

MEANING LOSS IN AI-GENERATED TIKTOK SUBTITLES: A STUDY OF SATIRICAL CONTENT

Vania Shafa Nabilah ^{1)*}, Erlan Aditya Ardiansyah ²⁾, and Dian Budiarti ³⁾

^{1,2,3)} State Islamic University Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence has changed translation practices, including on social media platforms such as TikTok. Many users now rely on AI-generated subtitles to reach international audiences. However, this technology still faces challenges in translating complex content such as satire, which often contains irony, humor, and cultural references. This study aims to identify the subtitling strategies used by TikTok's AI in translating Indonesian satirical content into English and to analyze the factors contributing to meaning loss. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method with content analysis. The data consist of 51 subtitles collected from five satirical videos uploaded on the TikTok account @dipalelu between August 2025 and January 2026. The analysis applies Gottlieb's (1992) subtitling strategies and Newmark's (1988) theory of meaning loss. The results show that TikTok's AI predominantly uses transfer strategy. This indicates that the AI-generated subtitle system translates satirical utterances literally by preserving lexical structure with limited contextual adaptation, which may reduce irony, implicit criticism, and humorous tone in the target language. Transcription appears occasionally, while decimation and deletion only appear once each. Strategies such as paraphrase, expansion, and imitation do not appear in the data. Regarding meaning loss, limitations in interpreting pragmatic and cultural aspects of language become the dominant factor, while linguistic and cultural differences also contribute to meaning loss. This study concludes that AI-generated subtitles remain limited in translating satirical discourse because satire depends heavily on contextual and cultural interpretation. Therefore, content creators should review AI-generated subtitles before publication to ensure clearer cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: AI-Generated; Subtitles; Satire; Translation; Meaning Loss; TikTok

Abstrak

Kecerdasan buatan telah mengubah praktik penerjemahan, termasuk pada platform media sosial seperti TikTok. Banyak pengguna kini mengandalkan takarir yang dihasilkan AI untuk menjangkau audiens internasional. Namun, teknologi ini masih menghadapi tantangan dalam menerjemahkan konten yang kompleks seperti satir, yang sering mengandung ironi, humor, dan referensi budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi strategi takarir yang digunakan AI TikTok dalam menerjemahkan konten satir berbahasa Indonesia ke bahasa Inggris serta menganalisis faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan kehilangan makna. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan analisis isi. Data penelitian terdiri atas 51 takarir yang diperoleh dari lima video satire pada akun TikTok @dipalelu yang diunggah antara Agustus 2025 hingga Januari 2026. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan teori strategi takarir Gottlieb (1992) dan teori kehilangan makna Newmark (1988). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa AI TikTok didominasi oleh penggunaan strategi transfer. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa sistem takarir otomatis AI menerjemahkan tuturan satire secara literal dengan mempertahankan struktur leksikal dan adaptasi kontekstual yang terbatas, sehingga dapat mengurangi unsur ironi, kritik implisit, dan nuansa humor dalam bahasa sasaran. Strategi transcription muncul sesekali, sedangkan decimation dan deletion masing-masing hanya ditemukan satu kali. Strategi seperti paraphrase, expansion, dan imitation tidak ditemukan dalam data. Dalam faktor kehilangan makna, keterbatasan dalam menginterpretasikan aspek pragmatik dan budaya bahasa menjadi faktor yang paling dominan, sementara perbedaan linguistik dan budaya juga turut berkontribusi terhadap kehilangan makna. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa takarir otomatis berbasis AI masih memiliki keterbatasan dalam menerjemahkan wacana satire karena satire sangat bergantung pada interpretasi kontekstual dan budaya. Oleh karena itu, kreator

*Author(s) Correspondence:

E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

konten perlu meninjau kembali takarir yang dihasilkan AI sebelum dipublikasikan guna memastikan komunikasi lintas budaya dapat tersampaikan dengan lebih jelas.

Kata Kunci: Kecerdasan Buatan; Takarir; Satir; Terjemahan; Kehilangan Makna; TikTok

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the most significant technological innovations of the twenty-first century. AI technologies have influenced various sectors of society, including business, education, healthcare, transportation, and communication (Dwivedi et al., 2021). In the field of communication, AI enhances digital interaction by enabling intelligent interfaces, personalized communication, and instant information processing. One of the important developments in this area is AI-based translation, which allows users to overcome language barriers in global communication. Although AI translation offers efficiency and accessibility, concerns remain regarding its accuracy, naturalness, and ability to interpret meaning across cultures (Alisherovich, 2025). Language plays a crucial role in human communication, as it enables individuals to express ideas, emotions, and intentions. However, the existence of numerous languages across societies often creates barriers to mutual understanding.

Translation, therefore, functions as an essential tool for facilitating communication between speakers of different languages. Catford (1965) defines translation as the replacement of textual material in one language with equivalent textual material in another language, emphasizing the transfer of meaning between linguistic systems. In digital communication, translation is frequently applied in audiovisual media, particularly through subtitling. Subtitling refers to the textual representation of spoken discourse that appears on screen and allows audiences to understand audiovisual content across languages (Gottlieb, 1992). However, subtitling involves significant constraints because translators must convey meaning within limited time and space (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014). The emergence of AI-generated subtitles has transformed the accessibility of audiovisual content on social media platforms.

