

**Swearing and Subtitling Strategies in *Penyalin Cahaya*:****A Qualitative Case Study**Kata Kasar dan Strategi Penerjemahan Subtitle dalam *Penyalin Cahaya*:

Sebuah Studi Kasus Kualitatif

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**Abstract**

Indonesian swear words frequently appear in everyday communication and serve various functions, such as expressing anger, stress, humor, or familiarity. In film subtitling, translating swear words can be challenging due to cultural differences that affect how emotional expressions are understood. This study aims to identify the types of Indonesian swear words and the subtitling strategies used to translate them into English in the Netflix film *Penyalin Cahaya*. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method by analyzing all sixteen instances of swear words identified in the film's dialogue. The data are classified based on types of swearing and subtitling strategies. The findings reveal that the swear words fall into three categories: cathartic, abusive, and idiomatic swearing, with cathartic swearing being the most frequent. In terms of translation, three strategies are identified: direct translation, omission, and substitution. Substitution is the most commonly used strategy, indicating that the subtitler tends to adapt Indonesian swear words into culturally acceptable English expressions while maintaining the emotional meaning and communicative effect of the original dialogue. These findings offer a framework for understanding how cultural and pragmatic constraints shape subtitling decisions, with practical implications for subtitle editors working across culturally distant language pairs in the streaming industry.

**Key words:** *subtitling, swearing, movie review***Abstrak**

Makian dalam bahasa Indonesia sering muncul dalam komunikasi sehari-hari dan memiliki berbagai fungsi, seperti mengekspresikan kemarahan, stres, humor, atau keakraban. Dalam subtitling film, penerjemahan makian dapat menjadi tantangan karena perbedaan budaya memengaruhi cara ekspresi emosional dipahami oleh penonton. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis makian bahasa Indonesia serta strategi subtitling yang digunakan untuk menerjemahkannya ke dalam bahasa Inggris dalam film Netflix *Penyalin Cahaya*. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan menganalisis seluruh enam belas kemunculan makian yang ditemukan dalam dialog film tersebut. Data diklasifikasikan berdasarkan jenis makian dan strategi subtitling yang digunakan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa makian yang ditemukan termasuk dalam tiga kategori, yaitu cathartic swearing, abusive swearing, dan idiomatic swearing, dengan cathartic swearing sebagai kategori yang paling dominan. Dalam penerjemahannya, ditemukan tiga strategi, yaitu direct translation, omission, dan substitution. Strategi substitution merupakan strategi yang paling sering digunakan, yang menunjukkan bahwa subtitler cenderung menyesuaikan makian bahasa Indonesia ke dalam ungkapan bahasa Inggris yang dapat diterima secara budaya, sambil tetap mempertahankan makna emosional dan efek komunikatif dari dialog asli. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian transfer budaya dalam penerjemahan audiovisual dengan menunjukkan bagaimana makian bahasa Indonesia diadaptasi ke dalam ungkapan bahasa Inggris yang dapat diterima secara budaya tanpa menghilangkan fungsi emosional dan pragmatismenya.

**Kata kunci:** *subtitling, makian, ulasan film***INTRODUCTION**

Audiovisual Translation (AVT) is focused on how movies, shows, or other multimedia works are translated from one language or culture to another, including the methods used and the final translated results (Gonzales, 2020). One of these forms is subtitling, a form of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) that turns spoken dialogue into written text shown at the bottom of the screen, constrained by time duration,

space, and readability (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2014). Of all the types of Audiovisual Translation, subtitling, as one of the most widely practiced forms of audiovisual translation, operates under specific spatial and temporal constraints that shape every translation decision the subtitler makes (Gottlieb, 1992) and is one of the most widely studied (Abu-Rayyas, Haider, & Al-Adwan, 2023), possibly because it is so commonly used and comes with its own unique set of challenges and limitations. In order to express their anger, emphasize a point, or release frustration, people commonly use swear words to help them (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008; Arrifa & Sutrisno, 2025). As Moore (2012) notes, swear words and slang also function as important sociolinguistic resources that convey speakers' attitudes, identities, and social relationships, making their accurate representation in subtitles particularly challenging. In addition, corpus-based research by McEnery and Xiao (2004) demonstrates that swear words such as *fuck* occur frequently in modern English and are used in patterned, context-dependent ways, highlighting the importance of considering function and usage when analyzing or translating swear words in audiovisual media.

Swearing allows people to convey their emotion through language and represents a linguistic phenomenon as well that deserves detailed study and analysis (See Chen, 2004; Fernandez, 2009; Kurniawanti & Damanhuri, 2022). As long as human speech exists, Montagu (2001) believes that swearing has been around, because it evolved together with language and became a natural part of how people express themselves. In line with Abdelaal's (2019) study on culture-bound terms, the subtitling of swear words requires strategies that maintain their pragmatic meaning while remaining culturally appropriate, since inappropriate choices may reduce the emotional and expressive impact of the original utterance.

Swear words also function as a powerful linguistic resource for expressing emotion and managing social interaction, the use of offensive and emotional language has become common not only in films, but also in digital communication and social media interaction. Studies on angry expressions in online communities (Nova & Winarti, 2024) show that taboo expressions are frequently used to convey emotional reactions and social attitudes, making them an important phenomenon for linguistic analysis (see Jay, 2009; Hoel & Fägersten, 2010). They explain that swearing can help people show strong emotions like anger, surprise, or even humor in ways that normal words cannot. For example, in Indonesian, the word *anjing!* literally means "dog" in English. When *anjing* is used for swearing, it carries an offensive meaning for whoever listens to it. Therefore, the translation of *anjing* as a swear word into English will depend on the context, it could be rendered as "bastard," "jerk," "asshole," or even "son of a bitch,". However, they do not fully capture how harsh and offensive *anjing* sounds to Indonesian speakers.

Those examples of Indonesian swear words provide an insight that the offensiveness and acceptability of swear words vary across cultures and translating swear words from one language into another language requires careful consideration of the linguistic meaning and cultural norms of both the source text and the target text (Budi, 2022; Lyska, Sibuea, & Ardinda, 2025). In films, it will become more interesting and challenging because when swear words are spoken in the dialogue, translators have to find the right way to express them in subtitles within the constraints common to Audiovisual Translation.

Previous studies on swear word translation and classification in audiovisual media have made valuable contributions but also reveal important gaps that the present study addresses. Arrasyid et al. (2022), examining the translation of French profanity into Indonesian subtitles in *Banlieue 13*, identified four translation strategies, censorship, substitution, taboo, and euphemism, and found that the taboo-for-taboo strategy was the most dominant, accounting for 45.7% of 94 swear word instances. The study attributed this dominance to the fact that both French and Indonesian share a comparable range of swear word expressions referring to similar social taboos. While this finding is significant in demonstrating that linguistic proximity between source and target cultures can facilitate more direct swear word transfer, the study is limited by its reliance on Davoodi's classification framework, which focuses primarily on the formal properties of the translation rather than the pragmatic function of the swear word within its dialogic context.

