



# Humor Maintenance and Translation Techniques in Cunk on Earth - In the Beginnings's Indonesian Subtitles

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## Abstract

This study examines the challenges of humor translation in audiovisual media, focusing on the Indonesian subtitles of the British mockumentary *Cunk on Earth* (2022). While humor relies heavily on cultural and linguistic nuances, literal translations often fail to preserve comedic effect, resulting in humor loss—a persistent issue in cross-cultural media adaptation. The research analyzes 128 humorous utterances using Molina and Albir's (2002) translation techniques to identify which strategies best maintain humor in subtitling. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining qualitative content analysis with audience evaluations. Three native English speakers validated the humorous segments, while 15 Indonesian participants rated the translations' effectiveness on a three-point scale (fully maintained, partially maintained, or lost). Results revealed that 12 translation techniques were applied, with Literal Translation (24.78%), Linguistic Compression (16.37%), and Modulation (15.04%) being the most frequent. Among these, Literal Translation proved most successful in humor preservation (19.56% of cases), while Adaptation and Compensation were less effective. Overall, 53.91% of translations fully retained humor, demonstrating that certain techniques better accommodate cultural-linguistic gaps in mockumentary-style comedy. The findings highlight the need for flexible, audience-aware strategies when translating satire and deadpan humor, particularly in understudied genres like mockumentaries. This study contributes to audiovisual translation research by providing empirical insights into humor adaptation, with implications for subtitling practice and training.

**Keywords:** *Humor; subtitling; translation*

## Introduction

Translating humor presents significant challenges due to its deep ties to language and culture, often resulting in "humor loss" when jokes fail to resonate in the target language (Yuliasri & Allen, 2019). This is particularly evident in audiovisual translation, where wordplay, cultural references, and idiomatic expressions—such as the English pun "outstanding in his field"—lose their comedic effect when translated literally. While AI and machine translation offer efficiency, human translators remain crucial for preserving the nuances of humor, as they navigate cultural and linguistic subtleties that automated systems cannot fully grasp.

This study examines how humor is handled in the Indonesian subtitles of *Cunk on Earth* (2022), a British mockumentary renowned for its dry wit and satire. A mockumentary is a fictional film or show that mimics documentary style, using satire, deadpan humor, and fake interviews to parody real-life subjects or genres while pretending to be serious. Mockumentaries present unique challenges in translating humor due to their deadpan delivery, satire, and absurdity. For example, in *Cunk on Earth*, British dry wit, such as "Was the Renaissance just a viral trend?", risks losing its ironic edge if translated literally, while cultural references (e.g., mocking David Attenborough's documentary style) demand adaptive strategies to preserve parody. Using Molina and Albir's (1992) subtitling strategies, the research analyzes whether translators successfully retain the original humor despite linguistic and cultural constraints. The findings will contribute to understanding the complexities of humor translation in audiovisual media, highlighting the balance between fidelity to the source text and adaptability for the target audience.

The main framework for this study also provides an optimal framework for analyzing *Cunk on Earth*, due to its systematic classification of strategies that balance linguistic precision and cultural adaptation, which are crucial for humor translation. Their model's granularity (e.g., distinguishing Literal Translation from Adaptation) enables precise evaluation of how satire and deadpan wit are transposed across languages, while its empirical foundation ensures methodological rigor. Furthermore, the framework's flexibility accommodates audiovisual constraints, making it ideal for assessing humor preservation in mockumentaries.

Research on humor translation has evolved from early literary analyses to contemporary studies of audiovisual media, reflecting a growing recognition of genre-specific challenges. Early scholarship focused on literary texts, such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Setyaningsih & Antaniami, 2019) and *Harry Potter* (Yuliasri & Hartono, 2014; Yuliasri & Allen, 2019), revealing persistent humor loss due to linguistic and cultural disparities. These works established foundational insights into strategies such as paraphrasing and cultural substitution, although with limited applicability to audiovisual contexts.

As studies expanded to audiovisual media, frameworks such as Gottlieb's (1992) subtitling strategies and Molina and Albir's (2002) techniques were applied to sitcoms (e.g., *The Big Bang Theory*; Anggraini et al., 2020) and animations (e.g., *SpongeBob SquarePants*; Xia et al., 2023). Findings underscored the inefficacy of direct translation for puns and culture-bound jokes, advocating instead for adaptive techniques. However, such research predominantly addressed conventional humor forms (e.g., slapstick, sarcasm), neglecting complex genres like mockumentaries, where satire and deadpan delivery demand tonal precision.

Recent advances highlight the role of cultural conceptualization (Mohebbi, 2023) and relevance theory (Diaz-Perez, 2014) in humor transference, yet their application remains rare for irony-driven formats. While studies like Zuo's (2020) comparative analyses and Rasouli and Rahimi's (2015) work on religious humor explore contextual adaptation, none examine the interplay of visual and linguistic absurdity central to mockumentaries. This gap is critical, as genres like *Cunk on Earth* rely on layered satire where audiovisual synchrony amplifies humor—a dimension overlooked in current frameworks.

By analyzing *Cunk on Earth*, this study extends humor translation research into underrepresented mockumentary territory, testing the limits of existing models (e.g., Molina and Albir's techniques) while proposing adaptations for the specific challenges of satire. It bridges the theoretical divides between literary/audio-visual scholarship, prioritizing the genre's unique demands: preserving the absurdist tone, timing, and cultural subtext.

This study focuses on two core questions regarding the Indonesian subtitling of *Cunk on Earth - In the Beginnings*: (1) which of Molina and Albir's (2002) translation techniques are employed in rendering the humorous utterances, and (2) how effectively these techniques preserve the original humor. The research breaks new ground by focusing on the mockumentary genre—a largely overlooked area in translation studies, despite its distinctive comedic style, which features deadpan delivery, ironic narration, and absurdist satire. By examining how Indonesian subtitles address these unique humor conventions, the study offers fresh perspectives on audiovisual translation challenges specific to satirical content, while providing practical solutions for maintaining a comedic effect across cultural boundaries.

