



MAINTAINING THE HUMOROUS EFFECT OF DARK JOKES IN INDONESIAN SUBTITLES OF *RICK AND MORTY*

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Abstrak

Menerjemahkan humor, khususnya humor gelap, merupakan tantangan besar dalam penerjemahan audiovisual karena efek komiknya bergantung pada referensi budaya, makna pragmatik, dan toleransi penonton terhadap topik tabu. Penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya sebagian besar berfokus pada klasifikasi teknik penerjemahan, sementara perhatian terhadap keberhasilan teknik tersebut dalam mempertahankan efek humor masih terbatas. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana lelucon gelap berbahasa Inggris diterjemahkan ke dalam subtitle bahasa Indonesia pada serial animasi *Rick and Morty*, dengan fokus pada strategi yang digunakan dan sejauh mana strategi tersebut mempertahankan efek humor aslinya. Dengan desain deskriptif kualitatif, lima lelucon gelap yang dipilih secara purposif dari lima episode pada platform resmi Prime Video dianalisis menggunakan kerangka teknik penerjemahan humor Chiaro (2006) dan konsep kesepadanan dinamis Nida (1964). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerjemahan literal, adaptasi, modulasi, dan omisi merupakan strategi utama yang digunakan oleh penerjemah. Adaptasi dan modulasi terbukti paling efektif ketika perbedaan budaya atau pragmatik menghalangi penerjemahan literal, sedangkan omisi cenderung melemahkan efek komik meskipun makna proposisionalnya tetap terjaga. Empat dari lima terjemahan mencapai kesepadanan dinamis penuh atau hampir penuh. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa mempertahankan humor gelap memerlukan prioritas pada kesepadanan pragmatik dan emosional dibandingkan kesesuaian leksikal semata, serta memberikan implikasi praktis bagi penerjemah yang menangani konten humor yang sensitif secara budaya.

Kata kunci: *terjemahan audiovisual; humor gelap; kesepadanan dinamis; terjemahan subtitle; Rick and Morty*

Abstract

Translating humor, particularly dark humor, poses considerable challenges in audiovisual translation because its comic effect depends on cultural references, pragmatic meaning, and audience tolerance for taboo subjects. While prior research has largely focused on classifying translation techniques, comparatively little attention has been paid to whether these techniques actually preserve humorous effect. This study examines how English dark jokes are translated into Indonesian subtitles in the animated series *Rick and Morty*, focusing on the strategies used and the extent to which they maintain the original humorous effect. Using a qualitative descriptive design, five purposively selected dark-joke instances from five episodes on the official Prime Video platform were analyzed through Chiaro's (2006) framework of humor translation techniques and Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence. The findings show that literal translation, adaptation, modulation, and omission are the main strategies

employed by the translator. Adaptation and modulation prove most effective when cultural or pragmatic differences prevent literal rendering, whereas omission tends to weaken comic impact despite retaining propositional meaning. Four of the five translations achieved full or near-full dynamic equivalence. These results suggest that preserving dark humor requires prioritizing pragmatic and emotional equivalence over lexical correspondence, offering practical implications for translators working with culturally sensitive comedic content.

Keywords: audiovisual translation; dark humor; dynamic equivalence; subtitle translation; Rick and Morty

1. Introduction

Humor is one of the most powerful communicative devices in audiovisual media because it entertains audiences while simultaneously conveying social criticism, cultural values, and interpersonal relationships. As streaming platforms expand globally, humorous audiovisual products are increasingly consumed by multilingual audiences through subtitles and dubbing, making the quality of audiovisual translation a determining factor in whether viewers experience the intended communicative and emotional effect of the original work.

Among the various forms of humor, dark humor presents one of the greatest challenges for translators. Unlike conventional humor, dark humor derives its comic effect from subjects generally regarded as disturbing or socially sensitive, including death, violence, trauma, and existential anxiety (Freud, 1927). Its effectiveness depends not only on semantic meaning but also on pragmatic interpretation, cultural expectations, and audience tolerance toward taboo issues, so a translation that conveys the literal meaning of a dark joke may still fail to reproduce its humorous effect.

These challenges are amplified in audiovisual translation, where subtitling operates under severe temporal and spatial constraints. Translators must convey dialogue within a limited number of characters while synchronizing subtitles with visual images and spoken language (Chiaro, 2006; Gottlieb, 1992). Gottlieb (1992) identifies subtitling strategies such as transfer, paraphrase, condensation, expansion, imitation, and deletion that allow translators to balance linguistic fidelity with technical constraints, while Chiaro (2006, 2018) shows that translators of verbally expressed humor rely on literal translation, adaptation, substitution, and omission to maximize comprehension while preserving comic effect. Decisions of this kind can improve subtitle readability but also risk weakening the humorous force of the original dialogue.

Rick and Morty offers an especially rich context for investigating these challenges. The series is internationally recognized for combining satire, absurdity, and dark humor, with characters frequently joking about death, suicide, and family dysfunction to reveal character psychology or criticize social norms. Because much of the series' identity is built on this style

of humor, translating it requires translators to negotiate linguistic structure, cultural values, and pragmatic conventions while maintaining subtitle brevity and naturalness.

Evaluating whether such translations succeed requires a functional, rather than purely linguistic, standard. Newmark (1988) distinguishes semantic from communicative translation, and Baker (1992, 2018) emphasizes lexical, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic equivalence, noting that pragmatic equivalence is essential in humorous discourse because humor relies on implicature and shared cultural knowledge rather than literal meaning alone. Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence extends this view by evaluating translation according to whether it elicits a comparable response from the target audience rather than reproducing identical linguistic form, and House (2014, 2015) similarly argues that translation quality should be judged by whether the target text fulfils the same communicative function as the source text. Because dark humor depends heavily on cultural attitudes toward taboo subjects, Mohebbi (2023) argues that translating it successfully requires reconstructing the conceptual assumptions underlying a joke rather than its surface linguistic structure.

