

An Analysis of Translation Techniques Used in the English-Indonesian Subtitle of *The Perfect Neighbor* (2025)

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ABSTRACT

Subtitle translation plays a vital role in facilitating intercultural communication by enabling audiences from different linguistic backgrounds to access and understand audiovisual content. This study investigates the translation techniques used in the English-Indonesian subtitles of *The Perfect Neighbor* (2025) based on Molina and Albir's (2002) translation techniques framework. The documentary was selected because it presents authentic real-life interactions and context-rich dialogues that require translators to maintain accuracy, naturalness, and readability while addressing the linguistic and technical constraints of subtitling. This study employed a descriptive qualitative design, using the English and Indonesian subtitles of the documentary as the primary data source. Data were collected through documentation and analyzed by identifying, classifying, and interpreting the translation techniques found in corresponding subtitle pairs. From 1,519 time-aligned subtitle pairs, 94 semantically validated translation units were systematically sampled for analysis. The findings reveal that Literal Translation was the most frequently employed technique (40.4%), followed by Reduction (17.0%), Established Equivalent (12.8%), Modulation (11.7%), and Amplification (7.4%), while Generalization, Adaptation, Borrowing, Particularization, and Transposition accounted for the remaining 10.7%. The predominance of Literal Translation reflects the documentary's factual and straightforward discourse, whereas the frequent use of Reduction demonstrates the influence of subtitling constraints. Overall, the translator successfully balanced semantic accuracy, naturalness, and readability, contributing valuable empirical evidence to the field of audiovisual translation, particularly subtitle translation in documentary films.

Keywords: Audiovisual Translation, Documentary Film, Subtitle Translation, Translation Techniques, Molina and Albir

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INTRODUCTION

Translation plays a significant role in facilitating cross-cultural communication by enabling audiences from different linguistic backgrounds to access audiovisual products such as films, television programs, and documentaries (Haider, 2025). In the era of global digital streaming platforms, subtitle translation has become one of the most widely used forms of audiovisual translation because it allows viewers to understand foreign-language content while preserving the original audio (Natasha & Adika, 2025). Effective subtitle translation requires translators to convey the original message accurately within spatial and temporal constraints, making the selection of appropriate translation techniques a crucial aspect of the translation process. Consequently, the quality of subtitle translation greatly influences viewers' comprehension, emotional engagement, and interpretation of audiovisual narratives (Safitri, 2026; Doherty & Moorkens, 2013; Zheng, 2022).

Among the various approaches to translation studies, Molina & Albir (2002) proposed a comprehensive framework consisting of eighteen translation techniques that explain how translators solve linguistic and cultural problems when transferring meaning from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL) (Doherty & Moorkens, 2013; Lu & Xu, 2023; Mulyanto et al., 2023). These techniques, such as established equivalent, literal translation, modulation, reduction, amplification, borrowing, adaptation, and linguistic compression, have been widely employed in translation research because they provide systematic criteria

for identifying translators' decisions at the micro-textual level (Lestari & Darmawan, 2025). Their framework is particularly relevant for subtitle translation, where translators must balance linguistic accuracy, cultural appropriateness, readability, and technical limitations imposed by subtitle duration and character length.

The increasing popularity of documentaries on streaming services has also generated new challenges for subtitle translators (Haider, n.d.). Unlike fictional films, documentary films often contain authentic conversations, spontaneous speech, legal terminology, cultural references, and emotionally charged expressions that require careful translation. These characteristics demand translation techniques capable of preserving factual information while maintaining naturalness and readability in the target language. Therefore, investigating the translation techniques employed in documentary subtitles contributes not only to translation studies but also to the broader understanding of intercultural communication in audiovisual media (Aprilia & Tami, 2025).

One documentary that attracts considerable scholarly attention is *The Perfect Neighbor* (2025), directed by Geeta Gandbhir. The documentary reconstructs the fatal shooting of Alike "AJ" Owens in Ocala, Florida, through authentic police body-camera recordings, emergency 911 calls, interviews, and legal documentation. Rather than presenting dramatized scenes, the documentary relies on real conversations and official recordings, making the linguistic content highly representative of natural spoken English. The English and Indonesian subtitles of the documentary therefore provide valuable data for investigating how translators employ different translation techniques to render authentic speech, legal expressions, emotional utterances, and culturally specific references into Indonesian.

