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Meaning Shifts in the English Subtitle Translation of Verbal Humor: A Case Study of Agak Laen (2024)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates meaning shifts in English subtitle translation in verbal humor in an Indonesian film, *Agak Laen*, in 2024. Using a qualitative descriptive content analysis methodology, a total of forty samples of verbal humor were identified and coded in accordance with Shade's typology in 1996. The study used a framework based on equivalence concepts in translation by Nida and Taber in 1969/1982 to include categories such as loss, gain, change, and neutral meaning. The results indicate that wit is the most prevalent humor style, which represents the embedded culture of Indonesian speaking behavior. Based on translation solutions, meaning shifts in both change of meaning and neutral meaning share a common index of 32.5%, which shows how semantic shifts are prevalent in ensuring ease of access by a cross-cultural audience. Even if some cultural specifics in humor are lessened, a global sense of humor remains intact. Meaning shifts represent adaptive solutions facilitating cross-cultural humor translation in audiovisual translation.

KEYWORDS: verbal humor, meaning shift, subtitle translation, audiovisual translation, Indonesian comedy film

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Introduction

Humor is subjective, and people can see the funny side of things in different ways. As a multi-dimensional social and cultural phenomenon, humor can be categorized into different types by various criteria or approaches. Humor is deeply subjective, shaped by factors such as cultural identity, life story, and the values of society at large and even one's emotional state in a given moment. Therefore, humor is inherently relative and shaped by its context; what amuses one audience may not have the same effect on another. In addition to its subjective nature, humor manifests in many different forms and expressions. According to Chen et al. (2017), it can be generally categorized into two features according to the modality of humor: nonverbal and verbal. Visual gag humor uses visual cues to make people laugh, whereas verbal gag humor involves language.

Verbal humor is a type of humor that is a linguistic phenomenon to produce a humorous effect, either spoken or written. It is produced through the playful manipulation of vocabulary, sentence construction, sound patterns, or multiple meanings, which generate an element of surprise or contrast that evokes laughter in the audience. One of the Humor Creation Ways Based on Berger (2017): One of the primary techniques to make jokes is to use words, ways of speech, lexical meaning, and their implication. Consistent with this conceptualization, Shade (1996) categorized verbal humor into 12 types: puns, riddles, jokes, satire, limericks, parodies, anecdotes of humoresque, farce, irony, sarcasm, tall tales, and wit.

Humor is also used for such things as discussing or joking about social issues. Comedy can be a means of conveying arduous or delicate information in an enjoyable and comfortable way. Comedy is used everywhere, from the day-to-day running of communities to national and even international levels; humor is a bridge that binds people together. But when humor is translated from one cultural and linguistic context into another, new hurdles present themselves. Humor can help get a message across, but cultural differences in values and customs can change how the message is understood and appreciated. So, a translator is very important for making sure that the humor's intended meaning and effect are clear.

Because of cultural differences, it can be very hard to translate humor. Humor is a cognitive and social construct that is significantly influenced by cultural norms and values (Attardo, 2020). Therefore, understanding the target culture is crucial in the translation process, especially when dealing with verbal humor, as the translation must still be effective and evoke the intended humorous effect. Moreover, humor can be found in everyday social interactions as well as in cultural products like books, TV shows, and movies, which are both ways to express humor and mirrors of cultural and social values. In this context, movies are one of the best ways to get humor across because they can mix verbal and nonverbal elements at the same time.

A movie is an audiovisual medium utilizing both verbal and nonverbal elements in a way to convey humor through audiovisual channels to create a laughing effect. Nonverbal elements include facial expressions, gestures, visual elements, and nonverbal sounds. As an audiovisual medium, a movie is efficient in representing a wide array of human thought and behavior, including emotions and cognitive processes (Niemic, 2014). Comedy movies have remained widely accepted all over the world, with some of these major contributors being Charlie Chaplin, among others, in developing contemporary movie humor (Rahmanadji, 2007). As far as Indonesia is concerned, comedic movie genres were developed by Mang Udel and later, during the 1970s–1980s, by comedians Benyamin Sueb, Srimulat, and Warkop DKI. With a very important place in culture, comedic movies have remained a critical area of research with a focus on a research analysis of comedic movie humor delivery and audience interpretation.