## **Method**

This study, conducted in 2024, employed a qualitative research design to examine humor translation in the mockumentary "*Cunk on Earth: In the Beginnings*," which spans 28 minutes. The research employed qualitative content analysis to systematically categorize and interpret humorous utterances, complemented by descriptive qualitative methods to provide a detailed examination of translation techniques. This dual approach enabled both the structured analysis of textual data and the flexible examination of emerging themes

related to the transfer of cross-cultural humor. The design was particularly suited to investigating the nuanced ways humor is adapted in subtitles while maintaining the original comedic intent.

The research involved two key participant groups selected for their linguistic and cultural expertise. Three native English speakers served as validators, carefully reviewing the mockumentary to identify and confirm genuine instances of humor in the source material. Fifteen native Indonesian speakers then evaluated the translated humor through a structured rating scale, providing crucial insights into how effectively the humor was preserved in the Indonesian subtitles. These fifteen native Indonesian speakers, aged between 18 and 25 years old, are either currently in college or college graduates, and they are all familiar with *Cunk on Earth*. The two sets of participants were explicitly chosen for their familiarity with both the mockumentary genre and the cultural contexts of the original and translated content.

Data collection incorporated multiple methods to ensure comprehensive analysis. The primary data source was the mockumentary itself, from which humorous segments were systematically extracted and transcribed. The 128 humorous utterances analyzed in this study were systematically extracted from the first 28 minutes of *Cunk on Earth* (2022), representing the whole duration of the episode "In the Beginnings." A validation checklist was administered to native English speakers to verify the humorous content. At the same time, a carefully designed rating scale questionnaire captured the perceptions of Indonesian viewers regarding the translated humor. The researcher also maintained detailed observational notes throughout the process, documenting patterns in translation techniques and audience reactions to different types of humor.

The analysis followed a rigorous process to ensure thorough examination of the data. First, translation techniques were identified and categorized using established frameworks from the field of translation studies. The 15 Indonesian participants were asked to rate the humor translation into three categories, which are Maintained (score: 3), Less Maintained (score: 2), and Not Maintained (score: 1). Maintained (score: 3) means the target text fully preserves the source's comedic effect (wordplay, cultural references, etc.), delivering identical impact. Less Maintained (score: 2) indicates partial retention, where humor is weakened or less clear. Not Maintained (score: 1) reflects complete humor loss due to untranslatable cultural/linguistic nuances, rendering the target text flat.

Next, audience responses were systematically coded and analyzed to evaluate the degree of humor maintenance in the translations. Finally, cross-analysis revealed important relationships between specific translation choices and their effectiveness in preserving humor. This iterative analytical approach allowed for continuous refinement of categories and themes as the study progressed, ultimately providing valuable insights into the complex process of humor

translation in audiovisual media.

This study adhered to standard research ethics protocols. All participants, including 15 Indonesian evaluators and three native English-speaking raters, provided informed consent via Google Forms, which outlined the study's purpose, data usage terms, and their rights to withdraw. No compensation was offered. Participants were anonymized in analysis; raw data is stored securely and will only be presented in aggregate form. The role of native English speakers was limited to validating the source-text humor and ensuring there was no conflict of interest. Cunk on Earth excerpts were analyzed under fair use for academic criticism.

## **Results**

This study analyzed 128 humorous utterances from Cunk on Earth, yielding 228 instances of translation techniques applied in the Indonesian subtitles. The findings reveal how distinct strategies—from literal translation to cultural adaptation—impacted humor preservation across deadpan satire, absurdist juxtapositions, and mock-documentary tropes. The analysis of translation strategies in Cunk on Earth - In the Beginnings reveals Literal Translation as the predominant technique, comprising 24.78% of humorous utterance translations.

Linguistic Compression (16.37%) and Modulation (15.04%) follow closely, while Established Equivalent (13.27%), Reduction (10.18%), and Borrowing (9.29%) also exhibit significant features. Less frequent methods include Adaptation (3.98%), Generalization (2.21%), and Particularization and Transposition (1.77% each), with Description and Compensation trailing at 0.88% each. Notably, six techniques—Amplification, Calque, Discursive Creation, Linguistic Amplification, Substitution, and Variation — were not employed in the subtitling process, highlighting their absence in addressing the mockumentary's humor.

Several translation techniques were notably absent from the subtitles of \*Cunk on Earth - In the Beginnings\*, each omission reflecting specific constraints of the translation process. First, techniques like Amplification and Linguistic Amplification were not used because they inherently require additional explanatory text, which would violate the strict space and time limitations of subtitling. The concise nature of subtitles does not accommodate such expansive techniques. The type of humor in the mockumentary also influenced which techniques were excluded.

Methods such as Discursive Creation and Substitution, which involve significant cultural adaptation of content, were avoided because they are better suited to dubbing or other forms of localization where more creative liberties can be taken. For instance, a reference to "James Corden" might have been effectively localized to an Indonesian celebrity, such as "Raffi Ahmad," in a dubbed version. However, such cultural substitutions are rarely attempted in subtitling due to the

need for direct correspondence with the original dialogue.