Another study examined by Lestari and Sutrisno (2023), examining the translation of taboo words in the HBO series *Big Little Lies* from English into Indonesian, identified five strategies based on Mona Baker's framework, with omission being the most dominant at 32.4% of 145 instances. The study found that the consistent application of these strategies resulted in a reduction of emotional value, a loss of cultural nuance, and a face-saving effect for the target audience. While this study makes a valuable contribution by highlighting the cumulative pragmatic consequences of translation strategy choices across a large dataset, it focuses exclusively on taboo words with euphemistic meanings, deliberately excluding expressions that retain their offensive force in the target language. This

selective scope limits its ability to account for the full range of communicative functions that taboo language performs in audiovisual dialogue.

Al Sawi (2025), analyzing the subtitling of swear words in the Netflix stand-up comedy special *Mo Amer: Muhammad in Texas* from English into Arabic, identified three strategies, euphemism, deletion, and taboo-to-non-taboo, with euphemism being the most dominant at 44% of 174 instances. Notably, the taboo-to-taboo strategy was entirely absent, which the study attributed to cultural conservatism in the Arabic-speaking target audience. This finding is particularly significant as it demonstrates how target culture values can entirely eliminate certain translation options from the subtitler's decision-making process. However, the study is limited by its focus on stand-up comedy, a genre in which swear words are deliberately deployed as a performance technique to build audience rapport, meaning its findings may not transfer readily to dramatic film contexts where swear words carry heavier emotional and narrative weight.

In another study by Silalahi and Ambalegin (2022), applying Pinker's (2007) typology to classify swear words in a YouTube gaming video featuring content creator IShowSpeed, identified all five categories of swearing, with cathartic swearing being the most dominant at 13 out of 25 instances. The study concluded that cathartic swearing was favored because it effectively attracts audience attention without causing direct offence, functioning more as an entertainment device than as a genuine expression of hostility or aggression. While this study is valuable in demonstrating the applicability of Pinker's functional typology beyond formal audiovisual media, and in confirming that cathartic swearing dominates informal, performance-driven contexts, it is limited in two significant ways. First, the study examines swearing in a non-translated, monolingual context, meaning it offers no insight into how these functional categories are mediated across languages and cultures through subtitling. Second, its data source, a live gaming video on YouTube, represents an informal, unscripted performance context that differs substantially from the narrative-driven, emotionally layered dialogue of a dramatic film, where swear words are embedded within complex character relationships and thematic tensions rather than used primarily for audience entertainment.

Recent studies on swear word translation in audiovisual media have examined how translators navigate cultural and linguistic challenges across various language pairs. Arrasyid et al. (2022) investigated the translation of French profanity into Indonesian subtitles, while Al Sawi (2025) analyzed the subtitling of English swear words into Arabic in a Netflix comedy special, and Lestari and Sutrisno (2023) examined the translation of taboo words from English into Indonesian in a television series. In the Indonesian context specifically, Silalahi and Ambalegin (2022) applied Pinker's (2007) typology to classify swear words in informal digital media. Despite these contributions, limited attention has been given to the translation of Indonesian swear words into English subtitles in Indonesian dramatic films. Most existing studies on swear word translation rely on brief examples drawn from multiple films or general corpora, with limited attention to how a single film's swearing patterns connect to its subtitling choices as a whole. This study addresses that gap by offering a close, detailed examination of one film, tracing each instance of swearing from its function, to its subtitling strategy, to its overall translation tendency. Rather than proposing a new theoretical framework, this study demonstrates how existing frameworks can be applied together to build a fuller, more contextualized picture of how culturally sensitive language is handled in subtitling, a level of depth that broader, multi-film studies often cannot provide. Beyond its narrative significance, *Penyalin Cahaya* achieved notable critical and commercial recognition. The film premiered in the New Currents section of the Busan International Film Festival in October 2021, and went on to win twelve Citra Awards out of seventeen nominations at the 2021 Festival Film Indonesia (FFI) as the most Citra Awards ever received by a single film, making it, at the time, the most-awarded film in Indonesian cinema history. Following its global Netflix release on January 13, 2022, the film reached #2 on Netflix's global Non-English Film chart and entered the platform's Top 10 in 26 countries during its second week, a level of international viewership uncommon for Indonesian cinema. This combination of critical acclaim and global streaming reach positions *Penyalin Cahaya* as a high-visibility case for examining how culturally specific, taboo language is rendered for an international audience via official subtitling.

The film is selected not merely for its high-visibility case, but because its narrative is center of institutional injustice, betrayal, and emotional conflict, conditions that naturally provoke intense and raw linguistic expressions that test the limits of subtitling constraints in audiovisual translation. This study adopts Pinker's (2007) classification of swearing to identify the types of swear words found in the film. Pinker distinguishes swearing into several functional categories, three of which are relevant to this study. *Cathartic swearing* refers to expressions used as emotional release, typically triggered by pain, frustration, or surprise, and is directed at no particular target. *Abusive swearing*, by contrast, is interpersonally directed and functions as a verbal attack intended to demean or intimidate another person. *Idiomatic swearing*, meanwhile, operates as a pragmatic filler or intensifier embedded in

casual speech, often losing its literal offensive meaning through habitual use. These categories differ significantly in pragmatic function (from internal emotional discharge, to direct interpersonal aggression, to conversational habituation) and therefore present distinct challenges for subtitlers seeking equivalent expressions in English.

To analyze how these swear words are rendered in translation, this study employs Pedersen's (2011) subtitling strategies. Together, these frameworks provide a systematic approach for examining both the linguistic functions of swear words and the translation techniques employed in audiovisual media. The analysis of the data revealed three strategies employed in the subtitling of Indonesian swear words in *Penyalin Cahaya*: Direct Translation, Omission, and Substitution. *Direct Translation* renders the swear word literally or closely follows the source text, preserving the form and meaning of the original expression. *Omission* involves the partial or complete removal of a swear word from the subtitle when the expression is deemed untranslatable, culturally inappropriate, or unnecessary for comprehension. *Substitution* replaces the original swear word with a different expression that is more culturally suitable or pragmatically equivalent for the target audience. Together, these three strategies reflect a spectrum from faithfulness to the source text to prioritisation of target culture acceptability.

This article is organized into four sections. Introduction outlines previous studies on subtitling, particularly research on strategies for translating swear words, and establishes the context for this study. The methodology explains the data, the Netflix film as the object of analysis, and the analytical framework used to identify and categorize the swear words. The results and discussion present the classification of Indonesian swear words found in the film and analyze how specific subtitling strategies are applied in their English translations. The conclusion summarizes the main findings, identifies the dominant strategies, and highlights the study's limitations and directions for future research. Through this analysis, the study looked for how translation can influence the meaning and tone of emotionally charged language in Indonesian cinema. The film *Penyalin Cahaya* (Photocopier), therefore contributes to the broader discussion on cross-cultural subtitling practices. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of swear words are found in the film *Penyalin Cahaya*, and what functions do they serve within the film's dialogue?
2. How do the subtitling strategies employed in *Penyalin Cahaya* reflect the cultural transfer of Indonesian swear words into English?

