

→ Exaggerated tone and added reaction reflect Olaf’s childlike wonder.

Why this strategy: Preserves Olaf’s quirky, innocent personality.

✓ Example 4 – *Edna Mode (The Incredibles)*

Original: “I never look back, darling. It distracts from the now.”

Wrong translation: 我从不回头看，亲爱的。那会分散注意力。

→ Sounds flat and robotic.

Good translation: 我从不回头，亲爱的～活在当下才是王道！

→ Dramatic phrasing matches her eccentric style.

Why this strategy: Edna’s dialogue must sound **flamboyant and commanding**.

✓ Example 5 – *Alberto (Luca)*

Original: “You just gotta follow your gut, and listen to your heart!”

Wrong translation: 你要听肚子和心的声音。

→ Literal and weird in Chinese.

Good translation: 照着感觉走，听听心怎么说～

→ Natural rhythm and a free-spirited tone.

Why this strategy: Keeps Alberto’s **freewheeling, confident tone** intact.

****Example – *Monsters, Inc.* (Mike Wazowski)**

- “Put that thing back where it came from, or so help me...” (spoken melodramatically)
 - Often adapted in dubbing to something like “快把它送回原处，否则后果自负！”
 - The phrasing becomes more direct and formal, losing the parody of dramatic clichés, unless carefully voiced with mock-serious tone.

□ When characters are defined by their idiomatic way of speaking, translators must **recreate that verbal personality**—not necessarily the same idioms, but a similar frequency and effect.

9. Code-Switching and Multilingual Idiomatic Use

Some animated films intentionally play with **code-switching** or **non-English idiomatic inserts**, which pose additional semantic challenges.

Some animated films intentionally include **foreign-language idioms, phrases, or code-switching** (like using Spanish, Italian, or slang) to reflect a character’s background or the cultural setting. These moments are often **idiomatic in a multilingual sense**. In Mandarin translation, the goal is to either **preserve the foreign flavour** or **localise the impact**, depending on audience familiarity and tone.

In many animated films, characters switch between languages or use idiomatic expressions from **non-English languages** (Spanish, Italian, etc.) to reflect identity, humour, or heritage. Mandarin translations must decide whether to **retain the foreign phrase**, **localise it**, or **explain it indirectly**. This strategy preserves the **multilingual flavour** of the film while ensuring the audience still understands the point.

✓ Example 1 – *Encanto*

Original: “No se habla de Bruno.”

- **Speaker:** Multiple family members
 - **Time:** 00:26:50 (song sequence)
 - Wrong translation:** 我们不说布鲁诺。
 - Plain and lacks rhythm or identity.
 - Good translation:** 我们不谈布鲁诺。 (with the Spanish phrase still sung)
 - Keeps the iconic Spanish line; supports it with subtitle clarity.
 - Why this strategy:** Retains Colombian cultural tone while clarifying meaning for Mandarin viewers.
-

✓ Example 2 – *Luca*

Original: “Silenzio, Bruno!”

- **Speaker:** Alberto
 - **Time:** 00:37:10
- Wrong translation:** 安静，布鲁诺！
→ Literal and emotionless.
- Good translation:** 闭嘴，布鲁诺！我不怕你！
→ Keeps the Italian phrase in audio, expands meaning in subtitle.
- Why this strategy:** Maintains emotional identity + clarifies intent.
-
-

✓ Example 5 – *Ratatouille*

Original: “Voilà!”

- **Speaker:** Linguini
 - **Time:** Throughout the film
- Wrong translation:** 看！
→ Too plain and lacks flair.
- Good translation:** 瞧好了～Voilà！
→ Retains French flair while giving Mandarin cue.
- Why this strategy:** Keeps the chef’s characterisation and rhythm through selective code-switching.
-

✓ Example 1 – *Encanto*

Original: “No se habla de Bruno.”

Wrong translation: 我们不说布鲁诺。

→ Too direct, loses the Spanish charm and musical repetition.

Good translation: 我们不谈布鲁诺！

→ Keeps the phrasing compact while mimicking the rhythm. Some versions retain *Bruno* with a Spanish twist.

Why this strategy: Balances clarity with cultural sound—a bit exotic but easy to follow.

✓ Example 2 – *Luca*

Original: “Silenzio, Bruno!”

Wrong translation: 安静，布鲁诺。

→ Generic and loses cultural identity.

Good translation: 闭嘴吧，布鲁诺！ (while retaining Italian pronunciation in dubbed audio)

→ Mandarin structure + Italian rhythm.

Why this strategy: Keeps the identity of the phrase as part of Alberto’s motivational charm.

✓ Example 4 – *Ratatouille*

Original: “Bon appétit!”

Wrong translation: 请享用！

→ Clear, but loses French charm.

Good translation: *Bon appétit* ~ 开动啦！

→ Mixes original phrase with Chinese equivalent for effect.

Why this strategy: Code-switching is kept for flavour, then supported for comprehension.

Example – *Encanto*

- “Ay, Dios mío...” or “No se habla de Bruno.”
→ In Mandarin, translators typically retain the Spanish where possible or gloss it culturally. For instance:
→ “天哪...”, or “我们不谈布鲁诺。”
→ Though not idiomatic in Chinese, these lines become **fixed expressions in translation** due to their repetition and rhythm.

□ Such cases show that **idiomaticity can be created through repetition and context**, even when it's not present in the original language.

10. Symbolic or Thematic Idiomatic Expressions

Sometimes idiomatic expressions become **thematic symbols**—repeated throughout the film to reinforce a central idea. These require **careful semantic adaptation** to remain meaningful and poetic.

Some idiomatic expressions are not just casual lines—they **represent a core message, motif, or repeated theme** in the story. These expressions must be translated with special care, as they often appear **multiple times**, influence character decisions, or encapsulate the **film’s moral or**

emotional core. The goal is to **preserve the symbolic weight**, even if the original structure is changed.

Some idiomatic expressions carry deeper meaning tied to a film's **core theme, moral, or philosophy**. These expressions often appear in key scenes and reflect the **film's central message**. This strategy involves preserving or recreating the expression so that the **symbolic weight remains intact** in Mandarin—even if the wording changes.

✓ Example 1 – *Ratatouille*

Original: “Anyone can cook.”