Agak Laen (2024) is a manifestation of contemporary Indonesian comedic films with a mix of traditional and contemporary elements. As a production of *Imajinari*, written and directed by Muhadkly Acho, this movie gained massive popularity with more than nine million views. Featuring Indra Jegel, Boris Bokir, Oki Rengga, and Bene Dion, this movie revolves around four friends working in a haunted house, a combination of comedies, horror elements, and social critiques. Going beyond mere entertainment, this movie portrays the resilience of Indonesian humor in responding to a contemporary audience. Successful in local markets with global release, other people from different countries were less fascinated, especially due to translation barriers with English in culturally embedded verbal jokes, resulting in a different meaning with less funny effects.

Although numerous research papers have explored challenges surrounding humor translation within film sources, general approaches and cultural constraints remain unaddressed, and there is a research gap

pertaining to the exploration of meaning shifts associated with Indonesian comedy films and translated into English subtitles. The research gap originates from the research problem pertaining to the changes in meaning that verbal humor sources of Agak Laen (2024) undergo when translated from Indonesian into English. It leads to a research problem encompassing changes in meaning within verbal humor sources and their impact on the source's humor reception among people belonging to different cultures. Thus, there emerge research objectives associated with identifying types of meaning shifts within Agak Laen's English subtitle and exploring its impact on Agak Laen's source humor. The research becomes worthwhile as it will enable understanding meaning shifts within culturally embedded Indonesian humor sources and provide useful insights related to Agak Laen's subtitle translator and associated research within the domain of audiovisual research papers. Also, it will be a useful contribution toward research papers on meaning shifts and associated changes within global comedy film reception.

Method

This is a qualitative study, using the approach of descriptive content analysis to investigate meaning shifts in the English subtitle translation of verbal humor in the film Agak Laen (2024). Asfar (2019) declared that content analysis is a technique to give a detailed description of information contained in a certain medium by way of systematized and organized data investigation. In this research, the researcher focuses on the identification of verbal humor and the analysis of the types of meaning shifts when they are subtitled in English. The data are collected by using the listening and noting method, in which the dialogues were observed thoroughly to obtain the relevant utterances that answer to the research objectives.

The researcher then listened to the Indonesian dialogues and their English subtitle counterparts and documented them in a table. The dialogues with verbal humor were classified according to the types of humor and further analyzed regarding the shift in meaning across languages. The research instrument consisted of observation notes that would serve to document the source language dialogues (Indonesian), target language subtitles (English), situational context, and the analysis of meaning accuracy and humorous effect. The subtitles that formed the basis of the data were extracted from the official translation on the Netflix streaming platform. Analysis was then done descriptively.

The first stage is through identifying dialogues that contain verbal humor. Then, the dialogues were categorized using Shade's categories of verbal humor, namely pun, riddle, joke, satire, limerick, parody, anecdote, farce, irony, sarcasm, tall tales, and wit, which are twelve categories overall. Next would be the analysis of meaning shift using Nida and Taber's four categories, namely, loss of meaning, gain of meaning, change of meaning, and neutral meaning. In addition, based on the communicative translation perspective, there is a needs-assessment review regarding whether the translated humor would still convey an equivalent humorous effect to the target audience. Finally, source triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility of the analysis by cross-checking the original film dialogues, their corresponding English subtitles, and relevant humor theory references. As noted by Alfansyur and Mariyani (2020), triangulation strengthens the theoretical and interpretative robustness of qualitative research by reducing analytical ambiguity and supporting more consistent interpretation during data analysis.