One of the platforms that provides this feature is TikTok, which ranks among the most widely used social media platforms worldwide (Statista, 2025). TikTok offers an Auto-Generated Captions feature that automatically converts spoken dialogue into subtitles using speech recognition technology and can translate these captions into other languages (TikTok, 2021). This feature allows content creators to reach a broader international audience. However, despite its convenience, AI-generated subtitles often produce inaccurate translations, awkward expressions, or the loss of contextual meaning, particularly when translating culturally nuanced or humorous content. For example, the Indonesian expression “ngelus dengkul,” which culturally implies regret or helplessness, may be translated literally as “rub your knees,” resulting in semantic confusion for English-speaking audiences. Similarly, informal discourse markers such as “yaelah” or “mah” are sometimes retained without contextual adaptation, causing the subtitles to sound unnatural in English. In other cases, satirical utterances containing irony or implicit criticism may be translated too literally, reducing the humorous or critical effect intended in the source language.

One type of discourse that poses particular challenges for translation is satire. Satire is a form of expression that uses language to criticize or mock individuals, social groups, or particular behaviors through humor, irony, parody, or exaggeration (Abrams & Harpham, 2012). Unlike comedy, which mainly aims to entertain, satire often conveys implicit criticism and relies on contextual interpretation. Abrams (as cited in Resti, 2015) identifies several satirical elements, including parody, irony, allegory, and humor. According to Newmark (1981), communicative translation is more suitable for translating satire because it seeks to preserve the intended effect and response of the original text. Therefore, translating satire requires sensitivity to contextual, cultural, and pragmatic meaning. However, AI-generated translation systems often rely on literal lexical processing, which may reduce the implicit and contextual meaning embedded in satirical expressions.

*Author(s) Correspondence:

E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

Meaning loss is a common issue in translation that occurs when semantic, cultural, stylistic, or pragmatic elements of the source text cannot be fully transferred into the target language. Crystal (1987) states that some degree of information loss is unavoidable because no two languages share identical systems of meaning. Similarly, Newmark (1988) explains that meaning loss may result from cultural and linguistic differences, variations in language use, and limitations in interpreting contextual meaning. These factors show that translation involves not only transferring words but also reconstructing meaning within a particular communicative and cultural context. In satirical discourse, meaning loss may weaken irony, humor, parody, or implied criticism when the translation lacks contextual adaptation.

This research was motivated by previous studies on translation in digital platforms, audiovisual texts, literary works, and machine translation systems. These studies provided theoretical and methodological foundations for understanding translation errors, humor translation, meaning transfer, and the challenges of machine translation in interpreting implicit meaning. Shafira & Nugroho (2023), in “Translation Error Types Analysis on TikTok Indonesian-English Auto-Translation Content,” analyzed translation errors in TikTok’s Indonesian–English auto-translation subtitles and found that AI-generated subtitles frequently produce lexical and structural inaccuracies. Their study highlights the limitations of automated subtitle translation in terms of linguistic accuracy. Another study by Mulyati & Nugroho (2023), in “Translation of Verbal Humor in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory Movie,” investigated the translation of verbal humor in film subtitles. Their findings demonstrate that maintaining humor requires careful selection of subtitling strategies and contextual adaptation. Meanwhile, Adhikary (2019) in “Loss of Meaning in Translation: The Case Study of a Nepali Novel ‘Basain’,” explored meaning loss in the translation of a Nepali novel and found that cultural differences between languages often result in the alteration or omission of meaning.

Research on machine translation has also shown similar challenges. Siregar & Zawawi (2025), in “Artificial Intelligence in Translating Literary Texts: An Accuracy and Satirical Representation of the Arabic Short Story,” examined the translation of satirical literary texts using artificial intelligence and found that AI systems often struggle to interpret irony and implicit meaning. Although these studies provide important insights into translation challenges, most of them focus on literary texts or professionally translated audiovisual media. Therefore, limited research has examined how AI-generated subtitles translate satirical discourse in short-form social media content. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the subtitling strategies used in AI-generated subtitles and identifying the factors that contribute to meaning loss in the translation of satirical TikTok videos.

Based on these issues, this study investigates how TikTok’s AI-generated subtitles translate Indonesian satirical videos into English. Specifically, the study aims to identify forms of meaning loss in AI-generated subtitles of Indonesian satirical TikTok videos and to analyze the subtitling strategies used by TikTok’s AI system in translating satirical utterances. The findings of this research are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of research in audiovisual translation and AI-assisted translation by examining how automated systems handle satirical discourse. Practically, the results may provide useful insights for translators, content creators, and digital platforms in understanding the limitations of AI-generated subtitles and improving cross-linguistic communication in digital media environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Subtitles in Audiovisual Translation

Translation plays an essential role in facilitating communication between speakers of different languages. In audiovisual media, translation is often presented through subtitles, which display written text that represents spoken dialogue on screen. According to Henrik Gottlieb (1992), subtitle is defined as a textual, additive, synchronous, and polysemiotic translation of spoken

*Author(s) Correspondence:

E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

discourse into written form. Unlike other forms of translation, subtitles operate under strict spatial and temporal constraints because subtitles must appear on screen within limited time and space. These constraints require translators to modify or adapt the original dialogue while preserving the essential meaning of the message. As explained by Jorge Díaz Cintas and Aline Remael (2014), subtitling is considered one of the most constrained forms of translation since translators must balance linguistic accuracy with readability and synchronization with the audiovisual elements. Consequently, subtitling often involves strategic decisions in order to maintain the communicative function of the source text.