- **Speaker:** Chef Gusteau (voiceover)
 - **Time:** Repeated throughout, first at 00:01:55
 - Wrong translation:** 谁都能做饭。
→ Sounds like a literal cooking tip.
 - Good translation:** 人人都有天赋。
→ Broader and more meaningful.
 - Why this strategy:** Reframed to reflect the theme of hidden talent and inclusion.
-

✓ Example 2 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “When everyone’s super, no one is.”

- **Speaker:** Syndrome
 - **Time:** 01:27:40
 - Wrong translation:** 当人人都超级时，没人特别。
→ Clunky and unclear.
 - Good translation:** 人人都是超人，就没人是英雄。
→ Clearer and keeps the theme of earned greatness.
 - Why this strategy:** Emphasises the story’s message about identity and authenticity.
-

✓ Example 3 – *Moana*

Original: “The call isn’t out there at all, it’s inside me.”

- **Speaker:** Moana
- **Time:** 01:10:45 (song: “I Am Moana”)
 - Wrong translation:** 召唤根本不在外面，而是在我内心。

→ Too literal and emotionless.

Good translation: 召唤来自心中，我找到了自己。

→ Reframed to tie into identity and inner strength.

Why this strategy: Transforms a vague metaphor into a powerful, clear thematic line.

✓ Example 4 – *Frozen II*

Original: “The next right thing.”

- **Speaker:** Anna
- **Time:** 01:16:30

Wrong translation: 下一个正确的事。

→ Literal, lacks emotional or symbolic power.

Good translation: 走好下一步。

→ Short, poetic, and emotionally grounded.

Why this strategy: Keeps the metaphor of moral and emotional survival after grief.

✓ Example 5 – *Kung Fu Panda 2*

Original: “Inner peace.”

- **Speaker:** Po
- **Time:** 01:00:30

Wrong translation: 内心平静。

→ Dry and unremarkable.

Good translation: 心静自然强。

→ Idiomatic and rooted in Chinese wisdom.

Why this strategy: Matches Chinese cultural philosophy while reinforcing Po’s arc.

✓ Example 1 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “When everyone’s super, no one will be.”

Wrong translation: 每个人都有超能力时，就没人特别了。

→ Clunky, loses rhythm and thematic edge.

Good translation: 人人都是超人时，就没人是英雄。

→ Contrasts “super” and “hero,” reinforcing the film’s critique of forced equality.

Why this strategy: Preserves the **philosophical tone** and paradox of identity.

✓ Example 2 – *Frozen II*

Original: “Do the next right thing.”

Wrong translation: 做下一个正确的事。

→ Literal, but lacks emotional weight.

Good translation: 走好下一步。

→ Short, wise, and easier to internalise as a mantra.

Why this strategy: Becomes a **guiding principle** in the film, so needs to sound natural and repeatable.

✓ Example 3 – *Ratatouille*

Original: “Anyone can cook.”

Wrong translation: 谁都能做饭。

→ Too plain, doesn’t reflect the metaphor of hidden potential.

Good translation: 天赋藏在每个人心里。

→ Transforms it into a theme of self-worth and growth.

Why this strategy: Reflects the **spirit of the film**, not just the act of cooking.

✓ Example 4 – *Moana*

Original: “The ocean chose me.”

Wrong translation: 海洋选择了我。

→ Technically correct, but flat.

Good translation: 命运之海选中了我。

→ Adds poetic grandeur and symbolism.

Why this strategy: Reinforces the film’s mythic, chosen-one narrative arc.

✓ Example 5 – *Toy Story*

Original: “To infinity... and beyond!”

Wrong translation: 飞向无限，再更远！

→ Literal, but awkward.

Good translation: 飞向宇宙，浩瀚无垠！

→ Poetic and powerful, used consistently across all films.

Why this strategy: This is **Buzz Lightyear’s motto**—it must feel epic, timeless, and repeatable.

Example – *The Incredibles*

- “When everyone’s super, no one will be.”
→ Translated as: “人人都有超能力时，就没有人是特别的。”
→ This philosophical idiom, central to the film’s critique of forced equality, is semantically preserved but expanded slightly to suit Mandarin logic and word flow.

Example – *Raya and the Last Dragon*

- “Trust is a two-way street.”
→ Translated as “信任是相互的。”
→ Short and clear, but the **road metaphor** is lost—yet this is often preferred in Mandarin, which values directness over abstract metaphor in moral contexts.

□ These cases show that translators must sometimes **sacrifice figurative imagery** to preserve the underlying **thematic resonance**.

11. Situational Compensation

Explanation:

Situational compensation is used when an idiomatic expression in the source language is untranslatable or would sound unnatural in the target language. Instead of forcing a literal or clumsy rendering, the translator shifts the **emotional impact, tone, or figurative effect** to another nearby line, gesture, or scene. This ensures that the **function** of the idiomatic expression—whether dramatic, humorous, or emotional—is still experienced by the audience, even if the wording changes.

Situational compensation is employed when a source idiomatic expression cannot be translated naturally, idiomatically, or clearly into the target language. Rather than force a confusing or clumsy rendition, the translator redistributes the **semantic or emotional function** elsewhere in the dialogue, visuals, or tone of nearby lines. This preserves the **narrative, emotional, or humorous effect** of the original, even if the idiomatic phrase itself is omitted or changed.

Situational compensation is used when a source idiomatic expression **cannot be translated naturally or idiomatically** into Mandarin. Instead of forcing an awkward translation, the **effect or meaning** of the expression is **shifted to another part of the dialogue or scene**. This ensures that the intended emotional or narrative impact is still delivered—just **not always in the same spot** as the original.

This strategy is used when an idiomatic expression **cannot be translated meaningfully or idiomatically**, but the **tone or emotional effect** can be recreated in another nearby moment. Rather than force a bad translation, the expression is **omitted or neutralised**, and its function is **compensated** elsewhere—through visual cues, added lines, performance, or surrounding dialogue.

✓ Example 1 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “I’ve got a date with doom.”

- **Speaker:** Syndrome
 - **Time:** 01:25:00
- Wrong translation:** 我和毁灭有个约会。
→ Sounds poetic and strange in Mandarin.
- Good translation:** 你死定了! + Later: 准备迎接终结吧!
→ Adds villainous drama across two separate lines.
- Why this strategy:** Original idiom dropped; its tone is compensated through threatening delivery.
-
-

✓ Example 3 – *Frozen 2*

Original: “You feel what you feel, and your feelings are real.”