Results And Discussion

Results

As a result of the analysis informed by concepts presented by Long and Grasser (1988), it was concluded that consistent with this conceptualization, Shade (1996) categorized verbal humor into 12 types: puns, riddles, jokes, satire, limericks, parodies, anecdotes of humoresque, farce, irony, sarcasm, tall tales, and wit, could be identified from the 40 examples of humor under examination. These findings are presented in

Verbal Humor Types

Types Of Verbal Humor	Frequency	Percentage
Puns	-	0%
Riddles	-	0%
Jokes	1	2.5%
Satire	2	5%
Limericks	-	
Parodies	1	2.5%
Anecdotes Of Humoresque	10	25%
Farce	5	12.5%
Irony	7	17.5%
Sarcasm	2	5%
Tall Tales	1	2.5%
Wit	11	27.5%
Total 12 Types Of Humor	40	100%

Table 1.1 Humor classification found in the source text, the movie Agak Laen (2024)

The method of analysis to be used here is a critical evaluation of how far the translated text preserves or changes the intended humorous effect. In this respect, the accuracy of meaning shift will be analyzed in terms of four categories: loss of meaning, gain of meaning, change of meaning, and neutral meaning. These categories are not arbitrary; they have been devised based on Nida & Taber's (1969/1982) theory of equivalence, in that a translation must strive to reproduce the closest natural meaning in the target language. Identifying these shifts becomes, thus, necessary for establishing whether the humor remains effectively preserved or transformed to a great extent during translation. These findings are presented in Table 1.2

Meaning Shift

Meaning Shift	Frequency	Percentage
Loss of Meaning	4	10%
Gain of Meaning	10	25%
Change of Meaning	13	32.5%
Neutral Meaning	13	32.5%
Total 4 Categories	40	100%

Table 1.2 Meaning Shift classification found in the source text into target text, the movie Agak Laen (2024)

Discussion

As stated previously, verbal humor is an expression that is not always easy to understand or translate because it is presented through language or verbal signs that differ between languages. Attardo stated that "the language contains the phonological, syntactic, and lexical descriptions of the text" (2017). Verbal humor presented through the media also consists of these elements, as it provides information for the verbalization of a text. Language, as one of the knowledge resources used to convey verbal humor (Ruch et al., 1993), may change, while other resources remain intact. This study analyzes the tendency to apply the translation of verbal humor in Agak Laen (2024). In analyzing the translator's tendency regarding verbal humor type and its meaning shift, the applied strategies are examined.

This study indicates that wit is the most dominant type of verbal humor used in Agak Laen (2024), accounting for 27.5% of the total humor found in the film. This dominant position aligns with Shade's (1996) argument that wit relies on swift, intelligent responses and linguistic sharpness, which are culturally appropriate within Indonesian conversational humor. The comedic style of Agak Laen, with its frequent impromptu wordplay and situational cleverness, naturally matches the characteristics of wit. In Indonesian popular comedy, a witty remark often functions both as a humorous trigger and a form of social commentary, making it highly effective in engaging audiences.

Meanwhile, anecdotal humor accounts for 25%, and irony constitutes 17.5% of the humor identified. Anecdotes frequently appear because the film's narrative relies heavily on colloquial dialogue, personal storytelling, and familiar social situations that create comedic tension. According to Hay (2001), humor often depends on socially shared experiences, which helps explain why anecdotal humor resonates strongly with Indonesian audiences. Irony, as the third most frequent type, reflects the film's satirical undertones and subtle critiques of social institutions, consistent with Attardo's (1994) claim that irony functions not only to amuse but also to convey evaluative stances. In contrast, puns, riddles, and limericks do not appear at all. This is not surprising since these types of humor usually depend on phonological features and linguistic structures that are not central to Indonesian comic tradition. According to Zabalbeascoa (2005), the cultural specificity of humor determines the suitability of certain types of humor within particular narratives and their translatability into other languages.