Additionally, specific techniques were impractical due to fundamental linguistic differences. Both Calque and Variation depend heavily on wordplay or structural similarities between languages, which often do not exist between English and Indonesian. A prime example is the "Greece/Grease" pun, which relies on a homophone that has no equivalent in Indonesian. Without this linguistic parallel, attempts to use such techniques would have fallen flat, making their exclusion a necessary choice for maintaining translation quality. The absence of these techniques demonstrates how linguistic realities can constrain translation options, particularly when dealing with humor that relies on specific language features.

| No | Translation Technique  | Freq | %      |
|----|------------------------|------|--------|
| 1  | Literal Translation    | 56   | 24.78% |
| 2  | Linguistic Compression | 37   | 16.37% |
| 3  | Modulation             | 34   | 15.04% |
| 4  | Established Equivalent | 30   | 13.27% |
| 5  | Reduction              | 23   | 10.18% |
| 6  | Borrowing              | 21   | 9.29%  |
| 7  | Adaptation             | 9    | 3.98%  |
| 8  | Generalization         | 5    | 2.21%  |
| 9  | Particularization      | 4    | 1.77%  |
| 10 | Transposition          | 4    | 1.77%  |
| 11 | Description            | 2    | 0.88%  |
| 12 | Compensation           | 1    | 0.44%  |
| 13 | Variation              | 0    | 0.00%  |
| 14 | Amplification          | 0    | 0.00%  |
| 15 | Calque                 | 0    | 0.00%  |

|              |                             |            |                     |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| 16           | Discursive<br>Creation      | 0          | 0.00%               |
| 17           | Linguistic<br>Amplification | 0          | 0.00%               |
| 18           | Substitution                | 0          | 0.00%               |
| <b>Total</b> |                             | <b>226</b> | <b>100.00<br/>%</b> |

### ***Literal Translation***

Literal Translation, defined as rendering text word-for-word with minimal structural alteration, emerged as the most frequently applied technique in this study, accounting for 24.56% of cases (56 instances out of 228 total translated utterances). While theoretically suited for straightforward texts, this method served as the default approach for translators even in humor adaptation. An example from this research is below.

- Datum : 7  
Context : Cunk is talking about the beginning of the Earth before humans.  
ST : For billions of years, there was no civilization on Earth. Just animals, plants and gasses getting on and mingling. Must have been beautiful, but also boring.  
TT : *"Selama miliaran tahun, tak ada peradaban di Bumi. Hanya hewan, tumbuhan, dan gas yang bersahabat dan berbaur. Pasti indah, tetapi juga membosankan."*  
BT : For billions of years, there was no civilization on Earth. .... Must have been beautiful, but also boring.

The translation adheres strictly to the source structure: temporal phrases ("for billions of years" → "selama miliaran tahun"), existential clauses ("there was no civilization" → "tak ada peradaban"), and the ironic contrast ("beautiful, but also boring" → "indah, tetapi juga membosankan") remain intact. This fidelity preserved both semantic content and the mockumentary's signature dry wit, demonstrating how Literal Translation can effectively retain humor when linguistic parallels exist between source and target languages. The success here lies in maintaining lexical equivalence without compromising the absurdist tone central to the scene's comedic impact.

### ***Linguistic Compression***

Datum : 9

Context : Cunk is curious about the biology of early humans. Here she asks an expert about the “meat” of early humans.

ST : **Was early man similar to us? I mean, was he made out of the same sort of meat that we are? You know, was it... Did it have a brand name like beef or pork?**

TT : ***Apa manusia purba mirip kita? Apa mereka terbuat dari jenis daging yang sama? Apa mereka... Ada jenisnya seperti daging sapi atau babi?***

BT : Were prehistoric humans like us? Were they made of the same type of meat? Were they... Are there types like beef or pork?

The humor in Cunk’s question about early humans’ “meat” lies in her absurd reduction of human biology to a trivialized commodity, akin to livestock or branded food products like beef or pork. By framing the inquiry as a culinary or marketing query, she injects absurdity into an anthropological discussion. The Indonesian translation employs Linguistic Compression by streamlining Cunk’s verbose phrasing into concise expressions. For instance, “jenis daging yang sama” (“the same type of meat”) and “daging sapi atau babi” (“beef or pork”) retain the comedic contrast between scientific inquiry and ludicrous branding. This compression preserves the core absurdity while adapting to subtitling constraints.

### ***Modulation***

Datum : 17

Context : Cunk is talking about the inventions found by ancient humans.

ST : One thing they did invent was fire, which allowed them to see at night and kept them warm, tragically prolonging their already tedious lives.

TT : *Satu hal yang mereka temukan adalah api, agar bisa melihat saat malam dan tetap hangat, yang memperpanjang hidup mereka yang sudah membosankan.*

BT : One thing they found was fire, so they could see at night and stay warm, which extended their already boring lives.

The humor stems from Cunk’s abrupt tonal shift: after highlighting fire as a pivotal human invention, she undercuts its significance by noting it merely extended their “tedious lives,” contrasting grandeur with banality. The translation employs Modulation, adapting “invent” to temukan (discover), reframing fire as a discovery rather than a creation. Additionally, the Indonesian rendition rephrases “which allowed them to see at night and kept them warm” as agar bisa melihat saat malam dan tetap hangat, shifting from describing fire’s effects to stating its purpose



i.e., a nuance more idiomatic in Indonesian. This strategic adjustment preserves the humor while aligning with linguistic norms.

### ***Established Equivalent***

- Datum : 81  
Context : Cunk moves on to talk about ancient Greece.  
ST : **Greece**, the country, not the musical, was where the birth of civilization was born...  
TT : **Yunani**, negaranya, bukan musiknya, di situlah lahirnya peradaban.  
BT : "Greece, the country, not the music, that's where civilization was born."

The humor originates from the phonetic overlap between "Greece" (the country) and "Grease" (the 1971 musical), creating a wordplay where Cunk clarifies she refers to the nation, not the musical. In Indonesian, this pun is lost as "Yunani" (Greece) and "Grease" lack phonetic similarity. Though the translation adds "negaranya, bukan musiknya" ("the country, not the musical") for context, the linguistic joke dissolves into mere clarification. Creative adaptations could clarify the reference, but replicating the original humor remains challenging due to the absence of equivalent wordplay. Additionally, the term "Greek" (as in "The Greeks") functions as a demonym, further anchoring the context in the country rather than the musical.