Previous studies have demonstrated that translation techniques significantly influence subtitle quality, readability, and meaning transfer. Recent research in audiovisual translation continues to report that established equivalent and literal translation are among the most frequently employed techniques, while techniques such as modulation, reduction, amplification, and linguistic compression are applied to accommodate linguistic and technical constraints in subtitling (Teknik et al., 2025). These findings indicate that translators rarely rely on a single technique; instead, they strategically select different techniques according to contextual, semantic, pragmatic, and cultural considerations. Nevertheless, studies specifically examining English-Indonesian subtitle translation in contemporary documentary films, particularly those depicting real criminal cases, remain relatively limited. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into how translation techniques are utilized in documentary subtitles containing authentic spoken discourse.

Despite the growing body of research on audiovisual translation, limited attention has been given to the translation techniques employed in the English-Indonesian subtitles of documentary films that feature authentic, context-dependent discourse. *The Perfect Neighbor* (2025) provides a suitable context for examining how translators address linguistic and technical constraints while preserving meaning and readability. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the translation techniques used in the English-Indonesian subtitles of *The Perfect Neighbor* (2025) based on Molina & Albir (2002) framework. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What translation techniques are employed in the English-Indonesian subtitles of *The Perfect Neighbor* (2025)? and (2) Which translation techniques are most frequently used, and how do they contribute to the accurate, natural, and readable translation of the documentary subtitles?

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze the translation techniques used in the English-Indonesian subtitles of *The Perfect Neighbor* (2025). A qualitative approach was selected because the primary objective of the research was to identify, classify, and interpret the translation techniques applied in subtitle translation rather than to test hypotheses or examine statistical relationships. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate when researchers aim to provide a comprehensive description of phenomena

while remaining close to the original data and its contextual meaning (Sandelowski, 2000). Qualitative research also enables researchers to examine linguistic phenomena systematically by interpreting language use within its natural and contextual setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Setting and Participants

The object of this study was the English-Indonesian subtitle of *The Perfect Neighbor* (2025), a documentary film directed by Geeta Gandbhir. The data consisted of subtitle pairs in English as the source language (SL) and Indonesian as the target language (TL). The source-language subtitle file contained 1,673 timed entries and the target-language file contained 1,719 timed entries. The research focused exclusively on subtitle segments containing translation units that could be analyzed using the translation techniques proposed by (Molina & Albir, 2002a). As audiovisual translation involves the transfer of verbal information within temporal and spatial constraints, subtitle analysis requires attention to both linguistic choices and subtitling conventions (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007; Pedersen, 2011).

Instruments

The instrument of this research was the researcher as the primary instrument, supported by a data classification table based on Molina & Albir (2002a) framework of translation techniques. The classification table contained the subtitle number, source-language subtitle, target-language subtitle, identified translation technique, and analytical remarks. This instrument enabled the researcher to classify and interpret each translation unit consistently according to the theoretical framework.

Procedures

The data collection procedure was carried out in a systematic manner. First, the English and Indonesian subtitle files were synchronized based on their timestamps, which produced 1,519 time-aligned subtitle pairs across the full duration of the documentary. Because the two subtitle files differed in segmentation for example, the English file included non-dialogue sound descriptions that were absent from the Indonesian file, and several utterances were split into a different number of lines between the two versions not every time-aligned pair represented a genuine one-to-one translation unit. To ensure analytical validity, a systematic sample of 94 subtitle pairs, evenly distributed throughout the documentary, was selected and manually verified to represent authentic, semantically corresponding source-target translation units. Each verified pair was then coded and organized into a data sheet to facilitate systematic analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). First, the researcher collected and synchronized the English and Indonesian subtitles. Second, the subtitle pairs were reduced by selecting only verified and relevant translation units for analysis. Third, each selected datum was classified according to the eighteen translation techniques proposed by Lucía Molina & Albir (2002), including established equivalent, literal translation, modulation, borrowing, amplification, reduction, adaptation, linguistic compression, linguistic amplification, generalization, particularization, compensation, discursive creation, description, substitution, transposition, variation, and calque. The classification of translation techniques followed a systematic procedure to identify the specific strategies used to transfer meaning between the source and target languages. Finally, the frequency of each technique was calculated to determine the dominant translation technique, followed by an in-depth qualitative interpretation of the translator's choices in relation to linguistic, cultural, and contextual factors. This combination of frequency calculation and

qualitative interpretation is consistent with approaches that use descriptive numerical information to complement qualitative analysis rather than replace it (Sandelowski, 2000).