Subtitling Strategies

To deal with the limitations of subtitling, Gottlieb (1992) proposes a set of subtitling strategies that can be used when transferring spoken dialogue into written subtitles. These strategies include transfer, paraphrase, condensation, expansion, imitation, transcription, deletion, dislocation, resignation, and decimation. Each strategy reflects a different method of handling linguistic differences between the source language and the target language. The following sections explain each subtitling strategy proposed by Gottlieb (1992).

Transfer

Transfer refers to direct translation with minimal modification to the source utterance. This strategy aims to preserve both meaning and structure as closely as possible. For example, “Aku sudah selesai mengerjakan tugas itu” may be translated as “I have finished that assignment.”

Paraphrase

Paraphrase involves reformulating the source utterance using different expressions while maintaining the intended meaning. This strategy is commonly used when literal translation sounds unnatural in the target language. For example, “Dia nggak bisa diandalkan” may be translated as “He is not reliable.”

Imitation

Imitation is a strategy in which proper names or internationally recognized terms are retained in their original form. This helps preserve identity and referential meaning. For example, “Aku nonton konser Coldplay kemarin” may be translated as “I watched a Coldplay concert yesterday.”

Transcription

Transcription occurs when source-language expressions are retained in the subtitle because they lack direct equivalents or contain cultural specificity. This strategy is often applied to slang or discourse markers. For instance, expressions such as “yaelah” or “mah” may remain untranslated in English subtitles.

Condensation

Condensation shortens the source utterance while preserving its essential meaning. This strategy is commonly used to fit subtitle time and space limitations. For example, “Aku ingin mengucapkan terima kasih atas bantuanmu selama ini” may be condensed into “Thank you for all your help.”

Deletion

Deletion involves omitting elements considered less important to the subtitle. Fillers, repetitions, or hesitation markers are often removed to improve readability. For example, “Ya, jadi, aku pikir kita bisa mulai sekarang” may be translated as “I think we can start now.”

*Author(s) Correspondence:
 E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

Resignation

Resignation is applied when certain meanings or nuances cannot be fully transferred into the target language. In such cases, the translator provides an approximate expression to maintain readability. For example, “Dia hanya tersenyum kecil” may be translated as “He smiled slightly.”

Dislocation

Dislocation modifies the structure of the source utterance in order to preserve tone or communicative effect, particularly in expressions containing sarcasm or irony. For example, the sarcastic utterance “Hebat banget sih kamu” may be translated as “Yeah, right. You’re amazing.”

Expansion

Expansion adds explanatory information to help target audiences understand culture-specific expressions. This strategy is used when direct translation alone may create ambiguity. For example, “Dia ikut arisan” may be translated as “She joined a traditional social gathering called arisan.”

Decimation

Decimation involves a substantial reduction of the source utterance due to subtitle constraints. Some details or nuances may be omitted to preserve the main idea. For example, “Saya sudah bilang berkali-kali sejak awal bahwa rencana ini tidak akan berhasil” may be simplified into “I told you it wouldn’t work.”

The choice of subtitling strategy may influence how meaning is conveyed in audiovisual translation. Strategies involving literal transfer, omission, or reduction may affect contextual and pragmatic meaning, particularly in satirical discourse that relies heavily on irony, humor, and implicit criticism. **Meaning Loss in Translation**

One of the common issues in translation is the phenomenon of meaning loss. Meaning loss occurs when certain aspects of the source text cannot be fully conveyed in the target language. According to Newmark (1988), meaning loss may occur due to several factors, including cultural differences, linguistic differences, individual language use (idiosyncrasy), different theories of meaning and value systems, and limitations on the part of the translator. These factors highlight that translation is not simply a process of replacing words between languages but a complex activity that involves interpretation and contextual understanding. In audiovisual translation, the risk of meaning loss may increase because translators must adapt the dialogue to fit subtitle constraints. When certain expressions are shortened, omitted, or reformulated, parts of the original meaning may be reduced or altered. This issue becomes particularly significant when translating discourse that relies heavily on implicit meaning, such as satire.

Satire and Translation Challenges

Satire is a form of discourse that uses humor, irony, parody, exaggeration, or ridicule to criticize individuals, social groups, or institutions (Abrams & Harpham, 2012). Unlike ordinary humor, satire often conveys implicit criticism that depends heavily on contextual and cultural interpretation. For example, the Indonesian sarcastic expression “Wah, rajin banget ya datang telat terus” literally means “Wow, you’re so diligent at always coming late,” but the intended meaning is criticism rather than praise. If translated literally without recognizing the ironic tone, the satirical effect may be misunderstood by target audiences. Similarly, expressions such as “Hebat banget pemerintah, rakyat susah malah tunjangan dinaikin” may sound like genuine appreciation when translated literally, even though the utterance actually contains political criticism and irony.

In Translation Studies, satire is considered challenging because translators must preserve not only semantic meaning but also communicative effect, emotional tone, and implicit criticism. According to Newmark (1981), communicative translation is often more suitable for translating satire because it prioritizes the intended response of target audiences rather than literal lexical equivalence.