### ***Reduction***

- Datum : 17  
Context : Cunk is talking about the invention of fire by early humans.  
ST : One thing they did invent was fire, which allowed them to see at night and kept them warm, **tragically prolonging their already tedious lives.**  
TT : *Satu hal yang mereka temukan adalah api, agar bisa melihat saat malam dan tetap hangat, **yang memperpanjang hidup mereka yang sudah membosankan.***  
BT : One thing they found was fire, so they could see at night and stay warm, which extended their already boring lives.

The humor in Datum 17 stems from Cunk framing fire, a celebrated human achievement, as a nuisance that dragged out the "already tedious" lives of early humans. This clash between society's reverence for fire and her flippant criticism creates absurdity.

The translation employs Reduction by dropping the word "tragically," which originally mocked fire's invention with sarcastic flair. While the omission softens the dark irony, the core joke about fire extending dull existence remains. Losing "tragically" weakens the humor slightly, as the word's exaggerated doom-and-

gloom, which implies longer lifespans were catastrophic, gave the line its playful edge. That said, the translation still captures the ridiculous premise of blaming fire for boring immortality, leaving some humor intact even without the full bite.

### ***Borrowing***

Datum : 56

Context : Cunk is asking an expert whether writing is more significant than rap metal.

ST : Was the invention of writing a significant development or more a flash in the pan, like rap metal?

TT : *Apa penemuan tulisan merupakan perkembangan yang signifikan atau hanya kesuksesan singkat, seperti rap metal?*

BT : Was the discovery of writing a significant development or just a short-lived success, like rap metal?

In this example, the humor stems from Cunk's absurd comparison of a pivotal historical milestone to rap metal, a niche music genre combining rap and heavy metal. The translation retains the term "rap metal" through borrowing, preserving the joke's essence. While "rap metal" may not be widely familiar in Indonesian, the word "metal" is recognizable as a music genre, allowing the audience to grasp the contrast. By directly borrowing the term, the translation maintains the ridiculous equivalence between the monumental invention of writing and a relatively trivial cultural artifact, ensuring the core joke i.e., juxtaposing significance and absurdity, remains intact.

### ***Adaptation***

Datum : 29

Context : Cunk is talking about the practice of hunting gathering done by early humans.

ST : Hunting animals every day was a pain in the arse until someone came up with the idea of also eating plants, which were easier to catch because they couldn't run away.

TT : *Berburu hewan setiap hari sangat menyebalkan, sampai seseorang muncul dengan ide untuk juga memakan tumbuhan, yang lebih mudah ditangkap karena mereka tak bisa kabur.*

BT : Hunting animals every day is very annoying, until someone came up with the idea to also eat plants, which are easier to catch because they can't run away.

The phrase "Hunting animals every day was a pain in the arse" is translated as "Berburu hewan setiap hari sangat menyebalkan," using adaptation to replace the British idiom with a more neutral Indonesian expression. While the original's informal tone is slightly softened, the core meaning of frustration remains clear for

local audiences.

The humor comes from the exaggerated complaint about hunting, followed by the ridiculous suggestion of hunting plants instead. Though the idiomatic punch of "pain in the arse" is lost, the joke still works in the Indonesian version because the absurd contrast between chasing animals and "menangkap tanaman yang tak bisa kabur" ("catching plants that can't run away") stays intact. The translation keeps the playful tone even without the original slang.

### **Generalization**

Datum : 12

Context : Previous to this Cunk made a stereotypical remark about early humans (they had big eyebrows and said "ugg")

ST : But in fact, they were pioneering inventerers.

TT : *tetapi faktanya, mereka adalah penemu perintis.*

BT : but in fact, they are pioneering inventors.

The phrase "pioneering inventerers" was translated as "penemu perintis" using generalization. The original English phrase playfully exaggerates innovation through redundant wording. The Indonesian version simplifies this by using more familiar terms while keeping the core idea of groundbreaking discovery. This choice works because "penemu perintis" combines two similar concepts i.e., "penemu" (inventor) and "perintis" (pioneer), creating a mild redundancy that mirrors the humor of the original. While less literal, it effectively conveys the same tongue-in-cheek tone about early human achievements without sounding unnatural in Indonesian. The translation maintains the joke by lightly mocking the overstatement of their accomplishments, fitting Cunk's typical style of deadpan exaggeration.

### **Particularization**

Datum : 25

Context : Cunk is talking about whether some filmmakers want to adapt cave paintings into a movie, then she follows it up with this:

ST : Suppose they couldn't get the **rights** anyway, though, could they?

TT : *Namun, mereka tetap tak bisa dapat **hak ciptanya**, 'kan?*

BT : However, they still can't get the copyright, right?

Here, Cunk jokes that even if a filmmaker wanted to adapt cave paintings into a movie, they couldn't because the "rights" to these prehistoric artworks would be unavailable. The Indonesian translation uses Particularization by choosing "hak cipta" (copyright) instead of the more general English term "rights." This precise word choice makes the joke even funnier by emphasizing the ridiculousness of applying modern copyright laws to ancient cave art. By using the culturally familiar legal term "hak cipta," the translation keeps the humor sharp while making it more relatable for Indonesian audiences. The casual, ironic tone of the original is

preserved, ensuring the joke works just as well in translation.

### ***Transposition***

Datum : 16

Context : In this utterance, Cunk is asking an expert how ancient humans made tools while walking on all fours. The expert clarifies that ancient humans did not walk on all fours and they made their tools using their hands, so Cunk clarifies by asking:

ST : So in leg terms, it would have been their top legs.

TT : ***Jadi, apa itu kaki bagian atas?***

BT : "So, what is the upper leg?"