The second part of the analysis shows how translation strategy influences the meaning shift of verbal humor. The largest percentage of meaning shift 32.5%, belongs to change of meaning, followed by neutral meaning with the same percentage and gain of meaning at 25%, while loss of meaning accounts for only 10%. From these findings, it can be observed that although many elements of humor survive translation, significant semantic and cultural transformation still takes place. The high percentage of change of meaning reflects the translator's decision to prioritize clarity and intelligibility, especially for international viewers. Under Nida & Taber's (1969/1982) theory of dynamic equivalence, a common translation approach involves adjusting linguistic content to achieve an equivalent effect rather than preserving literal form. This strategy inevitably modifies the original comic nuance. In *Agak Laen*, many witty expressions embedded in dialects, cultural references, and situational context must be modified, resulting in humor that differs in tone or intention from the source text.

Instances of neutral meaning suggest that certain jokes have been translated directly with no significant semantic shift. These usually involve simple humor, universal comedic structures, or straightforward sentences where cultural specificity is minimal. Although such translations maintain meaning adequacy, they do not always reproduce the same intensity of humor as in the source language. Meanwhile, the 25% gain of meaning shows that the translator occasionally added information or adapted humor creatively to suit English-speaking audiences. Chiaro (2010) observes that the addition of humorous elements may be necessary to recreate a comic effect that direct translation cannot convey due to cultural limitations. This strategy appears in scenes where the translator inserted contextual cues or altered wording to preserve the comedic tone.

However, the smallest yet still significant category is loss of meaning at 10%. Losses typically occur when humor relies heavily on cultural values, dialects, or sociolinguistic subtleties for which no direct English equivalent exists. According to Attardo (2020), humor based on cultural presuppositions becomes highly vulnerable in translation because the target audience lacks the shared cognitive background needed to appreciate the joke. The overall analysis shows that although the translator has succeeded in transferring most verbal humor into English, meaning shifts mainly changes and gains affect how international audiences interpret the film's comedic tone. Indonesian humor is culturally based on context, local dialects, and shared social experiences; these features inevitably become simplified or altered when adapted into English subtitles. For this reason, types of humor that work effectively for a domestic audience may sound less humorous or somewhat flat to foreign viewers.

The findings confirm Zabalbeascoa's 2005 argument that audiovisual humor translation is a multimodal process; that is, linguistic, cultural, and visual clues interact to determine humor reception. Despite the fact that the visual humor remains intact, this study has shown that when the linguistic element of humor suffers meaning shifts—in particular, change of meaning and neutral meaning, each gaining 32.5% of the total number of cases—the reception of humor in the target language also shifts. Above all, the findings prove that the verbal humor of *Agak Laen* often requires semantic modification in order to be clear and equivalently humorous for English-speaking audiences. Instead of being conceptualized in terms of what is lost, meaning shifts reflect the need to transform culturally embedded expressions so that the humor remains understandable across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Therefore, the meaning-shift patterns identified in the study demonstrate how the translation of verbal humor provides not only a preservation but also a transformation of the film's comedic tone for international viewers.

The discussion below explains how verbal humor is expressed in the film, how it is translated from Indonesian (SL) into English (TL), and how this process produces different types of meaning shifts.

1. Joke

Joke has something to do with things spoken to make the listeners laugh, such as language, metaphors and a multitude of phrases (Shade, 1994).

ST (SOURCE TEXT)	TT (TARGET TEXT)	MEANING SHIFT	THE IMPACT ON HUMOR
“Kalau ketahuan, bilang saja semua ini prank.”	“If we get caught, say this was all a prank.”	Neutral Meaning – the excuse and tone are preserved exactly with no semantic shift.	The comedic effect is unchanged since the TL keeps the same mischievous tone.

2. Satire

Satire is a kind of literature intended to be humorous while also offering critique. It incorporates critique as well as humor. According to LeBouef (2007), satires are becoming a very popular artistic medium for criticizing human behavior. Its methods include understatement, distortion, and exaggeration.