Based on these considerations, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What translation techniques are employed in translating English dark jokes into Indonesian subtitles in *Rick and Morty*?
2. To what extent do these translation techniques preserve the humorous effect of the original dark jokes in the Indonesian subtitles?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Humor and Dark Humor in Translation

Humor is a complex communicative phenomenon that relies on cognitive, social, and linguistic mechanisms to generate amusement. Martin (2007) defines humor as anything that is perceived as funny, amusing, or laughable, and distinguishes between humor as a stimulus, as a mental process, and as a response. From a pragmatic perspective, Dynel (2011) emphasizes that humor often arises from the violation of conversational maxims, incongruity, or the exploitation of shared cultural knowledge. The incongruity theory of humor, which holds that humor emerges from the perception of something unexpected or inappropriate, is particularly relevant to dark humor, where the incongruity lies in the juxtaposition of serious or taboo subjects with playful or lighthearted treatment.

Dark humor, also referred to as black humor or gallows humor, is characterized by its treatment of morbid, disturbing, or socially taboo topics in a comic manner (Freud, 1927; Martin, 2007). Freud (1927) argues that dark humor enables individuals to confront anxiety-

provoking subjects by transforming them into sources of pleasure, thereby serving a psychological coping function. Attardo (1994) situates dark humor within the broader framework of humorous discourse, noting that its effectiveness depends heavily on audience familiarity with the taboo subject and on cultural norms governing what can be said about death, violence, and suffering.

Translating dark humor introduces additional layers of complexity because what is considered taboo varies across cultures, and audience thresholds for offense differ considerably (Chiaro, 2006; Vandaele, 2002). Translators must therefore navigate not only linguistic and pragmatic differences but also varying cultural sensibilities, deciding whether to preserve the provocative force of the original or to soften it for target audiences.

2.2. Audiovisual Translation and Subtitling

Audiovisual translation (AVT) encompasses all forms of translation involving media content, including dubbing, voice-over, and subtitling (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). Among these, subtitling is distinguished by its technical constraints: subtitles must appear on screen for a duration sufficient for reading, must not obscure important visual elements, and are typically limited to one or two lines with a maximum of approximately 40 characters per line (Gottlieb, 1992). These constraints require translators to condense dialogue while preserving essential information, a process that often affects the translation of humor because jokes frequently depend on precise wording, timing, and delivery.

Gottlieb (1992) identifies six subtitling strategies: transfer (full translation), paraphrase (rewording), condensation (reducing length while preserving meaning), expansion (adding explanation), imitation (reproducing the original in a new form), and deletion (omitting material). In a later study, Gottlieb (2005) further distinguishes between intersemiotic and intralingual subtitling, emphasizing that the visual and auditory components of audiovisual media must be treated as integral to the translation process. This is particularly relevant to humor translation, where timing, character expressions, and visual gags often reinforce or even constitute the humorous effect.

Chiaro (2006, 2018) has contributed extensively to the study of humor in audiovisual translation, arguing that humor presents a “special” case for translation because it requires not only linguistic competence but also cultural knowledge and pragmatic sensitivity. She identifies five techniques for translating verbally expressed humor: literal translation, adaptation, substitution, omission, and compensation (Chiaro, 2006). Literal translation involves rendering the source text word-for-word, while adaptation adjusts the source to

target cultural norms. Substitution replaces a humorous element with a different but equivalent one, omission removes it entirely, and compensation introduces a humorous element elsewhere to offset loss.

Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2021) elaborate on the constraints and strategies specific to subtitling humor, noting that puns and wordplay are among the most difficult elements to translate and often require creative adaptation. Similarly, Dore (2020) emphasizes that humor in audiovisual media is multimodal, relying on verbal, visual, and auditory cues simultaneously, so translators must consider how subtitles interact with other modalities.

2.3. Translation Quality and Equivalence

Evaluating translation quality has been a central concern in translation studies, with various models proposed over the decades. Nida (1964) introduced the influential distinction between formal equivalence, which focuses on preserving the form and content of the source text, and dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes producing a similar effect on target audiences. For Nida, dynamic equivalence is achieved when “the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message” (1964, p. 159). This concept, later refined as functional equivalence (Nida, 2001), has been widely applied in Bible translation and has influenced broader translation theory.

Baker (1992, 2018) expands the notion of equivalence beyond the word level to include grammatical, textual, and pragmatic equivalence. Pragmatic equivalence is especially relevant to humor translation because humor relies heavily on implicature, presupposition, and speech acts that may not translate directly. Baker (2018) argues that translators must consider the communicative function of an utterance rather than merely its propositional content, a principle that aligns with House's (2014, 2015) model of translation quality assessment.

House (2014, 2015) proposes a functional-pragmatic model for assessing translation quality based on whether the target text serves the same function as the source text. Her framework draws on Halliday's (1978) systemic functional linguistics and emphasizes the importance of register, genre, and cultural context in evaluating translation outcomes. House distinguishes between overt translations, which signal their status as translations and are appropriate for culturally specific texts, and covert translations, which aim to function as the original would in the target culture. For humor translation, the choice between overt and covert approaches may significantly affect whether the humorous effect is preserved.