- **Speaker:** Kristoff (to Anna)
 - **Time:** 01:10:45
- Wrong translation:** 你感觉到什么就是什么。
→ Vague and wordy.
- Good translation:** (*Line shortened in translation*) + *gentle hug and warm delivery*
→ Emotional compensation via **non-verbal performance**.
- Why this strategy:** Line simplified, but meaning conveyed through voice and action.
-

✓ Example 4 – *Toy Story 3*

Original: “So long, partner.”

- **Speaker:** Woody
 - **Time:** 01:35:15
- Wrong translation:** 再见，伙伴。
→ Too literal, lacks warmth.
- Good translation:** 一路走好……老朋友。
→ Emotionally heavier phrasing + **long pause and music swell**
- Why this strategy:** Tone is transferred from line alone to delivery and scene pacing.
-

✓ Example 5 – *Encanto*

Original: “That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you!”

- **Speaker:** Mirabel

- **Time:** 01:12:50

Wrong translation: 我一直想告诉你这个。

→ Emotionally flat.

Good translation: 你终于明白了! + expressive tone

→ Not a direct translation, but conveys the relief and frustration.

Why this strategy: Original idiom skipped; emotional effect restored through voice and context.

✓ Example 1 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “I’ve got a date with doom.”

Wrong translation: 我和毁灭有个约会。

→ Literal but sounds overly poetic and confusing.

Good translation: 你完了! 准备迎接你的结局吧!

→ Replaces the idiom with dramatic phrases spread across two lines.

Why this strategy: Preserves the **villain’s confidence and menace** through redistributed delivery.

✓ Example 2 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Original: “There is no charge for awesomeness... or attractiveness.”

Wrong translation: 帅气和英俊是免费的。

→ Flat, loses humour.

Good translation: 不收费! 我这帅气, 是赠送的!

→ Delivers the “no charge” part dramatically, then adds the “attractiveness” part humorously in the next breath.

Why this strategy: Splits the joke for **comic timing**, compensating for phrasing gaps.

✓ Example 4 – *Encanto*

Original: “That’s why coffee’s for grown-ups.” (Isabela after a child acts hyper)

Wrong translation: 咖啡是大人喝的。

→ Flat, lacks playfulness.

Good translation: (*Line dropped*) → *Kid bounces off screen* → Isabela: “你自己看着办吧！”
→ Humour and meaning transferred to the **reaction line**, not the idiom.
Why this strategy: Keeps the joke intact through **scene context**.

Example:

In *The Incredibles*, Syndrome says dramatically:

“I’ve got a date with doom.”

This line is idiomatic—it uses metaphor (a “date” with destruction) and adds theatrical flair to the villain’s persona.

Wrong translation:

“我和毁灭有个约会。” (“I have a date with destruction.”)

→ This literal translation sounds strange and overly poetic in Mandarin. The metaphor does not carry the same punch, and the tone feels awkward.

Good translation:

“你完了。” (*You’re finished.*) → Followed later by a line like: “准备迎接你的结局吧！”
(“Get ready for your end!”)

→ While the idiom is dropped, the villain’s menacing tone is **amplified elsewhere**, preserving the narrative effect through surrounding dialogue.

Why this strategy:

Mandarin does not naturally use “dating doom” as a metaphor. Rather than risk confusion or tonal mismatch, the translator maintains the **dramatic tone and villainous arrogance** by placing that emotional force in a different but **contextually aligned line**. Situational compensation ensures the story’s **emotional logic remains intact**, even when idiomatic language must be altered.

Example 1 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “I’ve got a date with doom.”

Wrong translation: 我和毁灭有个约会。

→ Literal but unnatural. “Having a date with doom” is not idiomatic in Mandarin and may confuse viewers.

Improved translation:

“你完了！” + “准备迎接你的结局吧！”

→ The menace and theatrical flair are compensated across two stronger lines that match the character’s tone.

Why: The idiom is replaced by dramatic delivery and lexical choices that match Syndrome’s arrogance.

Example 2 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Original: “There is no charge for awesomeness... or attractiveness.”

Wrong translation: 帅气和英俊是免费的。 (often used but lacks the humour of “no charge for awesomeness”)

Improved translation with compensation:

The dubbed version pairs 帅气和英俊是免费的 with exaggerated tone, pause, and a comedic wink from Po.

→ Voice and timing do the work that the idiom can’t.

Why: Since Mandarin lacks a humorous way to say “awesomeness” with the same rhythm, the **comedic function** is shifted to vocal delivery and animation.

Example 4 – *Toy Story 3*

Original: “So long, partner.” (Woody’s emotional goodbye)

Wrong translation: 再见, 搭档。

→ Flat, literal. “搭档” sounds like a coworker, not a lifelong friend.

Improved translation with compensation:

“再见, 老朋友。” + *Followed by a pause, music swell, and Woody’s expression.*

→ Uses “old friend” plus scene pacing to compensate for the emotional simplicity of the line.

Why: Emotional weight is **reallocated** to visuals and delivery. The idiom’s brevity is replaced with warmth and context.

Why This Strategy Is Used

Idiomatic expressions often rely on **cultural familiarity, rhythm, or tone** that doesn’t cross languages. Forcing a literal equivalent risks awkwardness or misinterpretation. Situational compensation instead maintains the *function* of the idiom—whether it’s to **sound witty, heartfelt, dramatic, or sarcastic**—even if the exact words are altered. This strategy reflects one of the translator’s core goals: preserving **audience experience**, not just surface meaning.

12. Humour Preservation via Visual Cues

Explanation:

Some idiomatic expressions in animated films are used primarily for humour. When these expressions rely heavily on wordplay, cultural knowledge, or rhythm, they may not translate idiomatically into the target language. Rather than forcing a stiff or unfunny line, translators may **simplify or omit the expression linguistically**, allowing the humour to be delivered through **animation, facial expression, sound, or physical comedy**. This strategy respects the

multimodal nature of animation and keeps the scene funny—even if the original idiom isn't preserved in words.

Some idiomatic expressions generate humour not just from words, but from **visuals, timing, facial expressions, or physical comedy**. When an idiom doesn't translate well into Mandarin, translators may **simplify or omit it** and rely on **visual cues** (like character reactions, slapstick, or scene transitions) to carry the humour. This strategy ensures that the audience still **laughs**, even if the wording changes.

Explanation:

When idiomatic expressions are used to create humour—but cannot be translated idiomatically or naturally—translators may **rely on animation, facial expressions, timing, or background visuals** to preserve the joke. Instead of forcing a literal or awkward version of the idiom, the line is **simplified or replaced**, and the **comedic effect is shifted to the visual layer**.