The original English text uses a straightforward statement ("it would have been their top legs"), offering a clear but absurd conclusion. However, the Indonesian translation changes this into a question ("apa itu kaki bagian atas?"), altering the sentence structure. This transformation demonstrates transposition, where the grammatical form shifts while preserving meaning. The humor in the original line comes from the ridiculous idea of calling arms "top legs," which fits Cunk's intentionally clueless persona. While the Indonesian version keeps the literal meaning ("kaki bagian atas"), phrasing it as a question makes it sound hesitant rather than confidently absurd. Additionally, "apa itu kaki bagian atas?" feels unnatural in Indonesian, disrupting the comedic flow. This awkward wording weakens the joke, making it less effective for Indonesian viewers.

### ***Description***

Datum : 23

Context : Cunk enters a prehistoric cave that has prehistoric cave paintings depicting human hunting cows.

ST : But soon they began creating white-knuckle fight scenes like this: Humans Versus Cows **2D**. To a caveman, this was the thrilling equivalent of Fast and Furious part 7.

TT : *Tak lama, mereka mulai melukis adegan perkelahian seperti ini. Manusia melawan sapi, **dua dimensi**. Bagi manusia gua, ini setara dengan Fast and Furious Part 7.*

BT : Not long after, they started painting fight scenes like this. Man versus bull, **two-dimensional**. For cavemen, this is the equivalent of Fast and Furious Part 7.

Cunk's humor comes from comparing primitive cave paintings to modern action films like Fast and Furious 7, creating an absurd contrast. The translation uses Description to expand "2D" to "dua dimensi" (two-dimensional), matching Cunk's pronunciation while ensuring clarity for Indonesian viewers. This choice actually enhances the joke by emphasizing how crude cave art contrasts with today's flashy movies. The translation successfully preserves the humor while making it accessible.

### Compensation

Datum : 35

Context : Cunk is talking about the relationship between prehistoric humans with animals, she is making an observation about our tendencies to domesticate animals based on their aesthetic or utility.

ST : **Humans turned animals they couldn't eat or ride into pets** if they were pretty enough.

TT : *Yang tak bisa dimakan atau ditunggangi, manusia jadikan peliharaan jika cukup cantik.*

BT : What can't be eaten or ridden, humans make pets if they're pretty enough.

The humor stems from Cunk noting humans domesticate animals either for utility (food, labor) or cuteness. The translation employs Compensation by restructuring the sentence. While the English version begins with humans domesticating animals followed by the condition ("if pretty enough"), the Indonesian version reverses this order. It starts with animals "that couldn't be eaten or ridden" before mentioning domestication. This syntactic shift accommodates Indonesian grammar while preserving the ironic tone.

The phrase "cukup cantik" (pretty enough) maintains the original's judgmental humor. Despite structural changes, the compensation technique successfully retains both meaning and comedic effect in the target language.

### Humor Maintenance

The relationship between the translation techniques employed in subtitling humorous utterances in *Cunk on Earth - In the Beginnings* and their effectiveness in maintaining humor was systematically analyzed. First, each translation technique used in the mockumentary was identified and cataloged. These techniques were then evaluated by 15 raters, who assigned scores (3 for fully maintained humor, 2 for partially maintained, and 1 for not maintained) to assess humor retention.

The frequencies of these scores were aggregated for every technique across all utterances. Finally, these aggregated values were cross-referenced with the total frequency of each technique's occurrence in the translation, yielding a comprehensive overview of their effectiveness. This methodological approach ensured a rigorous and data-driven examination of how different techniques influenced the preservation of humor in the Indonesian subtitles.

|  |  |       |
|--|--|-------|
|  |  | Score |
|--|--|-------|

| No | Translation Technique    | 3    |        | 2    |       | 1    |       |
|----|--------------------------|------|--------|------|-------|------|-------|
|    |                          | Freq | %      | Freq | %     | Freq | %     |
| 1  | Literal Translation      | 660  | 19.56% | 83   | 2.46% | 81   | 2.40% |
| 2  | Linguistic Compression   | 468  | 13.87% | 48   | 1.42% | 39   | 1.16% |
| 3  | Modulation               | 390  | 11.56% | 79   | 2.34% | 41   | 1.22% |
| 4  | Established Equivalent   | 329  | 9.75%  | 73   | 2.16% | 33   | 0.98% |
| 5  | Borrowing                | 249  | 7.38%  | 53   | 1.57% | 43   | 1.27% |
| 6  | Reduction                | 248  | 7.35%  | 80   | 2.37% | 17   | 0.50% |
| 7  | Adaptation               | 71   | 2.10%  | 18   | 0.53% | 31   | 0.92% |
| 8  | Generalization           | 64   | 1.90%  | 26   | 0.77% | 0    | 0.00% |
| 9  | Particularization        | 38   | 1.13%  | 21   | 0.62% | 1    | 0.03% |
| 10 | Transposition            | 30   | 0.89%  | 15   | 0.44% | 15   | 0.44% |
| 11 | Description              | 28   | 0.83%  | 0    | 0.00% | 2    | 0.06% |
| 12 | Compensation             | 13   | 0.39%  | 2    | 0.06% | 0    | 0.00% |
| 13 | Amplification            | 0    | 0.00%  | 0    | 0.00% | 0    | 0.00% |
| 14 | Calque                   | 0    | 0.00%  | 0    | 0.00% | 0    | 0.00% |
| 15 | Discursive Creation      | 0    | 0.00%  | 0    | 0.00% | 0    | 0.00% |
| 16 | Linguistic Amplification | 0    | 0.00%  | 0    | 0.00% | 0    | 0.00% |
| 17 | Substitution             | 0    | 0.00%  | 0    | 0.00% | 0    | 0.00% |
| 18 | Variation                | 0    | 0.00%  | 0    | 0.00% | 0    | 0.00% |

The study identified 13 distinct translation techniques used in subtitling humorous utterances from *Cunk on Earth – In the Beginnings*. Fifteen native Indonesian speakers evaluated the effectiveness of these techniques in preserving humor, assigning scores of 3 (fully maintained), 2 (partially maintained), or 1 (not maintained at all). The frequency of these scores was calculated for each technique, resulting in 36 data points across three categories of humor maintenance.