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher applied theoretical triangulation by interpreting the data using Molina & Albir (2002) framework and comparing the findings with previous studies on audiovisual translation and subtitle translation. Triangulation can strengthen the credibility of qualitative findings by providing multiple perspectives for interpreting research data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Repeated examination of the subtitle pairs was also conducted to ensure consistency in identifying and classifying translation techniques throughout the analysis. Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be considered through criteria such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Forero et al., 2018). The results of the analysis are presented descriptively in the form of data tables, frequency distributions, percentages, and qualitative explanations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Translation Techniques Identified in the Subtitles

This study aimed to identify and analyze the translation techniques employed in the English-Indonesian subtitle of *The Perfect Neighbor* (2025) based on the translation techniques proposed by (Molina & Albir, 2002a). The analysis was conducted by comparing each English subtitle with its corresponding Indonesian subtitle to determine the translation technique applied by the translator. Documentary films differ from fictional films because they present authentic conversations, spontaneous expressions, legal terminology, and real-life interactions. Consequently, the translator had to consider not only linguistic equivalence but also cultural aspects, subtitle limitations, and viewers' comprehension.

Table 1. Examples of Translation Techniques Used in the English-Indonesian Subtitle of *The Perfect Neighbor* (2025)

English Subtitle	Indonesian Subtitle	Translation Technique
I'm like the perfect neighbor.	Saya seperti tetangga yang sempurna.	Literal Translation
Somebody got shot!	Seseorang tertembak!	Established Equivalent
Sheriff's Office!	Kantor Sheriff!	Borrowing
Come out with your hands up!	Keluar dengan tangan diangkat!	Literal Translation
She called me a racial slur.	Dia menghina saya dengan kata-kata rasis.	Modulation
I'm good. I'm with the sheriff's office. I'm the detective.	Saya penyidik dari Sheriff Wilayah.	Reduction
Code two.	Tak perlu sirene.	Adaptation

Table 1 illustrates several representative subtitle pairs analyzed in this study. The examples show that the translator did not rely on a single translation technique throughout the documentary. Instead, different techniques were employed according to the linguistic characteristics, communicative intention, and contextual meaning of each subtitle segment.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Translation Techniques (n = 94)

Rank	Translation Technique	Frequency	Percentage
1	Literal Translation	38	40.4%
2	Reduction	16	17.0%
3	Established Equivalent	12	12.8%
4	Modulation	11	11.7%
5	Amplification	7	7.4%

Rank	Translation Technique	Frequency	Percentage
6	Generalization	3	3.2%
6	Adaptation	3	3.2%
8	Borrowing	2	2.1%
9	Particularization	1	1.1%
9	Transposition	1	1.1%
Total		94	100%

Table 2 shows that Literal Translation was the most dominant technique, followed by Reduction, Established Equivalent, Modulation, and Amplification. Generalization, Adaptation, Borrowing, Particularization, and Transposition occurred less frequently, together accounting for 10.7% of the analyzed data. The findings reveal that Literal Translation was the most dominant translation technique, accounting for 40.4% of the analyzed data (38 of 94 subtitle pairs). [Molina & Albir \(2002\)](#), Literal Translation refers to translating a word or expression directly from the source language into the target language while maintaining its original grammatical structure whenever possible. One example is the translation of “Her children were walking their dog on the property” into “Anak-anaknya mengajak jalan anjing di lahan.” The translator transferred the lexical meaning of each component without changing the overall sentence structure, producing a subtitle that sounds natural and preserves the speaker's intended meaning. Because documentary dialogues frequently contain straightforward statements and factual information, Literal Translation became the translator's default strategy.