More recently, Mohebbi (2023) has argued that translating humor requires attention to cultural conceptualizations—the shared cognitive frameworks through which communities understand the world. Cultural conceptualizations influence not only linguistic expression but also pragmatic interpretation, making them essential to preserving humorous effect. Mohebbi suggests that translators of culture-specific jokes should reconstruct the conceptual assumptions underlying a joke rather than attempting to preserve its surface structure.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

This study integrates two complementary frameworks: Chiaro's (2006, 2018) typology of humor translation techniques and Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence. Chiaro's framework provides a systematic way of identifying the strategies translators employ when rendering humorous dialogue, distinguishing between literal translation, adaptation, substitution, omission, and compensation. This typology is particularly well-suited to analysis of audiovisual humor because it was developed specifically for screen media and accounts for the constraints of subtitling.

Nida's dynamic equivalence, meanwhile, offers a criterion for evaluating translation success that is particularly appropriate for humorous texts. Rather than measuring fidelity at the lexical level, dynamic equivalence asks whether the target audience experiences the same communicative effect as the source audience. For dark humor, this means assessing not only whether propositional meaning is preserved but also whether the translation generates the same emotional and comic response.

By combining these frameworks, this study can both identify what translators do (techniques) and evaluate how well those techniques work (dynamic equivalence). This integrated approach addresses a gap identified in previous research, which has often focused on technique classification without systematically evaluating functional outcomes, or vice versa.

3. Previous Studies

Empirical research on humor translation in audiovisual media has grown substantially over the past two decades, with studies examining a range of languages, genres, and translation modalities. This section reviews studies that are most directly relevant to the present investigation, including research on dark humor, translation of *Rick and Morty*, and evaluations of translation effectiveness.

3.1. Studies on Translating Dark Humor

Azis (2021, 2024) examined the translation techniques used for dark jokes in the Indonesian subtitles of the film *Joker*. Analyzing 44 instances of dark humor, Azis found that literal translation was the most frequent technique (56.8%), followed by linguistic compression (25%), adaptation (11.4%), and deletion (6.8%). The study concluded that literal translation and compression were effective in maintaining the original meaning but noted that some jokes lost their humorous force due to cultural differences. Significantly, Azis (2024) applied Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence and found that 70% of translations achieved acceptable equivalence, suggesting that literal translation can be successful for dark humor when the source joke is not heavily culturally specific.

Samir (2022) investigated the translation strategies used for dark jokes in Persian subtitles of the *Joker* film. Drawing on Pedersen's (2011) framework of subtitling strategies, Samir found that translators employed literal translation for jokes anchored in violence and physical comedy but used adaptation and paraphrase for jokes that relied on wordplay or cultural references. The study observed that translators generally prioritized comprehension over comic effect, sometimes sacrificing humor to ensure viewers understood the plot. Samir concluded that preserving dark humor in translation requires a balance between maintaining literal wording and adapting for cultural acceptability.

Ghassemiazghandi (2025) examined humor translation in Persian subtitles of animated films, focusing on the strategies used to render verbal humor from English into Persian. The study found that translators employed paraphrasing most frequently (45%), followed by literal translation (30%), and adaptation (15%). Ghassemiazghandi argued that the choice of strategy depended on the type of humor involved, with literal translation more common for universal humor and paraphrasing or adaptation necessary for culturally specific jokes. The study did not specifically focus on dark humor but noted that taboo-related jokes often required adaptation to comply with Iranian cultural norms.

Naufal and Cholsy (2024) analyzed the pragmatic equivalence of dark humor in the Indonesian translation of the animated series *Family Guy*. Applying a pragmatic equivalence framework, the study found that most translations preserved propositional meaning but weakened the pragmatic force of dark humor, resulting in reduced comedic effect. The researchers attributed this to cultural differences in tolerance for taboo subjects, with some jokes appearing less offensive and therefore less humorous in Indonesian. This study is particularly relevant because it focuses on the same target language (Indonesian)

and a similar genre (adult animation), and its finding that pragmatic weakening occurs even when meaning is preserved underscores the need for functional evaluation.

3.2. Studies on Translating Rick and Morty

Several studies have examined the translation of Rick and Morty specifically, reflecting the series' popularity as a site of translation research. Al-Dahshan (2020) analyzed the Arabic subtitles of the series, focusing on whether the humorous effect of jokes was preserved. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined translation analysis with audience questionnaire data, Al-Dahshan found that most humorous segments (72%) successfully transferred their comic impact, while 28% experienced noticeable loss. The study identified cultural adaptation and omission as the most common techniques, with adaptation more likely to preserve humorous effect and omission likely to reduce it.

Yusuf (2024) conducted a corpus-based analysis of taboo terms in the Indonesian subtitles of Rick and Morty, focusing on the techniques used to translate offensive language. Analyzing 200 instances of taboo terms, Yusuf found that calque (literal translation) was the most frequent technique (35%), followed by adaptation (28%), omission (20%), and substitution (17%). The study also evaluated translation quality using a rubric that considered accuracy, acceptability, and readability, finding that most taboo term translations were accurate but that some lost pragmatic force. While Yusuf's study focused on offensive language rather than humor specifically, its findings on translation techniques are directly relevant to the present investigation.

Shtanko (2023) examined domestication and foreignization in the Ukrainian translation of Rick and Morty, focusing on how cultural references and humorous elements were rendered. The study found that translators predominantly used domestication, adapting American cultural references to Ukrainian equivalents, which generally preserved the humorous effect. However, when foreignization was used for culturally specific jokes that had no Ukrainian equivalent, comic effect often diminished. Shtanko concluded that domestication is preferable for humor translation when the source and target cultures are distant, a finding that aligns with the cultural adaptation strategies identified in the present study.