The six highest-ranked techniques, all scoring 3, were Literal Translation

(660 instances, 19.56%), Linguistic Compression (468, 13.87%), Modulation (390, 11.56%), Established Equivalent (329, 9.75%), Borrowing (249, 7.38%), and Reduction (248, 7.35%). Following these, Literal Translation scored 83 (2.46%) for partial maintenance (score 2) and 81 (2.40%) for no maintenance (score 1). Reduction (score 2) ranked ninth with 80 instances (2.37%), while Modulation (score 2) placed tenth with 79 (2.34%). Established Equivalent (score 2) appeared 73 times (2.16%), Adaptation (score 3) 71 times (2.10%), and Generalization (score 3) 64 times (1.90%), rounding out the top 13.

Further analysis revealed that Borrowing (score 2) and Linguistic Compression (score 2) ranked 14th and 15th with 53 (1.57%) and 48 (1.42%) occurrences, respectively. Borrowing (score 1) followed with 43 instances (1.27%), while Modulation (score 1) and Linguistic Compression (score 1) appeared 41 (1.22%) and 39 (1.16%) times, respectively. Particularization (score 3) ranked 19th with 38 instances (1.13%). The remaining techniques, including Established Equivalent (score 1), Adaptation (score 1), Transposition (score 3), and Description (score 3), accounted for less than 1% of the total.

The findings highlight the dominance of Literal Translation and Linguistic Compression, which excel in preserving humor by maintaining the original structure or condensing content without losing comedic impact. These techniques proved particularly effective for Cunk on Earth's absurdist humor, which relies on illogical statements rather than wordplay or cultural references. The deadpan delivery further reinforced the success of literal approaches, as altering phrasing could disrupt the contrast between serious tone and ridiculous content. However, techniques like Adaptation and Reduction yielded inconsistent results, performing well in some cases but failing in others, depending on the joke's cultural or linguistic demands.

Notably, specific strategies, such as Amplification and Calque, were entirely avoided, likely due to their incompatibility with subtitling constraints or the mockumentary's humor style. Despite these challenges, the high overall humor retention rate (76.7%) demonstrates the translators' skill in navigating these complexities. The remaining 24% of cases, where humor was partially or not maintained, underscore the difficulties posed by untranslatable cultural references or overly literal approaches. This variability confirms that effective humor translation requires a nuanced balance of fidelity, creativity, and cultural adaptation.

## **Discussion**

This study analyzed 226 instances of translation techniques used in subtitling humorous utterances from Cunk on Earth - In the Beginnings. The volume of data surpasses that of comparable studies, including Treetrapietch et al. (2017) with 32 instances, Nguyen and Le (2024) with 100 instances, and Samir (2022) with 153 instances. Thirteen translation techniques were identified, with six unused:

Variation, Amplification, Calque, Discursive Creation, Linguistic Amplification, and Substitution.

The study's findings reveal that Literal Translation was the most frequently used technique (24.78%) and also the most effective in preserving humor (19.56% fully maintained). This suggests that the mockumentary's humor often relies on universal absurdity rather than culture-specific wordplay, making direct translation a viable option. However, this approach may not generalize to other humor types, such as puns or culturally embedded satire, where literal translation could lead to significant humor loss (Yuliasri & Allen, 2019). The high success rate of Literal Translation in this context underscores the importance of genre-specific analysis in humor translation, as mockumentaries like *Cunk on Earth* prioritize deadpan delivery and illogical statements over linguistic nuance.

The prominence of Linguistic Compression (16.37%) highlights the constraints of subtitling, where space and time limitations necessitate condensation. While effective for maintaining pacing, this technique risks diluting humor, particularly in jokes dependent on verbose phrasing or layered meanings (Azis, 2021). For example, reducing "human man" to "manusia" in the study stripped the original redundancy, a key humorous element. This trade-off between brevity and comedic fidelity is a recurring challenge in audiovisual translation, suggesting that translators must prioritize which aspects of humor to preserve—a decision that may vary depending on the audience's familiarity with the source culture (Díaz-Pérez, 2014).

Modulation (15.04%) and Established Equivalent (13.27%) were also frequently employed, reflecting efforts to adapt humor to Indonesian cultural norms. Modulation's success in cases like translating "bumholes" to "dubur" (avoiding overly literal or offensive terms) demonstrates its utility in striking a balance between decency and clarity. However, these techniques may falter with culturally entrenched jokes, such as the "Greece/Grease" pun, for which there is no phonetic equivalent in Indonesian. This aligns with Mohebbi's (2023) argument that cultural conceptualization gaps often necessitate compensatory strategies, which were underutilized in this study (e.g., Compensation accounted for only 0.44% of techniques). The limited use of Adaptation (3.98%) further underscores a reluctance to localize content aggressively, potentially due to subtitling's preference for source-text fidelity over creative reinterpretation (Hajuningdyah, 2024).

The study's mixed effectiveness ratings—53.91% fully maintained humor, with the rest partially or lost—reveal inherent tensions in the translation of humor. Techniques like Borrowing (e.g., retaining "rap metal") preserved humor when cultural familiarity was assumed but failed when audiences lacked context (Nguyen & Le, 2024). Similarly, Reduction simplified jokes at the cost of nuance, as seen in the omission of "tragically" from a sarcastic line. These findings echo Kianbakht's



(2015) observation that humor translation often involves "lose-lose" choices, where translators must sacrifice either linguistic accuracy or comedic impact.