*Author(s) Correspondence:

E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

Previous studies have shown that translating humor and satire requires contextual adaptation and cultural sensitivity. Mulyati and Nugroho (2023), for example, found that maintaining humor in subtitles often requires paraphrase and contextual reformulation rather than direct translation. Similarly, Siregar and Zawawi (2025) reported that AI systems frequently struggle to interpret irony and implicit meaning in satirical texts. These challenges become more complex in AI-generated subtitles because automated systems primarily rely on lexical processing and may fail to recognize contextual, cultural, and pragmatic nuances in satirical discourse.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design with content analysis to examine meaning loss in AI-generated English subtitles of Indonesian satirical TikTok videos. Qualitative descriptive research aims to describe and interpret a phenomenon within its natural context through detailed textual analysis (Sandelowski, 2000). This approach is considered appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting linguistic, pragmatic, and contextual meaning in subtitle translation rather than measuring numerical data. Through content analysis, the spoken dialogue and AI-generated subtitles are treated as textual data to identify patterns of meaning transfer, satirical expression, and subtitling strategies in audiovisual communication (Krippendorff, 2013). The method also enables the researchers to analyze how contextual and cultural elements of satire are preserved or reduced in the subtitle translation process.

The data of this study were obtained from five satirical videos uploaded on the TikTok account @dipalelu, a content creator known for producing humorous content containing social and political criticism. The videos were selected through purposive sampling based on several criteria, including the presence of satirical elements and relevance to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). In addition, the selected videos predominantly represent Horatian satire, in which criticism is delivered in a light and humorous manner. The characteristics of the selected videos are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Selected TikTok Videos and Their Satirical Characteristics

No	Name	Published Date	Main Topic	Satirical Elements	Characteristics
1	<i>Duit Gue</i> (My Money)	8 August 2025	Borrowing culture and financial dependency	Humor, parody, irony	Criticizes people who frequently borrow money from others through humorous and ironic expressions.
2	<i>Malaikat Bingung</i> (The Angel is Confused)	19 October 2025	Laziness and false self-improvement	Humor, parody	Mimics contradictory behavior of individuals who claim to improve themselves while maintaining unproductive habits.
3	<i>Pulang</i> (Go Home)	24 October 2025	Hanging out late at night and social dependency	Humor, parody	Delivers light criticism toward individuals who spend excessive time socializing without awareness of time.
4	<i>Tunjangan Pejabat</i>	22 August 2025	Government policy and social inequality	Humor, direct criticism	Criticizes the increase of officials' allowances while

*Author(s) Correspondence:
 E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

	(Government Officials' Allowances)				teachers' welfare receives limited attention.
5	<i>Pohon Sawit</i> (Oil Palm Tree)	6 December 2025	Environmental and political issues	Humor, parody, irony	Parodies political statements regarding environmental problems and criticizes performative government responses to disasters

Several criteria were applied in selecting the data. First, the videos had to contain satirical elements based on linguistic and non-linguistic elements. In this study, satire was identified through Abrams' (1999) theory of satire as linguistic elements. There are such as irony, parody, humor, and allegory. In addition, non-linguistic elements such as intonation, facial expressions, contextual situations, and audiovisual cues were also considered to support the interpretation of satirical meaning. These criteria were used to distinguish satirical discourse from ordinary humor or informal conversation. Second, the videos had to gain significant public engagement, indicated by more than one million likes. Third, the videos were limited to those published between August 2025 and January 2026 in order to ensure the relevance and recency of TikTok's AI subtitle system. The data consist of spoken dialogue in Indonesian as the source language (SL) and English subtitles automatically generated by TikTok's AI as the target language (TL).

Although some TikTok videos may contain bilingual or multilingual expressions, this study only included videos in which Indonesian was used as the dominant spoken language. Minor insertions of English words or informal foreign expressions were not categorized as bilingual discourse because they did not significantly affect the overall linguistic structure of the utterances. Videos containing extensive bilingual or multilingual interaction were excluded to maintain consistency in analyzing meaning transfer between Indonesian and English subtitles. The data were collected through several stages. First, the researchers accessed the TikTok platform and observed the content uploaded on the selected account. Second, videos that met the research criteria were selected. Third, the original Indonesian speech was transcribed and the AI-generated English subtitles were documented. Finally, subtitle segments indicating potential meaning shifts or meaning loss were identified for further analysis.

The analysis followed the procedures of content analysis. First, the researchers compared the source language dialogue and the AI-generated subtitles to identify meaning loss. Second, the translation results were examined using Newmark's (1988) theory of meaning loss to identify the factors contributing to meaning loss in the translation. In this study, the term "translator" in Newmark's framework refers to TikTok's AI-generated subtitle system, which automatically produces English translations from Indonesian audiovisual content. Third, each subtitle segment was classified according to Gottlieb's (1992) subtitling strategies in order to determine how the AI system translated the dialogue under audiovisual constraints. Finally, the findings were interpreted to explain how the subtitling strategies used by TikTok's AI contribute to the occurrence of meaning loss in the translation of satirical content.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the analysis of AI-generated English subtitles from five satirical videos uploaded on the TikTok account @dipalelu. The study focuses on subtitles automatically produced by TikTok's AI system from videos that contain informal Indonesian and sarcastic expressions. A total of 51 subtitle units were collected and analyzed, where each unit represents a complete utterance in the source language and its corresponding English translation generated by the AI system. However, only selected representative data are discussed in detail in this

*Author(s) Correspondence:
 E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

section to illustrate the patterns of subtitling strategies and the factors contributing to meaning loss. Each datum includes the source language (SL), the target language (TL), and the subtitle timestamp indicating when the subtitle appears on the screen. The analysis identifies the subtitling strategies used by the AI based on Gottlieb's (1992) framework and examines the factors influencing meaning loss using Newmark's (1988) concept of loss and gain of meaning. Through this analysis, the study aims to explain how the AI transfers meaning from the source language into the target language and how certain meanings are reduced or distorted during the translation process.