Reduction was the second most frequently identified technique, comprising 17.0% of the data (16 pairs). [Molina & Albir, \(2002\)](#) explain that Reduction involves omitting source-language information considered redundant in the target text. This technique was particularly common in dialogue-heavy scenes containing hesitations, repetitions, and overlapping speech. For example, “I'm good. I'm with the sheriff's office. I'm the detective” was condensed into “Saya penyidik dari Sheriff Wilayah,” omitting the repeated self-introduction while preserving the essential information. The relatively high frequency of Reduction confirms that subtitle translation is heavily constrained by reading speed and character limits, requiring translators to prioritize core meaning over completeness.

Established Equivalent accounted for 12.8% of the data (12 pairs). This technique involves expressions that are conventionally accepted in the target language. The translation of “Somebody got shot!” into “Seseorang tertembak!” and “Well, you have a good night” into “Selamat malam” demonstrate the application of this technique: instead of translating each lexical item individually, the translator selected expressions that are conventionally used by Indonesian speakers in equivalent situations, producing subtitles that sound natural and are immediately understandable.

Modulation was identified in 11.7% of the data (11 pairs), reflecting a change in point of view or expression to produce a more natural target-language rendering. For example, “She called me a racial slur” was translated as “Dia menghina saya dengan kata-kata rasis,” and “You may look at her and say she didn't have much” was rendered as “Kau mungkin menganggapnya bukan orang kaya,” shifting the perspective from possession to wealth status while preserving the intended meaning.

Amplification appeared in 7.4% of the data (7 pairs), used when the translator added explanatory information not explicitly stated in the source text to enhance clarity for the target audience. For instance, “I'm sorry. I want to step a little closer” was expanded into “Maaf. Saya ingin mendekat karena suara Anda tak terdengar jelas,” adding a reason that was only implied in the original utterance.

The remaining techniques—Generalization, Adaptation, Borrowing, Particularization, and Transposition—together accounted for approximately 10.7% of the data. Generalization

(3.2%) was used to replace specific or sensitive terms with more neutral expressions, as in “The F-word. The B-word” rendered simply as “Umpatan” (“swear words”). Adaptation (3.2%) was applied to police radio codes with no direct cultural equivalent in Indonesian, such as “Code two” translated as “Tak perlu sirene” (“no siren needed”), conveying the operational meaning of the code rather than a literal rendering. Borrowing (2.1%) preserved institutional titles, as in “Deputy Heckman” rendered as “Deputi Heckman.” Particularization (1.1%) and Transposition (1.1%) occurred only occasionally, for example when the vague time reference “like a week ago” was rendered with the more specific “Sekitar hari Jumat lalu” (“around last Friday”).

Overall, the combination of Literal Translation, Reduction, Established Equivalent, Modulation, and Amplification demonstrates that the translator employed multiple strategies to achieve translation quality. Rather than relying exclusively on literal rendering, the translator adapted the translation according to contextual meaning, linguistic conventions, cultural considerations, and the technical constraints of subtitling. This finding supports Molina and Albir's (2002) argument that translation techniques function as practical procedures enabling translators to solve linguistic and intercultural problems at the micro-textual level.

The findings of this study are also broadly consistent with previous research in audiovisual translation, which reports that Literal Translation and Established Equivalent are commonly employed in English-Indonesian subtitle translation because they effectively preserve semantic meaning while maintaining readability (Teknik et al., 2025). The comparatively high proportion of Reduction found in this study further underscores that documentary subtitles, which often contain unscripted and overlapping speech, place particularly strong demands on translators to condense information without sacrificing comprehensibility.

CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzed the translation techniques employed in the English-Indonesian subtitles of *The Perfect Neighbor* (2025) using Molina and Albir's (2002) framework and found that Literal Translation was the most frequently used technique, followed by Reduction, Established Equivalent, Modulation, and Amplification. The predominance of Literal Translation reflects the documentary's factual and straightforward discourse, whereas the frequent use of Reduction demonstrates the translator's adaptation to the spatial and temporal constraints of subtitling. Other techniques, including Established Equivalent, Modulation, Adaptation, Borrowing, Particularization, and Transposition, contributed to producing translations that were accurate, natural, and contextually appropriate while preserving culture-specific meanings. Overall, the findings highlight how different translation techniques work together to balance semantic accuracy, readability, and naturalness in documentary subtitle translation. This study contributes to audiovisual translation research by providing empirical evidence on English-Indonesian subtitle translation techniques and offers practical insights for translators, translation students, and researchers interested in improving subtitle quality across multilingual audiovisual contexts.

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