## METHODS

This study used a qualitative case study approach to examine the translation of Indonesian swear words into English subtitles in the Netflix film *Penyalin Cahaya* (Photocopier, 2022). Rather than treating the data statistically, the study focused on close textual and contextual analysis of each instance of swearing found in the film. The data were collected through manual extraction by watching the film several times and examining the subtitle track. This manual approach allowed for close attention to the contextual and tonal dimensions of each utterance, which is essential for accurately classifying swear words according to their pragmatic function. Although *Penyalin Cahaya* has a runtime of 130 minutes, only 16 instances of swear words were found across the entire film. While this study is limited to a single film, it offers a focused lens on how emotionally charged, high-stakes dialogue is mediated in streaming subtitling. This small number is acknowledged as a natural limitation of focusing on a single film. However, this study does not aim to produce statistically generalizable results. Instead, it offers a focused, in-depth lens on how emotionally charged and taboo language is handled in the subtitling of streaming media. By concentrating on one film, the study is able to examine each instance of swearing closely, paying attention to its context, function, and translation strategy in a way that a larger, more statistically oriented dataset would not allow. This scope is therefore treated as a deliberate delimitation of the study rather than a weakness to be minimized. *Penyalin Cahaya* is a drama-driven narrative in which emotional intensity is conveyed largely through situation and implication rather than explicit verbal aggression, resulting in a relatively limited but pragmatically rich set of swear word instances. Since the study employed total sampling, all swear word instances appearing in the film were collected and analyzed. This includes identifying the types and functions of swear words, examining the subtitling strategies used to translate them into English.

Using *Penyalin Cahaya* (2022) as the object of analysis, this study focuses on swear words used in the film, which reflect modern, urban, youth-oriented Indonesian speech (bahasa gaul) rather than formal or standard Indonesian. This informal, colloquial style is closely tied to how young, urban characters in the film speak to each other in everyday, casual situations, making the swearing

choices especially relevant to how real Indonesian youth communicate today. This distinction matters methodologically: because these expressions are drawn from a specific sociolect rather than standard Indonesian, their translation into English subtitles required negotiating not just lexical meaning but also register, informality, and cultural specificity, factors that directly shape which subtitling strategies were selected for each instance.

The process of analysis begins with identifying scenes and dialogues that contain swear words. This involves several steps: watching and re-watching the film, taking notes, selecting relevant dialogues, organizing the data into tables, categorizing translation patterns, explaining how meaning is conveyed, interpreting the subtitling choices, and drawing conclusions. These analytical steps are then linked to the theoretical frameworks used to address the research questions.

The data were analyzed using Pinker's (2007) classification of swear words and Pedersen's (2011) subtitling strategies. Each swear word was first identified from the film dialogue and coded according to Pinker's (2007) classification based on its pragmatic function in context. The coding process was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, each of the sixteen instances of swear words was coded according to Pinker's (2007) functional categories. Each utterance was examined in its full dialogic context, considering the speaker's emotional state, the interpersonal relationship between characters, and the situational trigger before being assigned to one of three categories: cathartic, abusive, or idiomatic swearing. In the second stage, the corresponding English subtitle for each instance was analyzed and coded according to Pedersen's (2011) subtitling strategies. Each subtitle was compared against its source utterance to determine whether the translator had applied Direct Translation, Omission, or Substitution based on the degree of formal and semantic correspondence between the source and target expressions. To ensure the consistency and reliability of the coding process, each of the sixteen instances was coded twice at different points in time. The results of both coding sessions were then compared, and any differences in categorization were revisited and resolved by returning to the original dialogue and subtitle for closer examination. This process of self-checking helped to reduce subjective bias and ensure that the coding decisions were consistent and well-grounded. The findings were then interpreted descriptively to explain how the emotional meaning and cultural values embedded in Indonesian swear words were preserved, adjusted, or reduced in the English subtitles.

## FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of swear words in the *Penyalin Cahaya* (Photocopier) film, addressing the two research questions formulated. A total of 16 instances of swearing were identified, as shown in Table 1. Among these, *anjing*, *anjrit*, and *goblok* emerged as the most recurrent forms, appearing more often than any other swear word in the corpus.

**Table 1. Swear words along with their derivatives**

| No | Swear Words    | Data |
|----|----------------|------|
| 1  | <i>Anjing!</i> | 3    |
| 2  | <i>Anjrit*</i> | 3    |
| 3  | <i>Goblok</i>  | 3    |
| 5  | <i>Bangsat</i> | 2    |
| 6  | <i>Tai</i>     | 2    |
| 7  | <i>Bacot</i>   | 1    |
| 8  | <i>Kampret</i> | 1    |
| 9  | <i>Pea</i>     | 1    |

Wildcards (\*) are used to include the term along with its variants. *Anjrit\** is for *njir*, *anjir*, and *anjrit*.

These words are very common in daily Indonesian conversations and are used not only as direct insults but also to express emotions such as anger, frustration, or surprise. In *Penyalin Cahaya*, which deals with betrayal, injustice, and emotional conflict, characters often face stressful situations where strong language feels natural. For example, *goblok* is a harsh insult meaning stupid, idiot, or moron, usually aimed at someone's intelligence. The line "*Goblok orang-orang!*" ("Those people are stupid!") directly attacks a group's intelligence. *Bangsat* and *tai* also recur more than once each, while *bacot*, *kampret*, and *pea* appear only a single time. In slang, *bacot*, literally "mouth," is used in KBI to tell someone to shut up or stop being annoying. *Pea*, not listed in KBI, is thought to come from *pendek*

*akal* ("short-minded"), meaning foolish or narrow-minded, as in "*Pea lu!*" ("You're stupid!"). *Kampret*, which literally means bat, is classified by Wijana (2004) as a curse word referring to objects or creatures, and is often used as a playful but insulting term like "jerk."

## 1. Functional Typology of Swearing

This study applies Pinker's (2007) typology to classify swear words based on their functions, which are divided into five categories: dysphemistic, abusive, idiomatic, emphatic, and cathartic. The analysis is conducted by Netflix official subtitles in order to identify similarities and differences in the classification of swear words. The data show that cathartic and idiomatic swearing were the two dominant categories, occurring with roughly equal frequency and together accounting for the clear majority of instances in the corpus, while abusive swearing appeared as a smaller but still notable presence. The categorization was determined by the pragmatic function of each occurrence rather than by the swear word itself, which is particularly significant given that the same word can belong to different categories depending on its context of use.

### 1.1 Cathartic Swearing

Cathartic swearing emerged as one of the two dominant categories in the corpus, reflecting how the film frequently uses swear words as a means for characters to release strong emotions, particularly in moments of tension, conflict, or frustration. Words such as *anjing* (dog), *bangsat* (bastard), *tai* (shit), and *goblok* (stupid) appear in this category, as they are not primarily used to target a specific individual with the intention to insult. Instead, these expressions emerge spontaneously in response to intense situations, functioning as a form of emotional release or psychological venting.