3.3. Studies on Translation Techniques and Strategies

Beyond studies of specific texts, broader research has examined the range of techniques used to translate humor across different languages and genres. Aleksandrova

(2020) analyzed pun translation in animated films from English into Bulgarian, identifying borrowing, calque, literal translation, adaptation, and substitution as the most common strategies. The study found that literal translation and borrowing were ineffective for puns, while adaptation and substitution were more successful. This finding supports the argument that culture-specific humor requires interventionist strategies, while language that does not rely on wordplay can be translated more directly.

Nguyen and Le (2024) investigated humor translation strategies in Vietnamese subtitles of the sitcom *Modern Family*. Using Gottlieb's (1992) framework, the researchers found that transfer (literal translation) was the most common strategy (42%), followed by paraphrase (30%) and condensation (18%). The study evaluated humorous effect through an audience questionnaire and found that transfer was most effective for jokes that were not culturally specific, while paraphrase and condensation were necessary for jokes involving wordplay or references. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of literal translation depends on the type of humor involved.

Kartika and Rosyidah (2022) examined the translation of humor from German to Indonesian in the film *Er Ist Wieder Da*, identifying translation techniques and their effectiveness in preserving humorous effect. The study found that adaptation and substitution were more effective than literal translation for German-specific humor, while literal translation was sufficient for universal humor. The researchers concluded that cultural distance between source and target languages significantly affects the choice of translation strategy and the likelihood of preserving humor.

Hajuningdyah (2024) analyzed humor translation strategies in the Indonesian subtitle of *The Amazing World of Gumball*, identifying omission, condensation, literal translation, and adaptation as the most frequent techniques. The study noted that omission was used primarily for visual humor that did not require verbal translation, while literal translation was used for jokes that did not depend on linguistic play. Hajuningdyah also observed that translation quality was higher when techniques were used in combination, suggesting that translators should employ multiple strategies flexibly rather than relying on a single approach.

3.4. Studies on Evaluating Translation Effectiveness

Some studies have focused specifically on evaluating whether translations preserve humorous effect, using both analytical and empirical approaches. Ghassemiazghandi and Tengku-Sepora (2020) examined humor translation strategies in Persian subtitles and

evaluated effectiveness through audience perception questionnaires. The study found that adaptation and substitution were perceived as more successful than literal translation and omission, though viewer preferences varied depending on familiarity with source culture and tolerance for offensive content.

Agung (2021) investigated humor subtitling in Indonesian stand-up comedy, focusing on how translators preserve humorous effect in a genre that relies heavily on cultural references and wordplay. The study found that adaptation and substitution were more effective than literal translation, and that compensation was sometimes used to introduce humor where the source joke was untranslatable. Agung concluded that preserving humorous effect requires creative intervention rather than literal rendering, a finding consistent with the present study's emphasis on dynamic equivalence.

Vallés (2015) applied House's (1997) translation quality assessment model to humor translation in *The Simpsons*, analyzing how cultural references were rendered in Catalan and Castilian Spanish. The study found that translations often failed to achieve functional equivalence because they preserved surface meaning but did not elicit the same comedic response. Vallés argued that translation quality assessment should consider the communicative function of humor, not just linguistic accuracy, and that House's model provides a useful framework for evaluating whether translations fulfill the same function as source texts.

3.5. Research Gap and Contribution

While these previous studies have contributed valuable insights into humor translation, several gaps remain. First, most studies focus on identifying translation techniques without systematically evaluating whether those techniques preserve humorous effect, a limitation noted by Al-Dahshan (2020) and Naufal and Cholsy (2024). Second, studies that do evaluate effectiveness often rely on researchers' judgments without incorporating audience perception, or vice versa. Third, while some studies have examined *Rick and Morty* (Al-Dahshan, 2020; Yusuf, 2024; Shtanko, 2023), none have specifically investigated dark humor in the series, despite its prominence as a defining feature of the show.

The present study addresses these gaps by combining Chiaro's (2006) framework of translation techniques with Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence to evaluate both the strategies used and their effectiveness in preserving humorous effect. By focusing specifically on dark humor in *Rick and Morty*, the study extends previous work that has

examined general humor or offensive language in the series. The use of a purposive sample ensures that the analysis targets jokes that are particularly difficult to translate, providing insights that can inform both theory and practice in audiovisual translation.

4. Method

4.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate how dark jokes are translated from English into Indonesian in the subtitles of *Rick and Morty*. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study seeks to interpret translation phenomena within their linguistic, cultural, and contextual environment—focusing on how and why certain techniques preserve humorous effect—rather than to quantify statistical relationships or measure the frequency of isolated variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A descriptive design was adopted because the primary objective was to identify translation techniques and explain how they influence the preservation of humorous effect. Crucially, this study is qualitative rather than quantitatively descriptive: it does not aim to count occurrences of translation techniques or calculate percentages across a large corpus. Instead, it provides an in-depth, interpretive analysis of selected illustrative cases, consistent with previous interpretative studies of subtitle texts (Chiaro, 2018; Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). This approach is particularly suited to dark humor, where the comedic effect depends on nuanced pragmatic and cultural factors that cannot be captured by numerical frequency alone.

4.2. Data Source

The primary data consisted of English dialogues containing dark jokes and their corresponding Indonesian subtitles, drawn from the official Prime Video release of *Rick and Morty* to ensure that the subtitles analyzed represented officially distributed translations rather than fan-generated subtitles. Five episodes were selected through purposive sampling because they contain a comparatively high frequency of dark jokes and culturally sensitive humorous situations: “Rixty Minutes” (S1E8), “Auto Erotic Assimilation” (S2E3), “Pickle Rick” (S3E3), “The Ricklantis Mixup” (S3E7), and “Morty's Mind Blowers” (S3E8). The unit of analysis was each dialogue containing a dark joke together with its Indonesian subtitle, with dark jokes identified based on their treatment of taboo or sensitive topics such as death, violence, suicide, and existential anxiety in a humorous manner (Martin, 2007; Dynel, 2011).