ST (SOURCE TEXT)	TT (TARGET TEXT)	MEANING SHIFT	THE IMPACT ON HUMOR
“Di sini yang penting bukan berani atau tidak, tapi kuat menahan gaji kecil.”	“Here it’s not about bravery; it’s about surviving low pay.”	Loss of Meaning – SL’s nuance endurance and cultural tone (“kuat menahan”) is compressed into a more literal economic phrasing (“surviving low pay”).	The line grows less witty and more serious, reducing its comic lightness and shifting toward social commentary.
“Kalau ini viral, kita bisa kaya!”	“If this goes viral, we’ll be rich!”	Neutral Meaning – The original idea is fully preserved; the hope of getting rich if it goes viral is directly transferred with no added, lost, or altered meaning.	The humor remains effective because the exaggeration (“we’ll be rich”) is still clear and understandable to the TL audience.

3. Parody

Parody is the imitation of a story, poem, or song. By employing a similar style but a different theme. Parody is defined as writing, art, music, and so on that intentionally imitates someone’s style, particularly a famous one, or a specific situation by making the original features more obvious in a humorous way (8th Edition of Cambridge Dictionary).

ST (SOURCE TEXT)	TT (TARGET TEXT)	MEANING SHIFT	THE IMPACT ON HUMOR
“Kubilang jangan main-main sama dunia lain.”	“Told you not to mess with the unseen world.”	Change of Meaning – “Dunia lain” literally means “The other world,” while “The unseen world” adds a clearer supernatural nuance. The TL is more specific than the SL.	The humor becomes slightly stronger in the TL because the phrase “unseen world” sounds more dramatic and overtly paranormal than the original.

4. Anecdotes Of Humoresque

An anecdote is an oral version of a fictional or true event, such as a biography. It develops and embellishes a story into a short amusing story.

ST (SOURCE TEXT)	TT (TARGET TEXT)	MEANING SHIFT	THE IMPACT ON HUMOR
“Jangan tegang, yang penting gaji masuk tiap bulan.”	“Relax. As long as the paycheck comes in, we’re fine.”	Change of Meaning – SL carries a culturally specific blue-collar resignation; TL generalizes to a straightforward pragmatic consolation.	The joke loses some cultural flavor and becomes more generic, still funny but less contextually rich.
“Aku tidak takut! Aku hanya... memeriksa udara.”	“I’m not scared! I was just... checking the oxygen.”	Change of meaning – “memeriksa udara” is general and casual, while “checking the oxygen” becomes more specific and scientific, shifting the tone.	The joke still works, but the English line feels slightly more technical, making the humor a bit less natural than the original.
“Baru buka sudah mau pingsan. Bagaimana mau sukses?”	“We’re already fainting before opening hours. Success is clearly not for us.”	Change of Meaning – The TL shifts the timing (“baru buka” – “before opening hours”) and changes the rhetorical question into a firm statement, altering the tone and emphasis of the original.	The humor becomes slightly more dramatic and exaggerated, giving the TL a stronger pessimistic punch than the SL.
“Kita harus sembunyikan ini sebelum Wi-Fi nyala.”	“We must hide this before the Wi-Fi reconnects.”	Gain of Meaning – “Nyala” simply means “turns on”, while “reconnects” implies a previous connection and adds technical context not in SL.	Humor becomes slightly sharper in TL because “reconnects” enchances the digital-era context.
“Jangan panik! Panikmu menular!”	“Stop panicking! Your panic is contagious!”	Neutral Meaning – the TL conveys the same caution and playful exaggeration as the SL; there’s no addition, omission, or reinterpretation.	The joke works because it highlights how panis spreads in a humorous way, and this effect carries over naturally in the translation.
“Kalau selamat, aku janji berhenti kerja di sini.”	“If I survive this, I swear I’m quitting this job.”	Gain of Meaning – The TL strengthen the commitment by using “I swear” instead of the softer SL “aku janji.” This adds extra emotional weight and urgency that wasn;t stated as strongly in the original.	The added intensity actually makes the line funnier, because the speaker sounds dramatically fed up, enhancing the comedic desperation in the situation.
“Kita sudah terlalu jauh untuk kembali... sayang juga kalau nggak dapat apa-apa.”	“We’ve gone too far to go back... might as well get something out of it.”	Change of Meaning – The TL keeps the same idea, but the SL’s “sayang juga kalau nggak dapat apa-apa” has a tone of regret/wastefulness, while the TL “might as well get something out of it” shifts into a more practical, opportunistic attitude. The emotional flavor changes slightly.	The humor still works because the logic of “already too far, might as well continue” remains funny, but the TL feels a bit more sarcastic and less wistful compared to the SL.
“Aku kangen hidup normal, tanpa hantu dan tanpa stres.”	“I miss a normal life. No ghosts, no stress.”	Neutral Meaning – The TL preserves the SL meaning exactly; missing a normal life without ghosts or stress is conveyed directly with no added or loss nuance.	The humor is preserved because the exaggerated simplicity of the wis (“no ghost, no stress”) keeps the playfull, relateable tone intact.