Factors of Meaning Loss

According to Newmark (1988), meaning loss occurs when certain elements of the source language shift, weaken, or disappear in the target language during the translation process. This loss may involve semantic content, cultural nuances, stylistic features, or pragmatic intentions embedded in the original utterance. Because languages operate within different grammatical systems and cultural contexts, complete equivalence between the source and target language is difficult to achieve. As a result, translators must interpret and adjust the source message, which may lead to partial changes in meaning at lexical, semantic, or pragmatic levels. In this study, meaning loss is observed in three forms: lexical loss (inaccurate word choice), semantic loss (distortion of propositional meaning), and pragmatic loss (loss of implied or satirical intention).

This section analyzes the occurrence of meaning loss in the AI-generated subtitles taken from five satirical videos uploaded on the TikTok account @dipalelu. Using Newmark's (1988) framework, the analysis identifies three main factors contributing to meaning loss: limitations of the AI translation system (categorized under translator incompetence), linguistic differences, and cultural differences. The results show that limitations related to translator incompetence appear in 50 data, linguistic differences in 9 data, and cultural differences in 6 data. These factors are not mutually exclusive because a single subtitle unit may contain multiple causes of meaning loss simultaneously. Consequently, the total frequency of meaning loss factors exceeds the number of subtitle units analyzed. The overall distribution of these findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors of Meaning Loss

No	Factor of Meaning Loss	Frequency	Percentage
1	Translator Incompetence	50	76.92%
2	Linguistic Differences	9	13.84%
3	Cultural Differences	6	9.23%
Total		65	100%

Linguistic Differences

Linguistic differences constitute a significant factor contributing to meaning loss in AI-generated subtitling. Indonesian and English diverge considerably in grammatical structure, lexical inventory, and expressive conventions, discrepancies that complicate accurate cross-linguistic transfer. The analysis reveals that AI-generated subtitles frequently render source utterances through literal translation without adequate syntactic or grammatical adaptation to English norms, yielding unnatural or incomplete renditions that obscure intended meanings. This factor manifests across 9 data points, demonstrating how structural and lexical asymmetries between the two languages precipitate meaning degradation in the subtitled output. This is a sample of data that represent loss of meaning cause by linguistic differences:

Table 3. Sample Data of Linguistic Differences

Video Name	"Pohon Sawit" (Oil Palm Tree)
SL	[00:22-00:25] Ngapain mikul beras kalau gak bisa mikul amanah?

*Author(s) Correspondence:

E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

TL	[00:37-00:40] <i>what to do mikul rice if you can't mikul amanah</i>
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The AI system transcribes "mikul" and "amanah" rather than translating them, resulting in substantial meaning loss rooted in linguistic and contextual limitations. The term "mikul" derives from the Indonesian word *memikul*, which according to KBBI means "to carry or bear a burden," while "amanah" refers to trust or responsibility. Both expressions carry culturally embedded meanings in Indonesian political discourse. The utterance criticizes performative governance: officials who conspicuously carry relief supplies for cameras while failing to bear genuine responsibility toward affected communities. By rendering these terms as opaque transcriptions, the AI strips away the satirical force, political critique, and cultural pragmatics embedded in the original. This case illustrates how linguistic asymmetries, compounded by deficient contextual processing, erode the substantive message in AI-generated subtitling.

Cultural Differences

Cultural differences emerge as another significant factor in meaning loss, given the intrinsic interdependence of language and culture. Indonesian expressions frequently embed culturally specific references, social contexts, and implicit meanings that resist direct lexical equivalence in English. The AI system's literal translation approach, which neglects cultural background, often yields subtitles that obscure or dilute the intended message for target audiences. This factor appears in 6 data points, revealing the system's limited capacity to interpret culture-bound terms, social allusions, and context-dependent expressions. Consequently, the subtitles forfeit cultural nuance and fail to transmit the underlying social or satirical intent. Below is the sample of meaning loss influenced by cultural differences:

Table 4. Sample Data of Cultural Differences

Video Name	"Pulang" (Go Home)
SL	[00:17-00:22] <i>Makanya punya tangan jangan dipake buat ngelus dengkul doang waktu mau minjem duit, ye.</i>
TL	[00:17-00:20] <i>That's why you don't use your hands to rub your knees.</i> [00:21-00:22] <i>When you want to borrow money,</i>

The datum illustrates how cultural differences precipitate meaning loss. The idiom "ngelus dengkul," literally denoting knee-rubbing, functions in Indonesian culture as an embodied expression of embarrassment, regret, or helplessness rather than a mere physical description. The AI's literal rendering as "rub your knees" strips away this cultural semantics, producing a semantically vacant or potentially perplexing formulation for English-speaking viewers unfamiliar with the gestural convention. The satirical force of the utterance, which critiques unproductive borrowers, consequently diminishes. This case demonstrates that culturally embedded expressions resist direct translation without compromising communicative efficacy.