4.3. Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used because not every humorous dialogue in the series represents dark humor; this technique enables researchers to select information-rich cases directly relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). Dialogues were included if they explicitly contained dark humor, if the humorous effect was conveyed verbally rather than solely through visual elements, if both English and Indonesian subtitles were available on the official platform, and if the dialogue contained sufficient contextual information for translation analysis.

The selection process involved repeated viewing of episodes to identify potential instances of dark humor, followed by verification against the operational definition. This resulted in five dialogue samples that met all inclusion criteria, each representing a different episode to ensure variety in the types of dark jokes analyzed.

4.4. Data Collection

Data collection proceeded in six stages. The selected episodes were first watched repeatedly using the English subtitle track to identify scenes containing dark jokes, since repeated viewing was necessary to accurately understand the contextual information supporting the humor. Potential humorous dialogues were then transcribed verbatim from the English subtitles together with their Indonesian counterparts, examined within their audiovisual context to confirm that they met the operational definition of dark humor, and coded by episode, scene, and dialogue sequence. The English source text (ST) and Indonesian target text (TT) were subsequently organized into comparative tables, and contextual notes on visual cues, character interactions, and narrative situations were added because audiovisual humor often depends on verbal and non-verbal information simultaneously (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021).

4.5. Analytical Framework

Three complementary theoretical frameworks guided the analysis. Translation techniques were identified using Chiaro's (2006, 2018) framework for translating verbally expressed humor, which explains how translators preserve humorous meaning through techniques such as literal translation, adaptation, substitution, and omission. The effectiveness of each translation was then evaluated through Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence, which focuses on whether target audiences experience communicative effects comparable to those of source-language audiences rather than on

formal correspondence between the texts. Finally, the study considered the audiovisual translation constraints proposed by Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2021) regarding subtitle space, timing, synchronization, and readability, which frequently explain the modifications or reductions observed in subtitle translation.

4.6. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2020) interactive model of qualitative data analysis, which consists of three concurrent streams of activity: data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The application of each stage is detailed below.

4.6.1. Data Condensation

Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw data that appear in the full corpus (Miles et al., 2020). In this study, the initial corpus consisted of all humorous dialogues identified across the five episodes. The condensation process involved systematically excluding dialogues that did not strictly meet the operational definition of dark humor—specifically, those that relied purely on visual slapstick, standard observational comedy, or jokes lacking a taboo or morbid thematic core. Furthermore, dialogues were excluded if the subtitles lacked sufficient contextual information in the audiovisual scene to allow for a robust pragmatic analysis.

Through this iterative filtering, the initial pool of 23 potential humorous instances was reduced to the final 5 purposively selected samples. This condensation ensured that the remaining dataset consisted exclusively of information-rich cases that directly addressed the research questions, allowing the researchers to focus in-depth on the translation challenges unique to dark humor without diluting the analysis with irrelevant data.

4.6.2. Data Display

Data display is the organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action (Miles et al., 2020). For this study, the condensed data were organized into a structured analytical matrix (see Table 1 in the Results section). This matrix served as the primary data display, arranging the source text (ST), target text

(TT), identified translation technique, researcher's explanatory notes, and the dynamic equivalence assessment in adjacent columns.

This tabular display was deliberately designed to facilitate systematic, side-by-side comparison across the five samples. By visually aligning the source and target texts with their corresponding techniques and outcomes, the matrix enabled the researchers to quickly identify recurring patterns—such as the prevalence of literal translation and the specific conditions under which adaptation or omission succeeded or failed. The display was continuously refined as the analysis progressed, with contextual notes on character tone and visual cues added to ensure that the verbal analysis remained grounded in the multimodal reality of audiovisual media.

4.6.3. Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

The third stage involved drawing meaning from the displayed data and continuously verifying those interpretations. Conclusions were drawn by comparing the identified translation techniques against their observed outcomes in terms of dynamic equivalence. For instance, the researchers examined whether a literal translation corresponded to “full equivalence” or “partial equivalence,” and whether adaptations successfully compensated for cultural gaps.

Verification was conducted through a rigorous iterative process. The researchers repeatedly re-watched the relevant scenes and re-examined the source and target texts to confirm that initial interpretations of humorous effect were consistent with the dialogue's delivery, character reactions, and narrative context. Interpretations were cross-checked against the established theoretical frameworks (Chiaro, 2006; Nida, 1964) to ensure that conclusions about humorous effect were grounded in established translation theory rather than subjective preference. Any discrepancies in interpretation between the two researchers were resolved through discussion and revisiting the primary data until a consensus was reached, ensuring that the final conclusions were dependable and confirmable.

Dynamic equivalence was assessed using the following criteria adapted from Nida (1964):

Full equivalence: The target translation elicits a comparable humorous response, with both propositional content and comedic effect preserved.

Partial equivalence: The target translation preserves propositional content but the comedic effect is weakened, though still perceptible.

No equivalence: The target translation fails to preserve both meaning and humorous effect.

This assessment was conducted by the researchers through systematic comparison of source and target texts in their audiovisual contexts, with attention to verbal cues, character tone, and visual reinforcement of humor.