- a. **Source Text:** "*Gue ngga pernah kasih foto itu ke dekan **anjing!***"

**Target text:** "But I never showed them to the dean!"

This utterance occurs at a pivotal moment when Farah is wrongly accused by Toriq of leaking the drunk photos that circulated among the drama club members. Here, *anjing* functions not as a direct insult aimed at Toriq, but as a spontaneous emotional outburst, a vehicle for expressing frustration and distress in the face of a false accusation. This is what marks the utterance as cathartic: the word is not chosen to demean Toriq or anyone else, it simply escapes Farah in the moment her composure breaks under the pressure of being blamed for a betrayal she did not commit.

- b. **Source Text:** "*Udah gue bilang bukan gue **bangsat!***"

**Target text:** It's not me, you **asshole!**"

This utterance occurs at the same confrontation when Farah is again pushed to defend herself against Toriq's accusation that she leaked the drunk photos circulating among the drama club members. Although *bangsat* is spoken in Toriq's direction, its function here is closer to cathartic release than to a calculated abusive insult. Farah is not pausing to construct a deliberate put-down aimed at wounding Toriq, the word erupts from her in the same breath as her repeated denial, a sign that her patience has run out after being forced to defend herself against the same accusation more than once. The word is less a targeted judgment of Toriq's character than an involuntary expression of how unbearable the moment has become for Farah herself; he simply happens to be the person she is facing when the outburst occurs.

- c. **Source Text:** "*Bukan Farah, **goblok!***"

**Target text:** "It wasn't Farah, you **idiot!**"

This utterance occurs within the same confrontation, as Anggun steps in to defend Farah against Toriq's baseless accusation. Although *goblok* is spoken in Toriq's direction, its function here is closer to cathartic release than to a calculated abusive insult. Anggun is not pausing to construct a targeted put-down, the word bursts out as an immediate, almost reflexive response to the sheer frustration of watching Toriq blame the wrong person without evidence. The naming of Toriq is incidental to the moment rather than the point of it: Anggun isn't trying to wound him with the word *goblok* itself, she is discharging the stress of the situation, and Toriq simply happens to be who she's looking at when it happens. This distinguishes it from an abusive insult, where the word is chosen deliberately to demean; here, it is closer to an involuntary outburst that happens to be aimed in someone's direction.

- d. **Source Text:** "***Anjing!***"

**Target text:** "**Damn!**"

This utterance occurs as Anggun, stressed by the mutual accusations tearing through the drama group, proposes that everyone gather at Rama's house to review the CCTV footage. Here, *anjing* functions as a standalone exclamation rather than an insult directed at any individual, a release of accumulated stress rather than an act of blame. This is what marks the utterance as cathartic: it has no addressee, makes no accusation, and serves no persuasive or communicative purpose. It is

not spoken to anyone. It simply escapes Anggun in the instant her frustration peaks, which is the defining trait of catharsis as a swearing function, discharging internal tension rather than delivering a message.

e. **Source Text: "Tailah!"**

**Target text:** "That's bullshit!"

The utterance occurs in a different context from the confrontation scenes of Data 10 through 13, here, Toriq expresses exhaustion and resentment over his team's constant reliance on him to handle every task for the upcoming theater contest. *Tailah*, a colloquial contraction rooted in *tai* (shit), functions here as an exclamation of exasperation rather than an insult aimed at any individual. This is what marks the swearing as cathartic rather than abusive or idiomatic: *tailah* is not directed at any person, nor does it serve as a stock phrase or verbal filler, it is a spontaneous release of built-up emotional pressure, erupting at the exact point where Toriq's patience gives out.

f. **Source Text: "Bangsat"**

**Target text:** "Bastard"

The utterance occurs when Sur confronts Amin after discovering he has been secretly selling student data to Rama, a betrayal from someone she trusted as a close friend. Although *bangsat* is spoken directly at Amin as he attempts to defend himself, its function here is closer to cathartic release than to a calculated abusive insult. Sur is not constructing a deliberate condemnation of Amin's character, the word erupts from her in the instant his self-justification confirms what she has just discovered, a spontaneous expression of the shock and fury of learning that someone she trusted has been working against her.

## 1.2 Idiomatic Swearing

Idiomatic swearing emerged as the other dominant category in the corpus, reflecting how the film frequently uses swear words as an embedded feature of casual, everyday speech rather than as direct insults or emotional outbursts. Words such as *goblok* (stupid), *kampret* (bastard/damn), *anjing* (dog), and *anjrit* (a softened exclamatory variant) appear in this category, as they are not primarily used to wound a specific individual or to release acute emotional tension. Instead, these expressions function as conventionalized markers of informal speech, appearing in the natural rhythm of conversation among close friends and peers to convey humor, surprise, or familiarity. In Indonesian youth culture, such words, though potentially offensive in formal or hostile contexts, are commonly used among close friends as markers of intimacy and social bonding, where their literal insulting meaning is effectively neutralized by the closeness of the relationship between speakers. This pattern aligns closely with the film's university setting, where informal, casual speech is characteristic of everyday student interaction, indicating that swearing in this category is not intended to offend but instead serves a social function in sustaining and reinforcing interpersonal relationships among the characters.

a. **Source Text: "Emang *bangsat* lu semua"**

**Target text:** "God damn you guys! I'm blown away!"

In this data, the utterance occurs when Anggun praises her team after their strong performance, celebrating that they pulled off the show and won. Although *bangsat* literally translates to a harsh insult, its function here is unmistakably idiomatic rather than abusive or cathartic: Anggun is not expressing anger, distress, or targeted condemnation, she is using the word affectionately, as an exclamation of admiration and excitement among close teammates. The literal insulting meaning of *bangsat* is neutralized entirely by context; among peers who share a close bond, the word becomes a marker of enthusiasm and camaraderie rather than hostility.

b. **Source Text: "Balik kelas ye *goblok*"**

**Target text:** "Go back to your class!"

In this data, the utterance occurs when Toriq tells his friends to head back to class after they had left to celebrate their theater team's victory. Here, *goblok* functions as idiomatic swearing rather than as a genuine insult: Toriq is not condemning his friends' intelligence or character, he is using the word the way close friends casually address one another, as a lighthearted, almost teasing nudge rather than a criticism. The celebratory context of the scene reinforces this reading; this is a moment of shared joy among teammates, not tension or conflict, and the word's presence reflects the easy familiarity of their relationship rather than any real irritation.

c. **Source Text: "pimpinan produksi kita, si *kampret* Toriq"**

**Target text:** "First, our production manager! Tariq the baddass!"

In this data, the utterance occurs when Anggun addresses the entire theater team in her victory speech, publicly thanking Toriq for his role as production manager. Here, *kampret* functions as idiomatic swearing rather than as an insult: spoken in a moment of public celebration and gratitude, the word carries an affectionate, almost teasing warmth rather than any hostility. Anggun is not

criticizing Toriq, she is praising him, and the swear word serves as an informal term of camaraderie that softens the formality of a public acknowledgment, marking Toriq as someone close enough to the group to be addressed casually even in a moment of official recognition.