Translator Incompetence

Translator incompetence represents the most prevalent factor in this study, accounting for 50 data points. This concept refers specifically to technological constraints inherent in AI systems, encompassing deficient contextual interpretation, limited capacity to recognize wordplay, inadequate processing of idiomatic expressions, and suboptimal application of subtitling strategies. Unlike human translators, the AI system demonstrates insufficient sensitivity to pragmatic meaning, tonal variation, and implied intention in the source text. The findings reveal recurrent patterns of literal rendering, lexical misselection, expression misinterpretation, and improper segmentation, collectively indicating a systemic lack of contextual comprehension that substantially compromises

*Author(s) Correspondence:
 E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

translation accuracy and clarity. These are examples of meaning loss influenced by translator incompetence:

Table 5. Sample Data of Translator Incompetence

Video Name	"Malaikat Bingung" (The Angel is Confused)
SL	[00:02-00:06] <i>Ini malaikat bingung jatohnya, niat baik apa boong mulu.</i>
TL	[00:02-00:03] <i>this angel confused the fall</i> [00:04-00:06] <i>good intentions what a lie mulu</i>

The datum exemplifies translator incompetence through multiple interconnected issues. The AI renders "jatohnya" as "the fall," a literal substitution that obscures its discourse function of indicating eventual outcome or revelation. This lexical misselection produces syntactic awkwardness in the target text, compounded by improper segmentation that fragments the utterance into grammatically incomplete units. The metaphorical expression "malaikat bingung," deployed to hyperbolically critique habitual self-improvement failures, loses its figurative force entirely. Furthermore, "mulu," an informal intensifier denoting persistence, remains untranscribed rather than rendered as "constantly" or "always." Collectively, these deficiencies demonstrate the AI's inability to process contextual meaning, informal register, and figurative language, resulting in substantial degradation of the satirical message.

Table 6. Sample Data of Translator Incompetence

Video Name	"Tunjangan Pejabat" (Government Officials' Allowances)
SL	[00:22-00:26] <i>Itu juga fasilitasnya dari Allah bukan pemerintah.</i>
TL	[00:23-00:25] <i>It is also a facility from God.</i> [00:25-00:26] <i>not the government</i>

The translation in this datum achieves adequate semantic transfer, yet technical and structural deficiencies compromise its effectiveness. The AI segments a single utterance into two temporally separated lines, a decision that diminishes readability without communicative justification. The second line exhibits minor grammatical deviation from English syntactic norms, yielding a fragmented, less cohesive presentation. A unified rendering, "It's a facility from God, not the government," would enhance clarity and processing ease within standard subtitle duration constraints. Additionally, the translation of "juga" as "also" introduces superfluous lexical material that contributes negligible semantic content; its omission would yield greater concision without impairing meaning. This case illustrates a characteristic limitation of AI-generated subtitling: strict adherence to word-level processing and precise temporal synchronization with source delivery often supersedes considerations of readability and textual fluency. Optimal subtitling practice, by contrast, permits minor temporal adjustments to accommodate syntactically complete formulations that facilitate target audience comprehension and acceptance.

The findings indicate that meaning loss frequently occurs in TikTok's AI-generated subtitles, affecting lexical, semantic, and pragmatic levels. Some translations still convey the general idea, but many fail to preserve the speaker's tone, contextual nuance, and satirical effect. This is mainly caused by the AI system's limited ability to interpret informal expressions, cultural references, and wordplay, often resulting in literal, word-by-word translations that reduce implied meaning. Errors in speech recognition and ineffective subtitle segmentation also contribute to the distortion, especially in satirical and humorous content. This study did not identify individual language use (idiosyncrasy) or different theories of meaning and value systems as factors of meaning loss. Because AI operates through programmed algorithms rather than personal linguistic choices, it lacks individual style or evaluative judgment. Therefore, meaning loss in AI-generated subtitles is largely determined by limited contextual and pragmatic understanding rather than subjective or ideological factors.

*Author(s) Correspondence:

E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

A comparison with Adhikary's (2019) study on human translation of the Nepali novel *Basain* reveals both similarities and differences. Both studies recognize that linguistic and cultural differences are central causes of meaning loss. However, Adhikary focuses on human translation, where errors often result from cultural gaps, overgeneralization, incomplete linguistic knowledge, and translator technique. In contrast, this study examines AI-generated speech-to-text translation, where the main sources of meaning loss are technological limitations, including literal translation, failure to detect satire, speech recognition errors, and inability to interpret pragmatic meaning. This distinction shows that while meaning loss is inevitable in both contexts, the dominant causes differ according to the type of translator and translation medium. Consequently, AI-generated subtitles face challenges not only from linguistic and cultural differences but also from inherent limitations in computational processing, highlighting a shift in the nature of translation errors compared to human translation.

Subtitling Strategies

As part of audiovisual translation, subtitles operate under spatial and temporal constraints, including limited screen space and restricted reading time. These constraints require translators to convey meaning concisely while maintaining readability and synchronization with audiovisual elements. This subsection discusses the subtitling strategies identified in the AI-generated English subtitles from five satirical videos uploaded on the TikTok account @dipalelu. The analysis aims to examine how TikTok's AI system translated Indonesian satirical utterances into English based on Gottlieb's (1992) subtitling strategy framework.

The findings presented in this section represent the overall subtitling strategies identified across all five selected videos. From a total of 51 subtitle units, 64 strategy occurrences were identified because a single subtitle unit may contain more than one subtitling strategy operating simultaneously at different linguistic levels. For example, an utterance may predominantly employ a transfer strategy at the sentence level while also containing transcription at the lexical level for culturally specific or non-standard expressions. Therefore, the total frequency of strategies exceeds the total number of subtitle units analyzed.

The analysis shows that transfer is the most dominant strategy, occurring 50 times, followed by transcription with 12 occurrences, while decimation and deletion appear only once each. These findings indicate that TikTok's AI-generated subtitles primarily rely on direct lexical transfer from the source language into the target language with minimal contextual adaptation, even in satirical utterances that contain irony, informal expressions, and culturally embedded meanings. To provide a clearer overview of the distribution of strategies, Table 7 presents the frequency of subtitling strategies found in each video.