4.7. Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the study followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility was established through repeated viewing of the episodes and careful comparison of the English and Indonesian texts; dependability was enhanced by documenting each stage of data collection, coding, and analysis; confirmability was maintained by grounding interpretations in the original subtitle data and established theoretical frameworks rather than personal assumption; and transferability was achieved through detailed description of the research context, procedures, and examples so that future researchers may replicate or extend the study.

4.8. Ethical Considerations

The study analyzed publicly available audiovisual materials obtained through an officially licensed streaming platform; no human participants were involved and no personal or confidential information was collected, and the analysis was conducted exclusively for academic purposes in accordance with principles of research integrity and copyright compliance.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Results

The analysis of five dark jokes from Rick and Morty reveals four recurring translation techniques: literal translation, adaptation, modulation, and, in one case, omission or simplification (see Table 1). Overall, four of the five translations achieve full or near-full dynamic equivalence, while one shows markedly reduced comedic energy relative to the source.

Table 1. Translation Techniques and Dynamic Equivalence in the Five Sampled Dark Jokes

Sample / Episode	Dark Joke (Source Text)	Indonesian Subtitle (Target Text)	Technique	Dynamic Equivalence
1. Rixty Minutes (S1E8)	Summer learns, in an alternate reality, that her parents once considered abortion; the joke lies in the casual, matter-of-fact tone.	“...senang sekali bisa dirawat orangtua yang terpaksa bersama bukan karena bahagia.”	Literal translation + adaptation	Full
2. Auto Erotic Assimilation (S2E3)	Rick tells Unity to “let go”; Unity takes this literally and bombs a populated town while laughing.	“Aku bisa bergembira” (I can have fun) replaces “I can let go!”; exclamations and onomatopoeia are omitted.	Modulation + omission	Partial (weakest of the five)
3. Pickle Rick (S3E3)	Rick compares turning himself into a pickle to 9/11 being “an inside job,” dismissing terrorism as mundane.	“...serangan 9/11 itu rekayasa dari dalam? ... Aksi terorisme global terjadi setiap hari.”	Literal translation	Full
4. The Ricklantis Mixup (S3E7)	Teacher Rick mocks Slick’s repeated traumatic loss of previous “Ricks,” calling him “top of the class.”	“Juara 1 dalam sesuatu” ... “Semoga itu yang terakhir.”	Literal translation + colloquial adaptation	Full
5. Morty’s Mind Blowers (S3E8)	Morty envies a species’ “afterlife,” later revealed as a cover for genocide.	“Spesiesmu mempunyai akhirat. Itu pasti menyenangkan.”	Literal translation	Partial (context-dependent)

5.2. 5Analysis of Each Sample

Sample 1: “Rixty Minutes” (S1E8)

In this episode, Summer discovers that in an alternate reality, her parents considered aborting her. The dark humor arises from the casual, matter-of-fact delivery of this devastating information, juxtaposed with Summer's flippant response. The source text and target translation are:

ST: “I’m just happy to be raised by parents who were forced to be together, not because they’re happy.”

TT: “...senang sekali bisa dirawat orangtua yang terpaksa bersama bukan karena bahagia.”

The translator employs a combination of literal translation and adaptation. The phrase “forced to be together” is rendered as “terpaksa bersama,” a faithful equivalent, while

the casual tone is preserved through the word order and phrasing. The adaptational element lies in the naturalness of the Indonesian sentence structure, which reads smoothly and avoids the awkwardness that a more literal rendering might produce.

This translation achieves full dynamic equivalence because it preserves both the propositional content and the comedic effect. The dark humor depends on the contrast between the casual tone and the serious subject matter, and the Indonesian translation maintains this contrast effectively. The use of “senang sekali” mirrors the casualness of “happy,” and the matter-of-fact construction preserves the deadpan quality that makes the joke humorous. Indonesian viewers familiar with the show's style would likely find this translation as comedic as English-speaking audiences.

Sample 2: “Auto Erotic Assimilation” (S2E3)

In this episode, Rick tells Unity, a hive-mind entity, to “let go,” meaning emotionally. Unity takes this literally, bombing a populated town while laughing. The dark humor arises from the catastrophic misinterpretation and the cheerful tone with which Unity commits mass violence.

ST: “I can let go!” (spoken with manic glee as explosions occur)

TT: “Aku bisa bergembira” (I can have fun)

The translation uses modulation, shifting from “let go” to “bergembira” (have fun), and omission, removing the exclamatory tone and onomatopoeic elements present in the source context. The modulation changes the semantic content from release to enjoyment, preserving the general structure of the joke (Unity misinterpreting Rick's advice) but altering the specific meaning. The omission reduces the comedic intensity by removing the manic quality of the delivery.

This translation achieves only partial dynamic equivalence, and it is the weakest among the five samples. While the plot point—Unity misinterpreting Rick and causing destruction—is preserved, the comedic effect is diminished. The source joke derives much of its humor from the contrast between Unity's cheerful “I can let go!” and the explosions occurring on screen. The translation “Aku bisa bergembira” is semantically accurate but lacks the intensity and ironic contrast of the original. The omission of exclamatory markers further reduces the humorous effect. As Naufal and Cholsy (2024) found, propositional meaning may survive while pragmatic force weakens, and this sample exemplifies that pattern.

Sample 3: “Pickle Rick” (S3E3)

Rick has turned himself into a pickle to avoid therapy. When asked why he would do such a thing, he compares it to being an “inside job,” referencing the 9/11 conspiracy theory. The dark humor lies in the casual dismissal of terrorism as mundane.

ST: “9/11 was an inside job? ... Global terrorism happens every day.”

TT: “...serangan 9/11 itu rekayasa dari dalam? ... Aksi terorisme global terjadi setiap hari.”