- d. **Source Text:** "*Anjrit, Sur. Lu ngapain sih?*"

**Target text:** "What the hell are you doing?"

In this data, the utterance occurs when Amin discovers Sur rearranging her things at his workplace without having asked his permission, after she has been kicked out of her house. Here, *anjrit* functions as idiomatic swearing rather than as a cathartic outburst or a targeted insult: it is a conventionalized exclamation of surprise, commonly used among close friends in casual Indonesian speech to register shock or mild disbelief rather than genuine anger. Amin is not condemning Sur or expressing distress at a betrayal, he is simply reacting, in the easy, informal register that reflects how comfortable and familiar he is with her, to the unexpected sight of her settling in without warning.

- e. **Source Text:** "*Hah anjrit, HP doang mau lu instal antivirus?*"

**Target text:** "Damn it! Who needs an antivirus for a phone?"

This data occurs as student reacts to Amin's suggestion to install antivirus software on a flash disk, apparently finding the request excessive or unnecessary for something as minor as a phone. Here, *anjrit* functions as idiomatic swearing: a conventionalized exclamation expressing mild disbelief or incredulity rather than genuine distress or anger. A student is not upset in any meaningful sense, he is reacting with the kind of dismissive, slightly amused surprise one might express at a request that seems overly cautious, the tone of someone mildly poking fun rather than someone genuinely bothered.

- f. **Source Text:** "*Njir parah banget dah lu!*"

**Target text:** "That was awful!"

This utterance occurs when Farah lightly judges Amin for leaving his friend to head home alone late at night in an online car. Here, *njir* functions as idiomatic swearing: a casual exclamatory contraction commonly used among peers to express mild disapproval or teasing criticism, rather than a genuine, weighty accusation. Farah is not angry or distressed, she is calling Amin out in the easy, informal register typical of friendly ribbing, treating his lapse in judgment as a minor social faux pas rather than a serious wrongdoing.

### 1.3 Abusive Swearing

Abusive swearing appears four times in the dataset, slightly fewer than the six instances each recorded for cathartic and idiomatic swearing. While this difference is small given the overall sample size, it is worth noting that even in a film centered on accusation, suspicion, and betrayal, direct verbal attacks intended to demean or silence another character are not the most frequent way characters express conflict on screen. More often, distress surfaces as spontaneous emotional release (cathartic) or is absorbed into the group's everyday informal register (idiomatic), with direct hostility reserved for a smaller number of the most severe interpersonal ruptures in the film. Words such as *pea* (crazy/stupid), *goblok* (idiot), *bacot* (shut up), and *tai* (shit) appear in this smaller category, consistently aimed at wounding a specific individual or group rather than expressing shared familiarity or discharging internal tension. Each of the four instances marks a moment where a relationship has genuinely broken down or turned adversarial, making abusive swearing, though rare in this corpus, disproportionately significant to the film's portrayal of conflict at its most severe and irreparable points.

- a. **Source Text:** "*Pea lu!*"

**Target Text:** "Crazy!"

This utterance occurs when Farah blames Amin for failing to take Sur home, directly confronting him over what she sees as a lapse in responsibility. Here, *pea* functions as abusive swearing: the word is aimed squarely at Amin, with clear intent to condemn his judgment and character in the moment.

- b. **Source Text:** "*Goblok orang orang!*"

**Target Text:** "Those idiots!"

This utterance occurs as Farah, emotional over the Sur incident, directs her frustration at the entire theater team rather than at any single individual. Here, *goblok* functions as abusive swearing: although the target is a group rather than one person, the word still carries clear intent to condemn and demean, marking the team collectively as responsible for whatever failure or negligence led to the incident involving Sur. Farah's anger is pointed squarely at the group, holding them accountable as a whole.



c. **Source Text:** “*bacot*”

**Target Text:** “Shut up!”

This utterance occurs when Anggun angrily confronts an online-car driver after he mocks Sur, directly silencing him in response to his disrespect. Here, *bacot* functions as abusive swearing: the word is a blunt command aimed squarely at the driver, intended not to release Anggun's own internal tension but to shut down his behavior outright.

d. **Source Text:** “Sur, lu *tai* lu ya!”

**Target Text:** “You ungreatful **piece of shit**.”

This utterance occurs when Amin, angry with Sur, lashes out after learning she intends to report his wrongdoing, selling student theses, to the campus, despite the fact that this same scheme had earned Sur money as well. Here, *tai* functions as abusive swearing in its most direct form: the word is aimed squarely at Sur, combined with the accusation of ingratitude, making this a deliberate personal attack rather than a spontaneous release of tension. Amin is not simply venting frustration into the air, he is condemning Sur specifically, framing her decision to expose him as a betrayal, given that she had benefited financially from the same wrongdoing he is now being reported for.

## 2. Analysis of Translation Strategies in Netflix Subtitles

This study applies Pedersen's (2011) typology to classify subtitling strategies, which are divided into three categories observed in this dataset: substitution, omission, and direct translation. The analysis is conducted on Netflix's official subtitles in order to identify how swear words identified in the previous section were rendered for an English-speaking audience. The data show that substitution was the clearly dominant strategy, accounting for the majority of instances in the corpus, while direct translation and omission appeared as smaller, less frequent strategies. The distribution of strategies was determined by comparing each source-text swear word against its corresponding subtitle rendering, which is particularly significant given that the same source word could, in principle, be rendered through different strategies depending on its function and context within a given scene.

### 2.1 Substitution

Substitution emerged as the dominant strategy in the corpus, accounting for 10 of the 16 data points, reflecting a consistent tendency to replace Indonesian swear words with English expressions that carry equivalent emotional weight rather than literal meaning. Words are not translated word-for-word in these instances; instead, the subtitler selects an English expletive or exclamation that approximates the emotional register of the original line, even where the literal image or cultural connotation of the source word is lost. This pattern reflects a broader tendency in the subtitling of *Penyalin Cahaya* to prioritize the feeling an utterance conveys over the precise lexical or cultural meaning of the swear word itself.

a. **Source Text:** “Emang bangsat lu semua ya *anjing*!”

**Target Text:** “God damn, you guys! I'm blown away”

This is a clear instance of substitution, since a literal translation would strip away the celebratory tone and instead suggest hostility where none exists. Instead, the subtitler substitutes an English exclamation, “God damn,” that occupies a similar pragmatic space: a mild profanity commonly used in English to express strong positive emotion (excitement, disbelief, admiration) rather than genuine anger or insult. This substitution prioritizes functional equivalence, capturing how the line would be understood by an English-speaking audience, over lexical equivalence, since English “God damn” and Indonesian *bangsat* or *anjing* share no literal meaning but occupy comparable emotional registers in casual speech.

b. **Source Text:** “Salah satunya adalah kepada pimpinan produksi kita *kampret* Tariq”

**Target Text:** “First, our production manager! Tariq **the badass**!”

This is a clear instance of substitution. A literal rendering of *kampret*, which translates roughly to “bastard” or “bat” (depending on regional usage), would be both semantically confusing and tonally wrong in English, since “our production manager, you bastard, Tariq” would read as hostile or nonsensical rather than affectionate. Instead, the subtitler substitutes an entirely different English expression, “badass,” that carries none of the literal meaning of *kampret* but occupies a comparable pragmatic space: a casual, mildly edgy term of admiration used among peers.

c. **Source Text:** “Anjrit Sur, lu ngapain sih?”