Table 7. Subtitling Strategies Found in Each Video

No	Video Name	Transfer	Transcription	Decimation	Deletion	Total
1	<i>Duit Gue (My Money)</i>	7	1	-	-	8
2	<i>Malaikat Bingung (The Angel is Confused)</i>	9	3	-	-	12
3	<i>Pulang (Go Home)</i>	11	3	1	1	16
4	<i>Tunjangan Pejabat (Government Officials' Allowances)</i>	8	2	-	-	10
5	<i>Pohon Sawit (Oil Palm Tree)</i>	15	3	-	-	18
Total		50	12	1	1	64

*Author(s) Correspondence:
 E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

Transfer

Transfer is a subtitling strategy in which the source language is translated directly into the target language without significant reduction, preserving the essential meaning of the original utterance. The utterance below is a representation of transfer strategy:

Table 8. Sample Data of Transfer

Video Name	"Duit Gue" (My Money)
SL	[00:05-00:11] <i>Konsep nyari duit juga bukan, "kerja ah buat yang mau minjem", bukan!</i>
TL	[00:05-00:08] <i>The concept of making money is also not work.</i> [00:08-00:11] <i>It's not for those who want to borrow.</i>

This datum shows that the AI applies the transfer strategy because all elements of the source utterance are translated into the target language, although the subtitle is divided into two sentences. While such division is acceptable in subtitling, in this case it reduces clarity. The translation "The concept of making money is also not work" contains a grammatical problem and distorts the intended meaning, particularly in the phrase "also not work," which may obscure the intended satirical meaning in the target language. A clearer translation would be "The concept of making money is not for those who want to borrow," which conveys the intended message more accurately.

Transcription

Transcription is a subtitling strategy in which specific source-language elements are reproduced directly in the target language without translation, usually for proper names, terms, or expressions that lack equivalents. Below is the sample data of transcription strategy:

Table 9. Sample Data of Transcription

Video Name	"Pulang" (Go home)
SL	[00:11-00:13] <i>"Yaelah masih jam segini mah masih siang."</i>
TL	[00:11-00:12] <i>yaelah still at this hour mah</i> [00:12-00:13] <i>still daytime</i>

The sample above shows that the AI applies the transcription strategy to the words "yaelah" and "mah," reproducing them in their original form instead of translating them. These expressions function as informal discourse particles or interjections that contribute to tone, emphasis, and pragmatic meaning in Indonesian conversational discourse (Ananda & Mulyadi, 2020). However, instead of adapting their pragmatic function into natural English expressions, the AI system retains the original lexical forms, which may reduce the intended satirical tone in the target language. The use of transcription strategy may indicate that the AI system processes these expressions primarily as lexical units detected through speech recognition rather than as pragmatic discourse markers requiring contextual adaptation. As a result, the original forms are retained instead of being omitted or replaced with more natural English equivalents, which may reduce the intended satirical tone in the target language. This strategy choice contributes to meaning loss, particularly in conveying the informal tone of the original utterance.

Decimation

Decimation is a subtitling strategy that significantly reduces the source utterance in order to fit time and space constraints, retaining only the most essential information. The utterance below is the decimation strategy in TikTok's AI-generated subtitle:

*Author(s) Correspondence:
 E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

Table 10. Sample Data of Decimation

Video Name	"Pulang" (Go Home)
SL	[00:04-00:06] <i>Kita udah keluar dari siang, jam segini <u>ya pulang.</u></i>
TL	[00:04-00:06] <i>We're out of noon at this hour.</i>

This datum indicates the use of the decimation strategy, as part of the source utterance is reduced in the translation. However, the omission of the word "pulang" ("go home") is irrelevant because it represents the essential meaning of the sentence. In the video, the speaker criticizes people who continue hanging out late at night without realizing the time. Before the utterance appears, the speaker sarcastically comments on how the group keeps talking and socializing despite the late hour. Within this context, the utterance implicitly functions as a suggestion for the group to go home. However, the speaker's intention to suggest going home is therefore not conveyed in the target language. This reduction removes the core idea of the utterance and results in meaning loss, making the message unclear for target-language viewers. A more accurate translation could be "At this hour, we should go home," which preserves the main intention without altering the meaning.

Deletion

Deletion is a subtitling strategy in which certain source-language elements are omitted in the target subtitle to reduce length and meet spatial and temporal constraints. The utterance below is a deletion strategy:

Table 11. Sample Data of Deletion

Video Name	"Duit Gue" (My Money)
SL	[00:07-00:10] <i>Kenapa lu? <u>Apa?</u> ga ada rumah? <u>Gembel? Hah?</u></i>
TL	[00:07-00:10] <i>Why don't you have a house?</i>

In this datum, the AI applies the deletion strategy by omitting the words "Apa?", "Gembel?", and "Hah?" and reducing the utterance into one sentence. This helps shorten the subtitle and maintain readability within the time constraint. However, the translation "Why don't you have a house?" alters the tone of the original utterance. The word "gembel" refers to a homeless person and carries a stronger sarcastic tone. A translation such as "Are you homeless?" would better reflect the satirical intention of the speaker. Therefore, although deletion simplifies the subtitle, it weakens the sarcastic effect and leads to pragmatic meaning loss.

The findings indicate that TikTok's AI-generated subtitles rely predominantly on the transfer strategy. Out of 51 data analyzed, 50 employ transfer, suggesting that the system tends to translate the source language directly into the target language with minimal restructuring. This pattern reflects the operational design of AI subtitle systems, which depend on automatic speech recognition and rapid lexical processing. As a result, translations often preserve the original sentence structure even when structural adjustment could improve clarity in the target language.