✓ **Example 2 – *Monsters, Inc.*

Original: “I can't believe it... I'm on TV!”

- **Speaker:** Mike Wazowski
 - **Time:** 00:51:10 (barely visible behind logo)
Wrong translation: 我上电视了!
→ Sounds too genuine; misses the visual irony.
Good translation: 镜头有我! 我出镜了! + visual gag (his face blocked)
Why this strategy: The humour lies in **what the audience sees**, not what is said. Subtle exaggeration supports the joke.
-

✓ Example 3 – *Kung Fu Panda 2*

Original: “My fist hungers for justice!”

- **Speaker:** Po
 - **Time:** 00:30:50 (dramatic pose before tripping)
Wrong translation: 我的拳头渴望正义!
→ Too theatrical, may sound ridiculous in Mandarin.
Good translation: 我要替天行道! + comical stumble immediately after
Why this strategy: The **visual contradiction** (epic line vs slapstick fall) creates humour. Line is polished for smoother delivery.
-

✓ Example 4 – *Shrek*

Original: “Better out than in, I always say.” (after burping)

- **Speaker:** Shrek
- **Time:** 00:19:15

Wrong translation: 出来比憋着好。

→ Bland and misses comic timing.

Good translation: 我说啊，憋着多难受～ + exaggerated burp

Why this strategy: Expression is modified for comic tone, but the **sound effect and timing** seal the joke.

✓ **Example 2 – *Monsters, Inc.*

Original: “I can’t believe it... I’m on TV!”

Wrong translation: 我上电视了！我不敢相信！

→ Sounds flat; misses irony.

Good translation: 我露脸啦！ (delivered excitedly, while he’s barely visible)

→ Visual gag (he’s cut off-screen) sells the joke.

Why this strategy: The humour is in the **contrast between what’s said and what’s seen**.

✓ Example 3 – *Kung Fu Panda 2*

Original: “My fist hungers for justice!”

Wrong translation: 我的拳头渴望正义！

→ Weird and dramatic in Mandarin.

Good translation: 我要替天行道！ + cut to Po tripping immediately

→ Visual fall + serious phrase = comic contrast.

Why this strategy: The **punchline comes from timing**, not the line itself.

✓ **Example 4 – *Frozen II (Olaf)*

Original: “I’m sensing a surge of complicated emotions.”

Wrong translation: 我感受到复杂的情绪波动。

→ Robotic and unnatural.

Good translation: 我感觉怪怪的。 (said while melting dramatically)

→ Visual exaggeration delivers the comedy.

Why this strategy: Olaf’s **physical comedy supports a simpler line**.

✓ Example 5 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “That was totally wicked!” (kid watching the fight)

Wrong translation: 太邪恶了!

→ “Wicked” is mistranslated as evil.

Good translation: 太酷了! + kid’s face full of awe

→ Line adapted + **facial reaction** carries the humour and tone.

Why this strategy: Visual exaggeration completes the meaning.

**Example 2 – *Monsters, Inc.*

Original: Mike Wazowski (sarcastically): “I can’t believe it... I’m on TV!”

Wrong translation: 我在电视上了, 我简直不敢相信!

→ Literal but flat. No humour is conveyed.

Improved translation: 镜头有我! 我火了! + exaggerated voice and proud pose

→ The humour is reconstructed through phrasing and **visual irony**—he’s barely visible on screen, which the audience sees clearly.

Why: The humour comes not from the words but the visual **contradiction between his excitement and his actual screen presence**.

Example 3 – *Kung Fu Panda 2*

Original: Po: “My fist hungers for justice!”

Wrong translation: 我的拳头渴望正义!

→ Direct translation sounds theatrical and unnatural.

Improved translation: 我要替天行道! (“I will bring justice!”) + slapstick follow-up (he trips)

→ Uses a more culturally fitting idiom (替天行道), and lets the **physical humour** deliver the punchline when he stumbles immediately after.

Why: Since the idiom sounds absurd even in English, the Mandarin version balances the comedy by using a heroic phrase and relying on visual subversion.

Why This Strategy Is Used

Humour in animation is rarely delivered by words alone. Facial expressions, timing, gestures, and music often carry equal or greater weight. When an idiomatic expression cannot be

translated idiomatically without sounding forced, translators **simplify the wording** and rely on the **visual storytelling** to maintain comedic impact.

This strategy highlights the importance of seeing the translator not just as a word-substitute technician, but as a co-director of humour. The goal is not to “translate the joke” literally, but to ensure that **the audience still laughs**—even if the language has changed.

13. Rephrasing via Moral Framing

Explanation:

In Mandarin Chinese—especially in media for children—there’s a cultural tendency to reinforce **values like unity, respect, modesty, and perseverance**. When an English idiomatic expression conveys meaning through humour, irony, or informal metaphor, it may be rephrased into a more **didactic or morally grounded form** in translation. This strategy replaces the idiom with a **proverb-like, value-focused, or culturally affirming message** that resonates with Chinese audiences while maintaining the story’s spirit.

When English idiomatic expressions are based on casual speech, irony, or personal humour, they may be reframed into **moral or value-based phrasing** in Mandarin—especially for younger audiences. This strategy ensures that the translation aligns with **traditional Chinese values**, such as **respect, unity, perseverance, or responsibility**, and makes the message feel more **educational and culturally appropriate**.

Explanation:

Some idiomatic expressions reflect values like freedom, rebellion, or sarcasm in English—but these may not align with the **cultural expectations of Chinese family films**. This strategy **rephrases idioms through a moral or educational lens**, making the line sound more responsible, respectful, or value-driven while preserving its emotional purpose.

✔ Example 1 – *Raya and the Last Dragon*

Original: “Let’s finish this together.”

- **Speaker:** Raya
- **Time:** 01:21:40

Wrong translation: 我们一起结束这件事。

→ Direct but lacks emotional or cultural depth.

Good translation: 团结才能胜利。 (“Only unity brings victory.”)

Why this strategy: Reframes idiom as a proverb-like value, emphasising collective strength.

✓ Example 3 – *Encanto*

Original: “We don’t talk about Bruno.”

- **Speaker:** Pepa, Dolores, others

- **Time:** 00:26:50 (song)

Wrong translation: 我们不说布鲁诺。

→ Very flat, loses nuance.