The translator employs literal translation throughout. “Rekayasa dari dalam” directly corresponds to “inside job,” and “aksi terorisme global terjadi setiap hari” translates “global terrorism happens every day” with no significant modification. The question format and syntax are preserved.

This translation achieves full dynamic equivalence. The source joke's humor depends on the incongruity between treating a catastrophic event casually and the mundane phrasing used to describe it. The literal translation preserves this incongruity, since Indonesian viewers are equally familiar with 9/11 conspiracy theories and the concept of terrorism as a daily occurrence. The translation also reads naturally, with no unnatural phrasing that would distract from the comedic effect. This finding aligns with Azis's (2021, 2024) observation that literal translation is effective for dark humor when the source joke does not rely on culture-specific references that lack equivalents in the target language.

Sample 4: “The Ricklantis Mixup” (S3E7)

In this episode, a Rick who works as a teacher mocks Slick, a Morty who has repeatedly lost his previous Ricks to violent deaths. The teacher calls Slick “top of the class” in a sarcastic tone, implying that Slick is the best at getting his Ricks killed.

ST: “Top of the class for something ... Hope that's the last one.”

TT: “Juara 1 dalam sesuatu” ... “Semoga itu yang terakhir.”

The translator uses literal translation combined with colloquial adaptation. “Juara 1 dalam sesuatu” directly conveys the meaning of “top of the class for something,” while “semoga itu yang terakhir” preserves the ominous implication of the original. The phrasing is natural in Indonesian, employing a colloquial style that matches the casual tone of the source.

This translation achieves full dynamic equivalence. The dark humor in the source depends on the sarcastic delivery and the implication that Slick's traumatic experiences are a source of amusement. The Indonesian translation preserves this sarcastic tone through the choice of words and the contrast between the positive phrasing (“juara 1,” “terakhir”) and the grim context. Indonesian viewers familiar with the show's dark humor style would likely

perceive the same comedic effect as English-speaking audiences. The adaptation element, while minimal, ensures naturalness in Indonesian, which prevents the translation from sounding stilted and thereby preserves the comedic effect.

Sample 5: “Morty's Mind Blowers” (S3E8)

In this episode, Morty encounters a species that has an “afterlife,” which he initially envies. However, it is later revealed that the “afterlife” is actually a cover for genocide, with the species using the concept to justify mass killing.

ST: “Your species has an afterlife. That must be nice.”

TT: “Spesiesmu mempunyai akhirat. Itu pasti menyenangkan.”

The translator uses literal translation. “Akhirat” directly corresponds to “afterlife,” “pasti” conveys “must,” and “menyenangkan” conveys “nice.” The word order and sentence structure are preserved with minimal adaptation.

This translation achieves partial dynamic equivalence, and its effectiveness is context-dependent. For viewers who have seen the episode previously or are attentive enough to recall the later revelation, the translation preserves the darker irony of the statement. However, for first-time viewers who do not yet know the context, the translation simply conveys that Morty finds the afterlife concept nice, without any hint of the dark humor that is intended. The source joke relies on dramatic irony—the audience may suspect the afterlife is not as positive as it seems—and the translation does not convey this ironic tension.

This finding echoes Al-Dahshan's (2020) observation that some humorous segments in Rick and Morty translations lose their comic impact, and it highlights the importance of considering narrative context in assessing translation effectiveness. As Dore (2020) notes, humor in audiovisual media is often cumulative, building on prior knowledge and audience expectations. A translation that is accurate at the sentence level may still fail to capture the humor that relies on larger narrative structures.

5.3. Discussion

5.3.1. Recurring Translation Techniques

The analysis identifies four translation techniques: literal translation, adaptation, modulation, and omission. This pattern largely aligns with the findings of previous studies. Azis (2021, 2024) found literal translation and compression to dominate in the Indonesian translation of dark jokes in *Joker*, and Yusuf (2024) found literal translation (calque) to be the most frequent technique for taboo terms in *Rick and Morty*. The

prevalence of literal translation suggests that translators of this series generally favor direct rendering when the source joke does not depend heavily on culture-specific references or wordplay.

Adaptation appears in Samples 1 and 4, where the translator adjusts phrasing to ensure naturalness in Indonesian while preserving the comedic effect. This corresponds to Mohebbi's (2023) argument that culture-specific jokes require reconstructing the underlying assumption rather than the surface wording. The successful use of adaptation in this study also supports Chiaro's (2006) observation that adaptation is necessary when literal translation would produce unnatural or incomprehensible target text.

Modulation appears in Sample 2, where the translator shifts from “let go” to “bergembira.” This technique is more common in translation of pragmatically complex material, where the source text's meaning cannot be rendered directly without producing an unintended interpretation. In this case, the modulation preserves the general structure of the joke (Unity misinterpreting advice) while altering the specific meaning, but the pragmatic shift contributes to the partial loss of humorous effect observed in that sample.

Omission, also present in Sample 2, removes exclamatory markers and onomatopoeia. This technique is common in subtitling due to time and space constraints (Gottlieb, 1992; Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). However, as Hajuningdyah (2024) observed, omission can diminish humorous effect, and this study's findings confirm that condensation applied without care can flatten a joke's energy. The difference between Samples 1 and 2 suggests that omission is most problematic when it removes elements essential to the comedic effect, such as tone markers, rather than when it condenses redundant information.

5.3.2. Dynamic Equivalence and Humor Preservation

Applying Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence, four of the five translations achieve full or near-full equivalence, while one shows only partial equivalence. This overall success rate aligns with Al-Dahshan's (2020) finding that 72% of humorous segments in the Arabic subtitles of *Rick and Morty* successfully transferred their comic impact, and with Azis's (2024) finding that 70% of dark joke translations in *Joker* achieved acceptable equivalence.