The presence of transcription in 12 data further suggests that the AI system tends to retain expressions that are culturally embedded or pragmatically difficult to interpret in satirical discourse. When encountering slang, informal expressions, or satire containing implicit criticism, the system often reproduces the original lexical form rather than adapting the meaning contextually. For example, expressions such as "mah" or "yaelah," which contribute to sarcastic tone and informal criticism in Indonesian satire, are frequently retained or translated literally without conveying their pragmatic effect in English. As a result, the humorous and critical nuances intended in the source language may become less effective in the target language. This indicates limited pragmatic awareness, particularly in handling satire and implicit criticism that require deeper interpretation.

Meanwhile, decimation and deletion occur only once each, indicating that the system rarely simplifies or omits information and instead prioritizes preserving lexical elements from the source

*Author(s) Correspondence:

E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

utterance. In addition, several strategies proposed by Gottlieb (1992), such as expansion, paraphrase, imitation, dislocation, condensation, and resignation, are not identified in the findings. The absence of these strategies suggests that the AI system performs minimal interpretative adjustment. Strategies such as paraphrase or condensation require contextual reformulation, while dislocation involves sensitivity to tone and stylistic effect. Since AI-generated subtitles rely primarily on automated processing, the system remains limited in applying these adaptive strategies. Consequently, literal transfer becomes the dominant approach. Although this mechanism enables rapid subtitle production, it also restricts the system's ability to convey contextual meaning, humor, and satirical intention.

Compared with the study conducted by Mulyati and Nugroho (2023), several similarities and differences can be observed. Both studies apply Gottlieb's (1992) subtitling strategies and examine complex discourse, although their focus differs. While Mulyati and Nugroho analyze verbal humor in film subtitles translated by human translators, the present study investigates satire in AI-generated subtitles on social media. Both studies identify transfer as the dominant strategy. However, their findings diverge in other aspects. In the study by Mulyati and Nugroho (2023), paraphrase frequently appears as a strategy used to adapt humor into the target language. In contrast, the present study finds transcription as the second most frequent strategy, while paraphrase is absent. This difference highlights a key gap between human and AI translation processes: human translators tend to reformulate expressions to preserve humor and contextual meaning, whereas AI-generated subtitles tend to translate more literally without sufficient contextual interpretation. Therefore, this study contributes to translation research by revealing the patterns and limitations of AI-generated subtitles in translating satirical content on social media platforms.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

This study examines the performance of TikTok's AI-generated subtitles in translating satirical content from the TikTok account @dipalelu. Since satire often involves irony, exaggeration, and cultural references, translating it presents significant challenges for AI systems that rely mainly on pattern recognition and lexical mapping. The analysis was conducted on 51 subtitle units taken from five satirical videos using two analytical frameworks: Gottlieb's (1992) subtitling strategies and Newmark's (1988) factors of meaning loss. The findings show that transfer is the most dominant subtitling strategy used by TikTok's AI, with 50 occurrences, followed by transcription (12 occurrences), while decimation and deletion appear only once each. The dominance of transfer indicates that the AI system mainly relies on literal translation and direct lexical correspondence, often preserving the surface structure of the source language without sufficient contextual adaptation. As a result, some subtitles appear grammatically unnatural or fail to convey the intended satirical tone.

Regarding meaning loss, three main factors were identified: translator incompetence, linguistic differences, and cultural differences. Translator incompetence appears most frequently and refers to the technological limitations of the AI system rather than human error. The system often struggles to interpret informal language, slang, idiomatic expressions, and context-dependent satire. Linguistic differences between Indonesian and English also contribute to meaning distortion, while cultural references sometimes lose their nuance when translated without contextual explanation. Overall, the findings indicate that although TikTok's AI-generated subtitles can facilitate basic cross-language communication, the system still has limitations in preserving the contextual and pragmatic meaning of satirical discourse. The reliance on literal translation strategies frequently reduces the humor, nuance, and critical intention embedded in the original content.

*Author(s) Correspondence:
 E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

Suggestions

Based on the conclusions of this study, several suggestions can be proposed for future research, AI developers, and content creators. Future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of investigation by examining AI-generated subtitles in other types of discourse, such as political speeches, religious content, educational materials, or live-stream interactions, in order to compare how different communicative purposes influence the preservation of meaning. Further studies may also integrate pragmatic theory, relevance theory, or translation quality assessment models to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of AI translation performance. Comparative research between AI-generated subtitles and human-translated subtitles would also offer valuable insight into differences in contextual sensitivity and strategic adaptation.

In terms of technological development, social media platforms, particularly TikTok, are recommended to enhance their AI subtitle systems by improving contextual processing and pragmatic interpretation. Since many instances of meaning loss originate from speech recognition errors and literal lexical mapping, strengthening automatic speech recognition accuracy and incorporating contextual disambiguation mechanisms may significantly reduce translation distortion. The development of models capable of detecting figurative language, satire, and culturally bound expressions would further improve subtitle quality in digital media. For content creators, especially those producing satirical and humorous content, it is advisable not to rely entirely on AI-generated subtitles when targeting international audiences. Reviewing and manually editing subtitles before publication may help preserve intended tone, implied meaning, and communicative nuance. By doing so, creators can minimize misunderstanding and ensure that their message is accurately conveyed across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

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E-mail: vaniashafanabila@gmail.com

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