**Target Text:** “What the hell are you doing?”

This instance is clear substitution. A literal rendering of *anjrit* has no stable English equivalent, the word is a softened, exclamatory contraction with no direct lexical counterpart, and attempting to translate it literally would produce nothing meaningful in English. Instead, the subtitler substitutes

the English idiom "what the hell," a comparably mild expletive phrase commonly used to express surprise or mild exasperation in casual speech.

- d. **Source Text:** "hah *anjrit*, HP doang mau lu instal antivirus"

**Target Text:** "Damn it! Who needs an antivirus for a phone?"

This is a clear instance of substitution since *anjrit* has no direct lexical counterpart in English, it is a softened, conventionalized exclamatory contraction specific to informal Indonesian speech, and a literal translation attempt would produce no coherent meaning in English. Instead, the subtitler substitutes the English exclamation "Damn it," a mild expletive that occupies a comparable pragmatic space: expressing casual exasperation or disbelief without conveying genuine anger or hostility.

- e. **Source Text:** "Pea lu!"

**Target Text:** "crazy!"

This instance is substitution since *pea* is a colloquial Indonesian term without a stable, literal English equivalent; translating it word-for-word would produce no coherent meaning in English. Instead, the subtitler substitutes the English term "Crazy!", a term that shares a loose semantic association with *pea* (both gesture toward foolish or irrational behavior).

- f. **Source Text:** "bacot"

**Target Text:** "Shut up!"

This is a clear instance of substitution. Although "Shut up!" may appear to be a close, natural equivalent, it is not a literal translation of *bacot*, *bacot* is not a verb or command in Indonesian but a noun, colloquially referring to a "mouth" or "talkativeness" (often used pejoratively, as in "*banyak bacot*" meaning "too talkative" or "runs their mouth too much"). *Bacot*, its grammatical form in Indonesian is fundamentally different from the imperative verb structure of English "Shut up!" A direct or literal translation attempting to preserve the noun form (e.g., "Mouth!") would be incomprehensible in English, so the subtitler substitutes a full English imperative that captures the same communicative intent and confrontational force, despite the structural mismatch between the two languages.

- g. **Source Text:** "Udah gue bilang bukan gue, *bangsat*!"

**Target Text:** "it's not me, you asshole!"

This is a clear instance of substitution. What actually happens here is substitution: *bangsat* (literally closer to "bastard" or "scoundrel") is replaced with a different English swear word, "asshole," which carries a distinct connotation of its own, in English, "asshole" more specifically implies someone is being deliberately inconsiderate or contemptible, whereas *bangsat* carries a broader charge of moral condemnation without that specific nuance.

- h. **Source Text:** "Anjing!"

**Target Text:** "Damn!"

This is a clear instance of substitution. A literal translation of *anjing* ("dog") would be nonsensical as a standalone exclamation in English, "Dog!" carries no expressive or emotional function for an English-speaking audience and would fail to convey Anggun's frustration at all. Instead, the subtitler substitutes the English expletive "Damn!", a common, low-intensity exclamation used to express frustration or exasperation in casual English speech. This substitution replaces an animal-based curse with a culturally neutral English swear word, preserving the cathartic function of the line as release of tension, without attempting to carry over the specific cultural image or connotation *anjing* holds in Indonesian (where it draws its offensive charge specifically from the cultural association of dogs as unclean or lowly, a connotation absent in English usage of "damn").

- i. **Source Text:** "tailah!"

**Target Text:** "That's bullshit!"

This is a clear instance of substitution. Although *tai* has a direct English lexical counterpart ("shit"), the subtitler does not render *tailah* as a bare, literal "Shit!" Instead, the line is expanded into the fuller English idiom "That's bullshit!", a substitution that shifts from a single exclamatory swear word to a complete idiomatic expression conveying exasperation at an unfair or frustrating situation, while related in vulgarity and core meaning, restructures the utterance to match a natural, idiomatic English pattern of complaint, rather than mechanically preserving the source word's grammatical form.

## 2.2 Direct Translation

Direct translation appears in 4 instances in the corpus, applied where the swear word's literal meaning maps closely onto an existing English equivalent, rather than requiring substitution or omission. This suggests that direct translation was applied selectively, specifically where the lexical gap between Indonesian and English swearing happened to be minimal, and where preserving the

literal word appeared to serve the scene's emotional intensity more effectively than reaching for an alternative expression would have.

a. **Source Text:** "Goblok orang orang!"

**Target Text:** "Those idiots!"

This is a clear instance of direct translation. *Goblok* translates literally and consistently into English as "stupid" or "idiot," and the subtitler preserves this exact lexical meaning: "Those idiots!" is not an unrelated English expression standing in for the emotional register of the line, it is a near word-for-word rendering that carries over both the literal meaning and the register of the source term with minimal alteration. The addition of "Those" simply supplies the grammatical subject implied by context in the Indonesian line (*orang orang*, "those people"). This direct correspondence is possible here because *goblok* functions straightforwardly as an insult targeting intelligence or judgment, a concept that maps onto "idiot" in English without any loss of meaning, vulgarity, or pragmatic force. As a result, this instance preserves the full abusive intensity of the original line for English-speaking audiences, without requiring the subtitler to compensate for cultural specificity or reach for a functionally equivalent but lexically unrelated term.

b. **Source Text:** "Bukan Farah, goblok!"

**Target Text:** "It wasn't Farah, you idiot!"

As with the earlier instance of "Goblok orang orang!" → "Those idiots!", this is a case of direct translation: *goblok* maps cleanly onto "idiot" in both literal meaning and register, carrying no culturally specific imagery that would require substitution or reformulation. The same reasoning applies here, the subtitler preserves the word's literal content and emotional intensity without alteration, since no lexical or cultural gap exists between the source and target terms. What differs between the two instances is not the translation strategy itself, but the function of the swearing: abusive in the earlier case, cathartic here, demonstrating that direct translation as a strategy is applied consistently to this particular word regardless of its pragmatic function within a given scene.

c. **Source Text:** "Sur, lu *tai* lu ya!"