The most successful translations (Samples 1, 3, and 4) share certain characteristics: they preserve both propositional content and the pragmatic elements that generate humor (tone, incongruity, sarcasm), they read naturally in Indonesian, and they

do not depend on narrative context that first-time viewers may lack. These translations demonstrate that literal translation can be effective when it does not create unnatural phrasing, and that adaptation can enhance effectiveness when literal translation would be awkward.

The least successful translation (Sample 2) demonstrates the limits of these techniques when applied to pragmatically complex humor. The modulation and omission employed in this case preserved plot meaning but weakened the contrast between tone and event that constitutes the joke's comedic core. This finding supports House's (2014, 2015) argument that translation quality cannot be judged by linguistic accuracy alone but must consider whether the translation serves the same communicative function as the original. In Sample 2, the translation fulfilled its informational function (conveying what Unity did) but did not fulfill its humorous function (generating amusement through ironic contrast).

Sample 5 illustrates an additional challenge: narrative dependency. The translation accurately renders the surface meaning, but the dark humor depends on knowledge of a later plot twist that first-time viewers do not have. This is not strictly a translation problem but rather a limitation of subtitling as a medium, where viewers may not have access to the full narrative context that enhances humor. This finding echoes Dore's (2020) observation that audiovisual humor is often cumulative, and it suggests that evaluating translation effectiveness should consider not only the translation itself but also the viewing experience it enables.

5.3.3. Implications for Translation Practice

These findings have several implications for translators working with dark humor, particularly in audiovisual contexts. First, literal translation should remain the default strategy but must be accompanied by careful attention to naturalness in the target language. As Samples 1 and 4 show, even minimal adaptation can enhance readability and preserve humorous effect.

Second, when literal translation is not possible due to cultural or pragmatic differences, adaptation and modulation should be considered. These techniques, while interventionist, are more likely to preserve humorous effect than literal translation would be. The success of adaptation in this study aligns with Mohebbi's (2023) argument that reconstructing the conceptual assumptions underlying a joke is often necessary when the source and target cultures have different understandings of taboo subjects.

Third, omission should be used with caution, especially when the omitted elements contribute to the comedic effect. The difference in success between the literal translations (which omitted little) and Sample 2 (which omitted tone markers) suggests that omission is most problematic when it affects the pragmatic force of the joke.

Fourth, translators should consider the narrative context of jokes, particularly when humor depends on dramatic irony or cumulative effect. While translators cannot control viewers' prior knowledge, they can ensure that translations do not obscure the clues that make later revelations humorous.

5.3.4. Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to translation theory by demonstrating the utility of combining Chiaro's (2006) technique framework with Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence concept. Prior studies have tended to focus on techniques without evaluating their effectiveness, or have evaluated effectiveness without systematically identifying techniques. By integrating these approaches, this study provides a more comprehensive account of translation decision-making and outcomes.

The findings also support the continued relevance of functional equivalence approaches to translation quality assessment, particularly for humorous texts where pragmatic effect is central to meaning. As House (2014, 2015) argues, translations should be evaluated according to whether they fulfill the same function as source texts, not whether they preserve surface form. The present study demonstrates that this functional perspective is essential for dark humor, where comedic effect depends on pragmatic interpretation rather than literal meaning.

Finally, the study contributes to the growing body of research on translation of Rick and Morty specifically, extending previous work on offensive language (Yusuf, 2024) and general humor (Al-Dahshan, 2020) to focus specifically on dark humor. This focus is important because dark humor is a defining feature of the series and one of its greatest translation challenges.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated how dark jokes are translated from English into Indonesian in Rick and Morty, focusing on the techniques translators employ and the effectiveness of those techniques in maintaining humorous effect. The analysis of five dark jokes from five episodes shows that translators combine literal translation, adaptation, modulation, and, occasionally,

omission or simplification. Literal translation is most effective when the source joke does not depend heavily on culturally specific references, while adaptation and modulation become necessary when literal rendering would produce unnatural or incomprehensible Indonesian; omission, though sometimes motivated by subtitling constraints, can diminish humorous effect and reduce dynamic equivalence. Four of the five translations achieved full or near-full dynamic equivalence, while one showed noticeably reduced comedic energy.

These findings contribute empirical evidence of how Chiaro's (2006) translation techniques and Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence can be applied together to analyze humor translation in practice, and they confirm the continued relevance of Baker's (1992, 2018) and Mohebbi's (2023) emphasis on the pragmatic and conceptual dimensions of humor. For translators and translation instructors, the results suggest that literal translation should remain the default strategy but must be supplemented with adaptation or modulation whenever literal rendering would be ineffective, that the emotional and comedic impact of dark jokes deserves as much attention as their surface meaning, and that the technical constraints of subtitling must be balanced carefully against the goal of preserving humorous effect, since condensation applied without care can flatten a joke's energy even when its plot content survives.

This study is limited by its small, purposively selected sample of five dark jokes, its focus on subtitles rather than dubbing, and its reliance on the researchers' own analysis rather than empirical audience-reception data; the findings should therefore be read as an in-depth qualitative account of illustrative cases rather than a claim about the relative frequency of techniques across the series as a whole. Future research should expand the sample, incorporate audience-reception data from Indonesian viewers, compare subtitle and dubbing translations of the same material, and examine how large-language model translation tools handle the adaptation and modulation strategies this study finds essential for dark humor (Abu-Rayyash, 2024). As global media consumption continues to expand, understanding how dark humor travels across linguistic and cultural boundaries remains essential for producing translations that serve both communicative and entertainment functions.

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