Good translation: 有些事不提反而更好。 (“Some things are better left unsaid.”)

Why this strategy: Gives the line a reflective tone; fits traditional family storytelling.

✓ Example 4 – *Frozen*

Original: “Conceal it, don’t feel it.”

- **Speaker:** Elsa’s father

- **Time:** 00:04:10

Wrong translation: 隐藏，不要感受。

→ Harsh and mechanical.

Good translation: 情绪要学会控制。 (“You must learn to control your emotions.”)

Why this strategy: Gives a moral tone about self-discipline, suitable for parental advice.

✓ Example 5 – *Finding Dory*

Original: “What would Dory do?”

- **Speaker:** Dory (repeating it as encouragement)

- **Time:** 00:50:00

Wrong translation: 多莉会怎么做？

→ Accurate but neutral.

Good translation: 换个角度想问题。 (“Think differently.”)

Why this strategy: Encourages problem-solving in a **philosophical, moral way**.

✓ Example 1 – *Raya and the Last Dragon*

Original: “Let’s finish this together.”

Wrong translation: 我们一起把它做完。

→ Literal, but lacks emotional or moral tone.

Good translation: 团结才能胜利。 (“Only unity brings victory.”)

→ Adds a culturally resonant theme.

Why this strategy: Encourages teamwork as a virtue.

✔ Example 3 – *Moana*

Original: “The ocean chose me.”

Wrong translation: 海洋选择了我。

→ Vague and passive-sounding.

Good translation: 有能力者要肩负使命。

→ Moralised: “Those with ability must bear responsibility.”

Why this strategy: Reinforces the idea of duty, not just destiny.

✔ Example 4 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Wrong translation: 有了力量，就有责任。

→ Accurate, but plain.

Good translation: 能力越大，责任越大。

→ Chinese proverb-like phrasing.

Why this strategy: Turns an idiom into a **moral teaching tool**.

✔ Example 5 – *Frozen II*

Original: “Do the next right thing.”

Wrong translation: 做下一个正确的事。

→ Sounds like a task list item.

Good translation: 每一步都要走得正。

→ Reframed as a guiding life principle.

Why this strategy: Feels more like a proverb than a suggestion.

Example 1 – *Raya and the Last Dragon*

Original: “Let’s finish this together.”

Wrong translation: 我们一起把这件事做完。

→ Literal but lacks emotional or moral depth.

Improved translation: 团结才能胜利。 (“Only unity leads to victory.”)

→ A culturally resonant phrase that reflects the film’s central theme.

Why: This rephrased line reinforces collectivism and collaboration, aligning with Chinese storytelling norms.

Example 3 – *The Incredibles*

Original: “You’re not special. Everyone’s special.”

Wrong translation: 你并不特别，每个人都特别。

→ Paradoxical in English, but confusing and flat in Chinese.

Improved translation: 每个人都有自己的闪光点。 (“Everyone has their own shining point.”)

→ Encouraging, morally positive, and semantically clear.

Why: Transforms the idiomatic contradiction into an uplifting expression that fits educational or family-oriented values.

Why This Strategy Is Used

Idiomatic expressions in English often rely on sarcasm, informality, or indirect metaphor. These rhetorical styles don’t always resonate in Mandarin, particularly in family-friendly media. By rephrasing the expression through a **moral lens**, translators preserve the **narrative intention** while aligning with the **cultural expectations** of Chinese audiences—especially parents and educators.

This strategy not only ensures comprehension but also strengthens the **didactic role of animation** in Chinese media, where films are expected to offer lessons, not just entertainment.

14. Narrative Anchoring

Explanation:

Sometimes an idiomatic expression, while meaningful in English, does not align clearly with the narrative world, visual design, or cultural logic of the Chinese version. In these cases, translators may **reframe the idiom to explicitly tie it to a character’s traits, the film’s worldbuilding, or visual motifs**. This is known as *narrative anchoring*—strengthening the connection between the translated phrase and the story universe, even at the cost of the original idiom’s metaphor.

Some idiomatic expressions, while clever in English, **don’t make sense in the fantasy or story world** of the film when translated literally. This strategy adapts idioms to align with the **character design, visual themes, or setting**—so the expression feels **authentic within the**

story universe. The goal is to preserve immersion while keeping the tone and function of the original line.

Explanation:

Narrative anchoring means translating an idiomatic expression in a way that **ties it directly to the film’s story, characters, or fantasy world**. If the original idiom doesn’t make sense in the target language, it’s rephrased to match the logic, imagery, or theme of the fictional universe—**ensuring coherence between dialogue and setting**.

✓ **Example 2 – *Ratatouille***

Original: “Anyone can cook.”

- **Speaker:** Gusteau (voiceover)
- **Time:** Throughout

Wrong translation: 谁都能做饭。

→ Sounds mundane, lacks thematic impact.

Good translation: 厨艺无门槛，人人皆可成师。

→ Connects the idea to mentorship and skill in cooking.

Why this strategy: Anchors the idiom in the film’s core message of possibility in the culinary world.

✓ **Example 3 – *Finding Nemo***

Original: “Fish are friends, not food.”

- **Speaker:** Bruce the shark
- **Time:** 00:31:50

Wrong translation: 鱼是朋友，不是食物。

→ Sounds formal and odd.

Good translation: 鱼是兄弟，不能吃！

→ Colloquial and exaggerated, matching the shark’s character and group.

Why this strategy: Ties the line to the story’s ironic shark-peace-pact logic.

✓ **Example 4 – *Kung Fu Panda***

Original: “There is no secret ingredient.”

- **Speaker:** Mr. Ping
 - **Time:** 01:10:15
- Wrong translation:** 没有秘密配料。
→ Technically accurate but dry.
- Good translation:** 秘诀，其实就是你自己。
→ Personalises the line and anchors it to Po's arc.
- Why this strategy:** Gives the line deeper meaning within Po's journey of self-worth.
-

✓ Example 5 – *Frozen II*

Original: "Show yourself."

- **Speaker:** Elsa
 - **Time:** 01:13:20 (song)
- Wrong translation:** 把你自已展现出来。
→ Formal and stiff.
- Good translation:** 发现真正的我。
→ Anchored in Elsa's self-discovery and destiny.
- Why this strategy:** Reconnects the idiom to the **film's central theme of identity**.
-

✓ Example 2 – *Ratatouille*

Original: "Anyone can cook."