Finally, the absence of techniques like Amplification and Discursive Creation suggests systemic constraints. Subtitling's brevity requirements inherently discourage expansive explanations or creative substitutions, which are more feasible in dubbing or voice-over (Gottlieb, 1992). This limitation is particularly acute for mockumentaries, where humor relies on audiovisual synchrony. Future research could explore hybrid approaches, such as combining subtitles with brief glosses for cultural references, to mitigate these gaps (Xia et al., 2023).

The findings highlight how translators navigated different types of humor: universal jokes were favored by Literal Translation, while cultural and linguistic humor required Modulation or Adaptation. Despite constraints, techniques such as Established Equivalent and Borrowing ensured accessibility, although Reduction and Linguistic Compression occasionally weakened the comedic impact. This aligns with broader subtitling research, affirming the need for flexibility in humor translation.

Cultural context played a pivotal role in shaping translation decisions. British humor, characterized by irony, understatement, and satire, often clashed with Indonesian linguistic norms, where directness and explicitness are more common (Yuliasri & Allen, 2019). For instance, the idiom "pain in the arse" was softened to "sangat menyebalkan" (very annoying), diluting the original's vulgarity to align with Indonesian sensibilities. Similarly, cultural references like "James Corden" were retained without localization, as subtitling conventions often prioritize fidelity over adaptation (Gottlieb, 1992). The absence of techniques like Discursive Creation or Substitution reflects a cautious approach to cultural adaptation, likely due to the mockumentary's global audience and the risk of over-localization. These choices reveal a tension between preserving the source culture's authenticity and ensuring accessibility for the target audience.

For subtitling practitioners, prioritizing contextual flexibility is essential. Translators should first determine whether the humor relies on universal absurdity or cultural specificity. For universal humor, Literal Translation may be effective, while culturally specific jokes may require techniques such as adaptation or Compensation to preserve their comedic impact (Molina & Albir, 2002). Audience testing can further refine subtitles, as humor perception varies widely.

Pilot testing with target viewers helps identify which jokes resonate and which need adjustment, ensuring the translation aligns with audience expectations (Zuo, 2020). Balancing fidelity and creativity is another key consideration. While staying faithful to the source text is important, creative techniques like Particularization can enhance humor retention without distorting meaning. For example, translating "rights" as "hak cipta" (copyright) adds clarity while maintaining the joke's intent. Finally, subtitling constraints, such as space and time

limitations, must be navigated carefully. Techniques like Linguistic Compression should be used sparingly to avoid oversimplifying jokes. For instance, reducing "human man" to "manusia" sacrifices humorous redundancy but preserves the core message, demonstrating the need for strategic compromises.

The study's limitations include its narrow focus on a single mockumentary episode, which may not capture the full spectrum of humor translation challenges in the genre. The participant pool was limited to young adults (18–25 years old), which may have skewed the results toward a demographic more familiar with global humor trends. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported ratings for humor maintenance introduces subjectivity, as humor perception varies widely across individuals (Mohebbi, 2023). The study also did not account for visual humor, which plays a significant role in mockumentaries and may interact with verbal jokes. Future research could expand the sample size, include diverse age groups, and incorporate multimodal analysis to address these gaps.

The British cultural context of *Cunk on Earth* posed unique challenges, as its humor often hinges on parodying British documentary tropes (e.g., David Attenborough-style narration) and local idioms. Translators faced difficulties when these references lacked equivalents in Indonesian, leading to either literal translations or omissions. For example, the deadpan delivery of "Was the Renaissance just a viral trend?" relied on British sarcasm, which may not resonate equally with Indonesian audiences. The study's findings align with Kianbakht (2015), who noted that the subtlety of British humor often requires amplification or cultural substitution in translation; however, such techniques were underutilized here due to subtitling constraints.

While the findings offer valuable insights for mockumentaries, their applicability to other comedy genres may be limited. Mockumentaries like *Cunk on Earth* rely heavily on deadpan absurdity, which aligns well with Literal Translation. In contrast, sitcoms or slapstick comedies, which depend on wordplay or physical humor, may require more adaptive techniques (Anggraini et al., 2020). The study's emphasis on linguistic humor over visual gags also limits its relevance to animation or visually heavy comedies, such as *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Xia et al., 2023). Future research could compare humor translation across genres to identify genre-specific best practices for effective translation.

## Conclusion

This study examines the application of Molina and Albir's (2002) translation techniques in rendering humorous utterances from the British mockumentary *\*Cunk on Earth – In the Beginnings\** into Indonesian subtitles, with a particular focus on how these techniques influence the preservation of comedic effect. To ensure the accuracy of humor identification, the research enlisted three native English speakers to validate the humorous segments, addressing potential

limitations arising from the researcher's non-native proficiency in English.

The analysis identified twelve distinct translation techniques employed in the subtitling process, including Adaptation, Borrowing, Description, Compensation, Established Equivalent, Generalization, Linguistic Compression, Literal Translation, Modulation, Particularization, Reduction, and Transposition. Each technique served specific purposes in addressing the unique challenges posed by the mockumentary's humor, which combines absurdist satire with deadpan delivery. The study further incorporated evaluations from native Indonesian raters to assess the effectiveness of these techniques in maintaining the original humor, revealing nuanced insights into the interplay between translation strategies and humor retention.

Literal Translation emerged as the most frequently used technique in the study, accounting for nearly a quarter of all translation instances. While theoretical frameworks often position this approach as suitable primarily for straightforward, non-idiomatic content, the findings demonstrate its surprising effectiveness in preserving the mockumentary's humor. The success of Literal Translation can be attributed to the nature of *\*Cunk on Earth\**'s comedy, which frequently relies on illogical statements and exaggerated questions that transcend cultural boundaries.