**Target Text:** "you ungrateful piece of shit."

This is a clear instance of direct translation. Unlike *kampret*, literal English equivalent and required the subtitler to substitute an unrelated target-language expression, *tai* maps directly onto the English swear word "shit," both in literal meaning and in register (both are common, moderately strong vulgarities in their respective languages). The subtitler preserves this direct lexical correspondence rather than replacing it with an unrelated term, retaining the core taboo word intact across languages. What distinguishes this instance is that the direct translation is expanded rather than delivered as a single-word equivalent: the subtitler adds "ungrateful piece of" around the core translated word, intensifying the insult and making explicit the accusation of betrayal that is implied more compactly in the Indonesian original.

d. **Source Text:** "Bangsat"

**Target Text:** "Bastard"

This instance is direct translation. *Bangsat* translates literally and consistently into English as "bastard," and the subtitler preserves this exact lexical correspondence: both words carry a comparable degree of vulgarity, and both function as standalone, exclamatory terms of condemnation in their respective languages. This direct correspondence allows the subtitler to preserve the full weight of Sur's shock and fury for English-speaking audiences without needing to substitute an unrelated expression or expand the line with additional intensifying language, making this one of the more lexically faithful renderings in the dataset despite the swear word's high emotional stakes.

### 2.3 Omission

Omission is the least frequently applied strategy in the corpus, occurring in 3 instances where swear words are removed entirely from the subtitle rather than replaced with any English equivalent, resulting in a reduction of emotional intensity and expressive force. Unlike substitution, which still signals to the English-speaking audience that some charged or informal register is present, omission erases that signal altogether, the line is rendered as a neutral, composed statement, leaving no trace that the character swore at all. Notably, omission in this dataset appears specifically in instances of cathartic or idiomatic swearing rather than abusive swearing, suggesting the subtitler judged spontaneous emotional outbursts and casual, peer-bonding profanity as more expendable than deliberate insults, whose narrative function, silencing another character, depends more directly on the line's confrontational force. This selective pattern points to an implicit hierarchy in the subtitler's decision-making: taboo language is preserved when it drives interpersonal conflict forward, but is

quietly smoothed away when it functions primarily as texture, register, or character voice, a choice that subtly sanitizes the emotional rawness and cultural specificity of the film's dialogue for a global audience, even as it leaves the plot-critical confrontations largely intact.

a. **Source Text:** "kelas balik kelas ye **goblok!**"

**Target Text:** "Go back to your class!"

This is a clear instance of omission. The subtitler does not attempt to find an English equivalent for *goblok* at all, no expletive, mild or otherwise, appears in the target text. The line is rendered simply as a neutral instruction, "Go back to your class!", stripped entirely of the casual, informal register the swear word carried in the source line. This is a meaningful choice: an equivalent like "you idiot" or "you dork" could plausibly have preserved the teasing tone, yet the subtitler opted to remove the taboo language altogether rather than find a substitute. This omission reduces the emotional and interpersonal texture of the scene: what was, in Indonesian, an instruction delivered with the casual intimacy of close friendship becomes, in English, a flat, almost formal directive. The loss here is subtle but significant, English-speaking audiences lose the linguistic cue that signals Toriq's easy camaraderie with his friends, receiving instead a line that could just as easily be delivered by an authority figure or stranger. This suggests that when swearing serves primarily to mark social closeness rather than to carry strong emotional or confrontational weight, the subtitler judged it as expendable, smoothing over a marker of peer intimacy for the sake of a cleaner, more neutral English line, even at the cost of flattening the characters' voice and relational dynamic.

b. **Source Text:** "*Njir* parah banget dah lu!"

**Target Text:** "That was awful!"

This is a clear instance of omission. The subtitler does not attempt to find an English equivalent for *njir* at all, no mild expletive or exclamation ("geez," "ugh," or similar) appears in the target text to mark the line's informal, exasperated tone. Instead, the line is rendered as a plain evaluative statement, "That was awful!", which conveys Farah's judgment but strips away the casual, almost joking register carried by *njir* in the original. This omission has a specific interpretive cost: in the source line, *njir* signals that Farah's criticism is delivered with the ease of close friendship, light ribbing rather than a serious reprimand. Without it, the English subtitle reads as a more direct, formal condemnation, closer to genuine disapproval than friendly teasing. This shift subtly alters how English-speaking audiences perceive Farah and Amin's relationship in this moment: rather than registering as a small, low-stakes jab between friends, the line risks landing as a more serious criticism than the scene intends.

c. **Source Text:** "Gue gak pernah kasih foto itu ke dekan **anjing!**"

**Target Text:** "But I never showed them to the dean!"

This is a clear instance of omission. The subtitler does not attempt to find an English equivalent for *anjing*, no expletive of any kind ("damn," "hell," or similar) appears in the target text to signal Sarah's emotional break. Instead, the line is rendered as a composed, grammatically clean denial, "But I never showed them to the dean!", that reads as measured self-defense rather than a moment of emotional rupture. This omission is arguably the most consequential of the three in this study, precisely because of what it erases dramatically: this is the first instance in the confrontation sequence where Sarah's frustration surfaces, marking the moment her composure begins to break under sustained false accusation. By removing *anjing* entirely, the English subtitle flattens this turning point into a calm, rational denial, obscuring the escalation that the original dialogue builds toward across the scene. English-speaking audiences, without this cue, may perceive Sarah as maintaining composure throughout the confrontation rather than registering the specific moment her emotional control begins to give way, a loss that has implications beyond a single line, since it affects how the scene's rising tension is legible to a non-Indonesian-speaking audience.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study offer several important insights into how Indonesian swear words are mediated for international audiences through Netflix subtitling, and invite a critical dialogue with existing scholarship in audiovisual translation and cross-cultural pragmatics.

### 1. The Dominance of Substitution: Pragmatic Equivalence over Literal Translation

The predominance of substitution in the subtitling of *Penyalin Cahaya* reflects a deliberate prioritization of pragmatic equivalence over source-text literalism. Rather than translating Indonesian swear words word-for-word, the subtitler consistently sought English expressions that replicate the emotional impact of the original utterance for an international audience. This approach aligns with Pedersen's (2011) argument that subtitling decisions are governed not only by linguistic equivalence but also by the communicative needs of the target audience, where fluency and naturalness take

precedence over formal correspondence. The choice to substitute *anjing* (dog) with "God damn" and *kampret* with "badass," for instance, demonstrates that the subtitler recognized that a literal rendering would produce expressions that feel culturally foreign or emotionally flat to English-speaking viewers. By replacing these culturally embedded Indonesian expressions with functionally equivalent English ones, the subtitler allowed international viewers to experience the same emotional register, frustration, excitement, or camaraderie, that Indonesian audiences would naturally feel. This supports the broader principle in translation studies that emotional authenticity in the target text is often more valuable than lexical fidelity to the source text, particularly in audiovisual contexts where the audience's emotional engagement with the narrative is paramount.

It is worth noting, however, that substitution does not always produce a neutral transfer of meaning. As demonstrated in data, the substitution of *kampret* with "badass" does not merely replace one expression with another of equal weight, it reverses the connotative direction entirely, transforming a mildly negative insult into a term of admiration. This suggests that while substitution is effective in preserving emotional tone, it can simultaneously alter the pragmatic value and cultural specificity of the original expression, raising questions about how faithfully the subtitled version represents the source culture's communicative norms.