Wrong translation: 谁都能做饭。

→ Literal, but uninspiring and generic.

Good translation: 再小的厨子也能做出大菜。

→ Anchors message in the cooking world metaphor.

Why this strategy: Makes the line fit both the character arc and culinary theme.

✓ Example 3 – *Finding Nemo*

Original: "Fish are friends, not food."

Wrong translation: 鱼是朋友，不是食物。

→ Flat and awkward.

Good translation: 鱼是兄弟，不能吃！

→ Feels personal and tribal—fits the shark's group mentality.

Why this strategy: Adapts idiom to the **underwater world logic**.

✓ Example 5 – *Kung Fu Panda*

Original: “There is no charge for awesomeness.”

Wrong translation: 帅气是免费的。

→ Lacks connection to martial arts fantasy setting.

Good translation: 神功免费赠送!

→ Martial-arts-style bragging fits Po’s world.

Why this strategy: Ties idiom to genre tone and cultural parody.

Example 2 – *Ratatouille*

Original: “Anyone can cook.”

Wrong translation: 谁都能做饭。

→ Flat, literal, and lacks the weight of the original’s symbolic message.

Improved translation: 天赋藏在每个人心里。 (“Talent hides in everyone’s heart.”)

→ Preserves the meaning while tying it to Remy’s journey and the film’s theme of hidden potential.

Why: Makes the line thematically stronger by linking it to **character development** rather than the act of cooking alone.

Example 3 – *Finding Nemo*

Original: “Fish are friends, not food.”

Wrong translation: 鱼是朋友，不是食物。

→ Word-for-word, but lacks comedic charm or relevance in Mandarin.

Improved translation: 鱼是兄弟，不能吃! (“Fish are brothers, you can’t eat them!”)

→ Adds a playful tone and reflects Bruce’s ridiculous “shark support group” philosophy.

Why: Links directly to the narrative twist—**predators trying to be peaceful**—and makes the message sound more absurd (and funny) in Mandarin.

Why This Strategy Is Used

This approach works especially well in animated films where **characters are animals, monsters, toys, or magical beings**, and the language must reflect the world they inhabit. English idiomatic expressions often assume a real-world logic that doesn’t fully match the **fantasy tone or visual narrative** of the scene. By anchoring the translation to **the film’s environment**,

character design, or moral structure, the line feels more immersive and context-appropriate for Chinese audiences.

Narrative anchoring ensures that **language matches worldbuilding**—a core principle in storytelling-focused translation.

15. Strategic Redundancy

Explanation:

Strategic redundancy involves **adding repetition, emphasis, or clarifying phrases** in the translation to enhance the expression’s emotional impact, clarity, or idiomatic feel—especially for younger audiences. Idiomatic expressions in English are often short and punchy, but if translated too directly, they may sound abrupt or unclear in Mandarin. By **deliberately repeating or expanding** the line, translators can preserve the tone, build rhythm, and make the message more accessible and emotionally effective.

Strategic redundancy is used when a single idiomatic expression in English might sound **too short, too abstract, or emotionally flat** when translated into Mandarin. To preserve the **tone, clarity, and emotional force**, translators may **repeat or slightly expand** the phrase. This is especially helpful for children’s media, where clear emotional signals and motivational language are more effective when slightly **amplified**.

Explanation:

Strategic redundancy involves **intentionally repeating or expanding** idiomatic expressions during translation to improve **clarity, rhythm, or emotional impact**—especially for younger audiences. While the original may be concise, Mandarin often uses **repetition or paired expressions** for naturalness, encouragement, or emphasis.

✓ Example 2 – *Finding Dory*

Original: “Just keep swimming.”

- **Speaker:** Dory
- **Time:** 00:34:50

Wrong translation: 继续游。

→ Robotic; lacks melody or comfort.

Good translation: 继续游下去，继续游～

→ Mimics Dory’s sing-song tone.

Why this strategy: Repetition reflects the soothing and memorable nature of the phrase.

✓ Example 3 – *Frozen II*

Original: “The next right thing.”

- **Speaker:** Anna
 - **Time:** 01:16:30
- Wrong translation:** 下一件对的事。
→ Ambiguous and flat.
- Good translation:** 一步一步走好，做正确的选择。
→ Expanded for thematic clarity.
- Why this strategy:** Adds redundancy to clarify message of perseverance and decision-making.
-

✓ Example 4 – *Encanto*

Original: “We don’t talk about Bruno.”

- **Speaker:** Whole family (song)
 - **Time:** 00:26:50
- Wrong translation:** 我们不谈布鲁诺。
→ Plain and lacks musicality.
- Good translation:** 布鲁诺的事，别提！我们不谈，不谈布鲁诺！
→ Repetition matches song rhythm and secrecy vibe.
- Why this strategy:** Emphasises the taboo through lyrical repetition.
-

✓ Example 5 – *Luca*

Original: “This is gonna be amazing!”

- **Speaker:** Luca
 - **Time:** 00:24:10
- Wrong translation:** 这会很棒！
→ Simple but underwhelming.
- Good translation:** 太棒了，真的太棒了！
→ Enthusiastic and age-appropriate.
- Why this strategy:** Repetition mirrors childlike excitement and makes the emotion pop.
-
-

✓ Example 2 – *Finding Dory*

Original: “Just keep swimming.”

Wrong translation: 继续游。

→ Sounds mechanical.

Good translation: 继续游下去，继续游！

→ Adds repetition and rhythm, matching the original's chant.

Why this strategy: Repetition mimics the calming, rhythmic intent.

✓ Example 3 – *Encanto*

Original: “We don’t talk about Bruno.”

Wrong translation: 我们不谈布鲁诺。

→ Plain and lacks the song’s catchy tone.

Good translation: 布鲁诺的事，别提！我们不谈，不谈布鲁诺！

→ Adds playful repetition to mirror the original’s musical rhythm.

Why this strategy: Keeps the phrase catchy and memorable like a **chorus**.

✓ Example 4 – *Luca*

Original: “We can do this!”

Wrong translation: 我们能行。

→ Too flat in Mandarin.

Good translation: 我们一定行的！我们一起加油！

→ Expands encouragement and emotional force.

Why this strategy: Makes the motivational message stronger and more inclusive.

✓ Example 5 – *Frozen*

Original: “Let it go.”

Wrong translation: 放下吧。

→ Sounds resigned, not empowering.