For example, the deadpan observation about early humans' "tedious lives" being prolonged by fire retained its comedic impact through direct translation, as the humor stemmed from the absurd contrast rather than language-specific wordplay. However, the study also revealed limitations of this approach when dealing with humor rooted in cultural references or linguistic peculiarities, where literal renditions often failed to convey the intended comedic effect. These instances highlight the importance of a translator's discernment in determining when direct translation is sufficient and when more adaptive strategies are necessary to bridge cultural gaps.

The second most prevalent technique, Linguistic Compression, proved particularly valuable in addressing the practical constraints of subtitling, such as strict character limits and time restrictions. By condensing verbose source material into more concise target-language expressions, translators could maintain the core humorous intent while adhering to technical requirements. A notable example includes the reduction of "human man" to the simpler Indonesian term "manusia," which sacrificed some humorous redundancy but preserved the essential meaning.

Similarly, Reduction served as a complementary strategy for streamlining content, though its application sometimes resulted in partial humor loss when crucial contextual elements were omitted. The frequent use of these techniques underscores the inherent tension between preserving comedic nuance and meeting the spatial and temporal demands of subtitling, suggesting that practitioners must carefully balance brevity with humor preservation in their decision-making process.

Modulation and Established Equivalent techniques played significant roles in

adapting culturally specific humor for Indonesian audiences. Modulation allowed translators to reframe concepts in ways that aligned with target-language norms, such as rendering the British idiom "pain in the arse" as the more culturally neutral "sangat menyebalkan" (meaning "very annoying"). This approach proved particularly effective for maintaining the mockumentary's ironic tone while ensuring audience comprehension. Established Equivalent, meanwhile, facilitated the direct transfer of widely recognized terms, such as translating "Greece" to "Yunani," ensuring immediate recognition without compromising humor. These techniques demonstrate how strategic cultural adaptation can enhance humor preservation when dealing with concepts that have clear counterparts in the target language. However, their effectiveness diminishes when confronting truly culture-bound references that lack direct equivalents.

The study revealed more mixed results for techniques involving greater creative intervention. Borrowing, while effective for retaining specialized terms like "rap metal," occasionally resulted in humor loss when the borrowed concepts lacked cultural resonance with Indonesian audiences. Adaptation showed potential in reworking idiomatic expressions, but its infrequent use suggests translators may have been hesitant to depart significantly from the source material. Particularization emerged as a valuable middle-ground approach, offering clarification without the spatial demands of full Amplification, as seen in the precise rendering of "rights" as "hak cipta" (copyright) in the context of cave paintings. Conversely, Transposition frequently led to humor loss, likely because grammatical restructuring disrupted the careful balance of deadpan delivery and absurd content that characterizes mockumentary humor. These findings underscore the importance of selecting techniques that take into account both the nature of the humor and the constraints of the subtitling medium.

Description and Compensation, though used sparingly, demonstrated particular utility in addressing culture-specific concepts. The expansion of "2D" to "dua dimensi" (two-dimensional) through Description enhanced audience understanding while maintaining the humorous comparison to modern cinema. The single instance of Compensation successfully repositioned sentence elements to preserve stylistic humor, suggesting its underutilization may represent a missed opportunity for more creative solutions to untranslatable humor. The study's identification of six unused techniques—including Amplification, Calque, and Discursive Creation—reflects both the constraints of subtitling and the specific demands of mockumentary humor, which often prioritizes concise delivery over explanatory elaboration.

The evaluation data revealed that Literal Translation not only dominated in frequency but also effectiveness, with humor fully maintained in nearly 20% of cases using this technique. This success rate challenges conventional assumptions about the limitations of direct translation for humor preservation, particularly for

content-driven comedy that relies on absurd premises rather than linguistic play. The mockumentary's distinctive style—combining serious documentary tropes with ridiculous content—appears particularly amenable to literal approaches, as altering the phrasing might disrupt the crucial contrast between form and content that generates comedic effect. However, the partial or complete loss of humor in approximately 24% of cases serves as a reminder that even the most prevalent techniques have limitations, especially when confronting culture-bound references or wordplay.

These findings have significant implications for subtitling practice, particularly in the specialized domain of mockumentaries. The demonstrated effectiveness of Literal Translation for absurdist humor suggests that translators may need to recalibrate their approach based on humor type, resisting reflexive adaptation when direct translation suffices. At the same time, the study underscores the ongoing need for adaptable strategies when navigating cultural references, idioms, and wordplay. The research highlights the importance of technique diversity, with different strategies proving optimal for various types of humor and contexts. Practitioners may benefit from developing a decision-making framework that considers both the nature of the humor and the practical constraints of subtitling, potentially incorporating audience testing to validate the effectiveness of the technique.

The study's focus on a single mockumentary episode presents both strengths and limitations. While providing depth of analysis for this specific genre, the findings may not fully generalize to other comedy styles that rely more heavily on wordplay or visual gags. The participant pool's demographic homogeneity (Indonesian speakers aged 18-25) may also influence the results, as humor perception varies across age groups and cultural backgrounds. Future research could expand the scope to include comparative analysis across mockumentary series, broader audience demographics, and multimodal humor elements, thereby developing more comprehensive guidelines for humor translation in audiovisual media. Nevertheless, the study makes valuable contributions to understanding humor preservation in subtitling, particularly for the under-researched mockumentary genre, offering both theoretical insights and practical guidance for translation practitioners.

This study examines humor translation in the Indonesian subtitles of \*Cunk on Earth\*'s "In the Beginnings" episode, identifying 12 of 18 possible techniques. While revealing how mockumentary humor is adapted, the limited scope means findings may not represent the full range of strategies used in the series. Future research could analyze additional episodes to uncover more comprehensive approaches to translating satirical and absurdist comedy. The study also suggests areas for further exploration, including empirical research on audience perception through surveys or focus groups to examine how demographics influence the reception of humor. Additionally, investigations could focus on specific humor

types, such as puns or satire, as this study's general audience evaluation and single-episode analysis present limitations in assessing broader translation challenges.

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