## 2. Dialogue with Existing Literature

The findings of this study both support and extend the conclusions of previous research on swear word translation in audiovisual media. Previous studies examining swear word translation across other language pairs, including French–Indonesian and English–Arabic, have similarly found that translators tend to favour target-culture adaptation over literal equivalence when dealing with emotionally charged language. The present study confirms this pattern in the Indonesian–English direction, contributing evidence that pragmatic adaptation is a cross-linguistically consistent strategy in the subtitling of taboo language. However, this study adds a layer of nuance by demonstrating that the degree of semantic shift produced by substitution varies considerably from near-equivalent replacements such as *bangsat* → "asshole" to connotatively reversed substitutions such as *kampret* → "badass", it suggesting that substitution is not a uniform strategy but a spectrum of adaptation decisions shaped by the specific cultural and pragmatic properties of each expression. Furthermore, the classification of swear words using Pinker's (2007) typology reveals that the same word can perform different pragmatic functions depending on context, a finding that underscores the importance of utterance-level analysis over word-level analysis in translation research. This contextual sensitivity is particularly relevant for Indonesian swear words, which, as this study demonstrates, frequently shift between cathartic, idiomatic, and abusive functions depending on the interpersonal dynamics and emotional conditions of the scene.

While omission accounts for only 19% of the subtitling decisions in this study, its pragmatic consequences are disproportionately significant. When swear words are removed from the subtitle, the translation does not merely lose a single word, it loses the emotional texture and interpersonal tone that the swear word was carrying. The most illustrative case is Data 2, where "*Balik kelas ye goblok*" is rendered as "Go back to your class!". The word *goblok*, which functions as informal expression commonly used among friends in Indonesian youth culture to add a playful or teasing tone to everyday speech. Its omission in the subtitle, therefore, does not simply remove an offensive word, it removes a marker of social familiarity and informal camaraderie between the characters, resulting in a subtitle that reads as a flat, neutral command rather than a lighthearted remark between peers. For international viewers, this omission creates a subtle but meaningful misreading of the interpersonal dynamic between the characters involved. For an English-speaking viewer, the subtitled version reads as a firm but unremarkable directive, entirely stripped of the aggression and contempt that an Indonesian-speaking viewer would immediately recognize. This dilution of tone has consequences beyond the individual utterance, it softens the interpersonal dynamic between characters and reduces the overall tension of the scene, potentially misleading international audiences about the nature of the relationship and the emotional stakes of the confrontation. A similar loss occurs in Data 10, where "*Gue ngga pernah kasih foto itu ke dekan anjing!*" is subtitled as ("But I never showed them to the dean!"). The omission of *anjing* here strips the utterance of its urgency and emotional desperation, reducing a charged denial made under intense psychological pressure to a calm, factual statement. This is particularly consequential in scenes involving direct interpersonal conflict, where swear words do not merely express emotion but actively function as instruments of verbal aggression. As Culpeper (2011) argues, deliberate face-threatening language is a key mechanism through which speakers cause offence and assert dominance in interpersonal conflict, a function that is entirely lost when the swear word is omitted from the subtitle, leaving international viewers unaware of the hostile intent embedded in the original utterance. The film's broader themes of institutional injustice and betrayal

rely heavily on the authenticity of these emotional outbursts to convey the human cost of the conflict and omission, in these instances, undermines that authenticity for international viewers. This finding is consistent with broader critiques in translation studies regarding the use of omission as a default strategy for managing offensive language, where the preference for a cleaner, less confrontational subtitle comes at the expense of pragmatic and emotional fidelity to the source text. The 19% omission rate in this study, while relatively modest, therefore represents a meaningful reduction in the emotional and cultural richness of the film's dialogue as experienced by non-Indonesian audiences.

### 3. *Global Perception of Indonesian Characters: Aggression, Politeness, and Cultural Legibility*

Beyond linguistic equivalence, these subtitling choices shape how Indonesian characters are perceived by international audiences. Rather than a uniform shift, the findings show a split pattern: omission tends to soften moments of raw emotional distress, while direct or intensified translation tends to preserve or heighten moments of open confrontation.

In omitted instances such as data when Sarah's desperate denial, carrying the force of *anjing* in the source text, becomes a calm, composed statement in English. International viewers lose access to the urgency of her distress, receiving a character who appears more controlled than she is written to be. This is not genuine politeness reflecting cultural norms, but a politeness manufactured by translation loss.

Conversely, in abusive instances such as *tai* rendered as "You ungrateful piece of shit," intensifying additions make the accusation's stakes explicit for audiences unfamiliar with the interpersonal context, arguably registering as more aggressive in English than the more economical source line. Together, this suggests global audiences receive an emotionally uneven picture of Indonesian youth: quieter, cathartic distress is muted, while overt confrontation is preserved or amplified. If this pattern extends beyond this film, it implies Indonesian characters may be perceived internationally as more prone to direct verbal aggression, while their more vulnerable, internalized emotional responses go comparatively unseen.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the translation of Indonesian swear words in the English subtitles of *Penyalin Cahaya* using Pinker's (2007) classification of swearing and Pedersen's (2011) subtitling strategies. The findings revealed that the swear words identified in the film fall into three categories: cathartic, idiomatic, and abusive swearing. Cathartic and idiomatic swearing were the most dominant categories, reflecting the film's portrayal of emotionally charged situations and informal interactions among university students. Regarding translation strategies, substitution emerged as the most frequently used strategy, followed by omission and direct translation. These findings indicate that the subtitler often adapted Indonesian swear words into culturally appropriate English expressions while attempting to preserve their emotional and communicative functions.

The findings demonstrate that the meaning and function of swear words are highly dependent on context rather than on the lexical item itself (Guillot, 2023; Lu, 2024). The same swear word may perform different pragmatic functions, such as expressing emotional release, signaling solidarity, or conveying direct hostility, depending on the situation and speaker intention. The predominance of substitution suggests that the subtitler prioritized pragmatic equivalence and audience accessibility over literal translation. This highlights the importance of considering socio-cultural norms, interpersonal relationships, and emotional intensity in audiovisual translation to ensure that the intended communicative effect of the source text is effectively conveyed to target audiences (Amaliah, 2023; Prasatyo, Gustary, & Astuti, 2023).

This study is limited to the analysis of sixteen swear-word instances found in a single Indonesian film and its official Netflix subtitles. Therefore, the findings may not represent the broader patterns of swear-word translation across different genres, platforms, or audiovisual contexts. Future research is encouraged to examine a larger corpus of films, television series, or streaming services to explore whether similar patterns of swearing functions and subtitling strategies occur across different settings. Comparative studies involving multiple languages, subtitle providers, or translation approaches may also provide deeper insights into the relationship between culture, pragmatics, and audiovisual translation.

For practicing translators, this study's findings suggest a few working guidelines: when translating Indonesian cathartic swearing in dramatic contexts, translators should prioritize emotional impact over literal meaning to maintain narrative pacing; when translating abusive swearing tied to central conflicts, translators should preserve its full confrontational force given its narrative weight;

and when translating idiomatic swearing between close characters, translators should avoid default omission, since doing so risks flattening the informality and closeness the swearing signals.

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