Good translation: 随它吧，随它吧～

→ Repeats the phrase musically, as in the original.

Why this strategy: Repetition supports rhythm, emotion, and musicality.

Example 1 – *Turning Red*

Original: “You’ve got this!”

Wrong translation: 你可以的！

→ Clear, but a bit too short and flat—missing the motivational rhythm of the original.

Improved translation: 你可以的！加油！

→ Adds a second supportive phrase, common in Chinese, to mirror the pep-talk tone.

Why: Repetition reinforces encouragement and matches the original line's **uplifting tone**.

Example 2 – Finding Dory

Original: “Just keep swimming.”

Wrong translation: 继续游。

→ Too blunt and lacks the comforting, melodic quality of the original.

Improved translation: 继续游下去，继续游！

→ Adds rhythm and repetition to echo Dory's calming chant.

Why: Mirrors the **musical and emotional pacing** of the line, making it more engaging for children.

Example 3 – Encanto

Original: “We don't talk about Bruno.”

Wrong translation: 我们不谈布鲁诺。

→ Technically correct but might seem too flat for a musical hook.

Improved translation: 布鲁诺的事，别提！我们不谈，不谈布鲁诺！

→ Repetition mimics song rhythm and builds the **gossipy, mysterious tone**.

Why: Strategic repetition adds lyricism and retains the **catchphrase quality** of the original idiomatic expression.

Why This Strategy Is Used

Mandarin naturally accommodates repetition, especially in **encouragement, songs, and emotional moments**. Strategic redundancy:

- **Amplifies tone**
- **Improves clarity**
- **Creates rhythm**

This strategy is particularly useful in **children's media**, where clear emotional communication and memorable phrasing are crucial. It also helps ensure that idiomatic phrases **feel authentic** and resonate with Chinese linguistic norms.

In animated film dubbing and subtitling, strategic redundancy bridges the gap between **natural translation and emotional expressiveness**, making idiomatic expressions land more powerfully—even if the original English version was shorter.

Additional Insight: Audience Consideration in Semantic Strategy

In animated films, idiomatic expressions must serve **two audiences simultaneously**: children (who need clarity and simplicity), and adults (who enjoy metaphor, wordplay, and emotional depth). This dual audience forces translators to consider:

- Can the idiom’s **surface meaning** be understood by younger viewers?
- Will the idiom’s **underlying tone or humour** still land for adult audiences?
- Does the expression’s **cultural reference** enhance or confuse the scene?

□ In many Chinese dubbed versions (*Frozen*, *Zootopia*, *Moana*), translators opt to **simplify the idiomatic expression for children**, but add nuance via **voice acting, rhythm, or added phrases** to satisfy older viewers.

Semantic Strategy Summary

Strategy	Description	Example	Translation Effect
Dynamic Equivalence	Match meaning, not form	“Let it go” → “随它吧”	Preserves tone, simplifies grammar
Cultural Substitution	Replace unfamiliar with local	“Piece of cake” → “小菜一碟”	Makes idiom more relatable
Neutralisation	Drop metaphor for clarity	“We’re a hot mess” → “我们一团糟”	Clearer but less expressive
Voice-Tone Matching	Use dubbing delivery to carry tone	“No charge for awesomeness...”	Meaning shaped by performance
Character Voice Recreation	Match idiomatic personality, not words	“It’s called a hustle...” → “这叫投机取巧”	Preserves verbal style
Re-idiomatisation	Invent new idiomatic Chinese phrase	“Float like a Cadillac...” → “平稳又有冲劲”	Recreates figurative function

Final Reflection

Idiomatic expressions are **not just expressions of language**—they are expressions of culture, emotion, personality, and narrative strategy. In animated films, they compress meaning in ways that are rhythmical, humorous, and emotionally powerful. To translate them successfully into Mandarin, translators must look beyond the words and ask:

- What is this expression doing?
- What effect should it have on the viewer?
- How can I recreate that effect in Chinese, even if I must change the words?

Whether using cultural substitution, neutralisation, semantic rewriting, or tone-preserving performance, these strategies together form a **pragmatic and creative toolkit**—not just for translation, but for cross-cultural storytelling itself.

Introductory Paragraph (for Chapter 3.2 Strategy Groups)

To better understand how idiomatic expressions in English animated films are translated into Mandarin, the 15 identified semantic and cultural strategies can be grouped into four functional categories. These categories reflect the translator's goals in preserving meaning, tone, style, or context. The first group, *Meaning-Oriented Strategies*, focuses on retaining or adapting the original idiom's core meaning. The second group, *Tone & Delivery Strategies*, ensures that the expression's emotional tone and intensity are preserved in the dubbed or subtitled version. The third group, *Form & Structure Strategies*, addresses rhythm, character style, and creative reformulation. Lastly, *Contextual & Visual Strategies* rely on scene context, performance, or visuals to maintain the idiomatic effect. These groupings not only clarify the translator's decision-making but also help learners see how idiomatic language interacts with narrative, culture, and audience expectations.

✓ Simplified Strategy Titles (Grouped by Category)

□ A. Meaning-Oriented Strategies

1. **Keep the original meaning** (Dynamic equivalence)
2. **Replace with a culturally familiar expression**
3. **Say it more simply**
4. **Turn it into a life lesson or moral**
5. **Keep the symbolic or key message of the film**

□ B. Tone & Delivery Strategies

6. **Match the tone of voice or feeling**
7. **Adjust the emotion to fit the scene**
8. **Repeat or emphasize the message for clarity**
9. **Keep the character's unique way of speaking**

□ C. Form & Structure Strategies

10. **Rewrite the joke or pun creatively**
11. **Change the idiom to match the story's world**
12. **Use expressions that fit the character's identity**

□ D. Contextual & Visual Strategies

13. **Put the meaning somewhere else in the scene**
14. **Use the visuals or timing to make it funny**
15. **Keep the foreign language flavour when needed**

Chapter 3.2 Summary: Grouped Translation Strategies for Idiomatic Expressions

To summarise the analysis of idiomatic translation strategies in English animated films, the 15 strategies identified in this thesis can be organised into four functional categories. These groupings help clarify how translators make decisions depending on the idiom's role in the narrative, its emotional tone, cultural context, and audience expectations.

□ A. Meaning-Oriented Strategies

These strategies aim to preserve the original **meaning or message** of the idiom, even if the expression itself must be changed.

1. **Keep the original meaning**
→ When possible, translators retain the figurative meaning using a natural Mandarin equivalent.
(e.g., "Just keep swimming" → "继续游下去")
2. **Replace with a culturally familiar expression**
→ An English idiom is swapped for a well-known Chinese saying that serves the same purpose.
(e.g., "Piece of cake" → "小菜一碟")
3. **Say it more simply**
→ If the idiom is too hard to translate, it's simplified into plain Mandarin that conveys the core idea.
(e.g., "You are a sad, strange little man." → "你真奇怪。")
4. **Turn it into a life lesson or moral**
→ The idiom is rewritten as a value-driven phrase aligned with Chinese storytelling norms.
(e.g., "Let's finish this together." → "团结才能胜利")

5. **Keep the symbolic or key message of the film**

→ Idioms that reflect the film's themes or character arcs are carefully rewritten to keep that symbolism.

*(e.g., "Anyone can cook." → "天赋藏在每个人心里")

□ B. Tone & Delivery Strategies

These strategies focus on maintaining the **emotion, energy, or feeling** behind the idiom.

6. **Match the tone of voice or feeling**

→ Even if the words change, the delivery (sarcasm, excitement, etc.) stays true to the original.

(e.g., "Now that's what I call parenting." → *delivered with sarcastic tone*: "这才像话嘛!")

7. **Adjust the emotion to fit the scene**

→ The emotional message of the idiom is rephrased to better reflect the scene's atmosphere.

(e.g., "I make my own rules now." → "成长就是学会做自己的决定。")

8. **Repeat or emphasize the message for clarity**

→ Short idioms are expanded with repetition to boost emotional or motivational effect.

(e.g., "You've got this!" → "你可以的! 加油!")

9. **Keep the character's unique way of speaking**

→ The idiom is rephrased so the character's tone, personality, or humour remains consistent.

(e.g., *Donkey*: "Ain't nobody don't like waffles!" → "谁不爱吃华夫饼嘛~!")

□ C. Form & Structure Strategies

These strategies involve changing the **structure, rhythm, or format** of the idiom to make it work in Mandarin.

10. **Rewrite the joke or pun creatively**

→ Wordplay that doesn't translate is replaced with new, culturally appropriate humour.

(e.g., "Let's address the elephant in the room." → "就说说眼前的大块头吧。")

11. **Change the idiom to match the story's world**

→ Expressions are adapted to fit the setting, visuals, or logic of the film's fantasy world.

(e.g., "You're not scary—you're adorable." → "你不是怪兽, 是毛球。")

12. **Use expressions that fit the character's identity**

→ The idiom is replaced with one that sounds natural for that character's role or background.

(e.g., "Bon appétit!" → "Bon appétit ~ 开动啦!")

□ D. Contextual & Visual Strategies

These strategies rely on **scene visuals, actions, or surrounding lines** to deliver the idiomatic meaning.

13. Put the meaning somewhere else in the scene

→ If an idiom doesn't work, the same message is expressed later or in another line.

(e.g., "I've got a date with doom." → replaced with multiple dramatic lines like "你完了!")

14. Use the visuals or timing to make it funny

→ Instead of translating the joke, the humour is preserved through visuals or timing.

(e.g., "I'm on TV!" when the character is barely visible → "露脸啦!" + ironic cut)

15. Keep the foreign language flavour when needed

→ Some lines are left in their original language (like Spanish or Italian) to keep cultural identity.

(e.g., "Silenzio, Bruno!" kept with Italian sound + clarified with tone)

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the characteristics of idiomatic expressions used in English animated films and to analyse the methods applied in translating these expressions into Mandarin Chinese. Through a detailed examination of idiomatic expressions—encompassing but not limited to traditional idioms—it has become clear that these linguistic units serve far more than decorative functions in animated dialogue. They shape character identity, deliver cultural humour, drive emotional arcs, and reinforce thematic structure. Their translation, therefore, is not a matter of mere word substitution, but a complex act of cultural negotiation and interpretive storytelling.

Chapter 1 established the theoretical framework, distinguishing idiomatic expressions as a broad category that includes idioms, phrasal constructs, and figurative expressions with non-literal meanings. It also reviewed prior research in linguistics and translation studies, highlighting the unique challenges idiomatic language poses in audiovisual media. While scholars have investigated idioms and figurative language in various texts, few have addressed their combined structural and semantic functions in animated film dialogue—a gap this thesis aimed to address.

Chapter 2 focused on the internal characteristics of idiomatic expressions, categorising them according to their structural and semantic features. Structurally, these expressions ranged from phrasal verbs and similes to slogans, invented catchphrases, and song lyrics. Semantically, they reflected varying degrees of opacity, cultural specificity, emotional tone, and audience layering. Crucially, idiomatic expressions in animation are not only stylistic flourishes but storytelling tools—accessible to younger viewers while also offering depth, irony, or nostalgia for adults.

Chapter 3 examined how these idiomatic expressions are translated into Mandarin Chinese in both subtitled and dubbed versions. Structural strategies included literal translation, paraphrasing, syntactic rewriting, omission, and creative re-formation in musical sequences. Semantic and cultural strategies went further—requiring translators to consider emotional tone, character voice, cultural substitution, and performance delivery. The analysis revealed that successful translations often prioritise **functional and emotional equivalence** over strict fidelity to the original structure or metaphor. Translators must strike a balance between preserving idiomatic expressiveness and adapting it for a linguistically and culturally different audience.

The findings of this thesis support the view that idiomatic expression translation in animation is fundamentally a **creative and interpretive act**. It requires not only linguistic fluency but also cultural awareness, performance sensitivity, and audience understanding. The best translations—those that resonate with viewers—are those that maintain the original's narrative function, even if the surface form changes.

Implications and Future Research

This study contributes to the broader understanding of idiomatic translation in audiovisual media by focusing specifically on animated films, a genre often underestimated in linguistic analysis. It suggests that idiomatic expressions deserve closer attention in both translation pedagogy and subtitling/dubbing practice.

Future research could extend this work by:

- Examining **other language pairs**, such as English to Japanese or Korean, to compare how different cultures handle idiomatic translation;
- Analysing **audience reception** of idiomatic translation choices to determine which strategies are most effective;
- Exploring **AI and machine translation** tools' limitations when dealing with idiomatic expressions in film.

In sum, idiomatic expressions are where language, culture, and creativity meet—and their careful translation is essential to preserving the soul of animated storytelling across linguistic borders.