“Akhirnya selesai juga. Tapi jangan ajak aku mulai lagi.”	“Finally over. But don’t ever ask me to do this again.”	Gain of Meaning – The TL adds “ever”. Which strengthens the refusal compared to the SL. This emphasizes the speaker’s frustration more than the original.	The humor is enhanced because the added emphasis makes the speaker sound more dramatic and exasperated, increasing the comedic effect.
“Kalau ada film tentang kita, pasti lucu sekali.”	“If someone made a movie about us, it would be hilarious.”	Neutral Meaning – The TL preserves the original idea perfectly; imagining a movie about the speaker and friend being funny is directly conveyed.	The humor stays effective because the exaggeration of “pasti lucu sekali” is maintained, keeping the playful and lighthearted tone intact.

5. Farce

Farce’s a raucous humor. In most cases, it uses a specific event as a place to making fun of.

ST (SOURCE TEXT)	TT (TARGET TEXT)	MEANING SHIFT	THE IMPACT ON HUMOR
“Jangan lari, kau malah bikin hantu itu minder!”	“Stop running! You’re making the ghost insecure.”	Neutral Meaning – the playful idea of a ghost feeling “minder/insecure” transfers directly with the same tone and absurd humor.	Humor stays equally effective, because the reversal (the ghost being the one who feels insecure) remains intact and equally absurd in English.
“Hantu itu pasti stres kerja di sini.”	“That ghost must be stressed working in this place.”	Neutral Meaning – the TL keeps the same idea, tone, and nuance: a ghost feeling stressed because of its workplace. No meaning is added, lost, or changed.	The humor stays fully effective, since the absurd image of a stressed ghost remains exactly the same in English.
“Kalau polisi datang, bilang saja ini latihan film horor.”	“If the police show up, tell them it’s a rehearsal for a horror movie.”	Neutral Meaning – The excuse/joke is transferred directly with no added, lost, or altered meaning.	The humor stays full effective because the TL keeps the same playful deception.
“Jangan sentuh itu! Kita belum siap masuk berita kriminal!”	“Don’t touch that! We’re not ready to be on crime news!”	Change of Meaning – “masuk berita kriminal” implies appearing as suspects.”Be on crime news” can mean any appearance, not specifically as perpetrators.	Humor remains but becomes slightly less sharp because the TL dilutes the implication of guilt.
“Hantu itu kalau bisa bicara pasti bilang kita merepotkan.”	“If that ghost could talk, it would say we’re troublesome.”	Change of Meaning – The TL conveys the main idea, but the casual, teasing tone of “merepotkan” in SL is somewhat formalized in “troublesome”.	The joke still works because imagining a ghost giving feedback is funny, but the playful light-hearted nuance is a little less prominent in English.

6. Irony

Irony is associated with an utterance whose intended meaning contradicts its literal meaning. It means that the word is contradictory to the action, and the expectation is also contradictory to what actually occurs.

ST (SOURCE TEXT)	TT (TARGET TEXT)	MEANING SHIFT	THE IMPACT ON HUMOR
“Kerja di rumah hantu, tapi kau yang paling takut.”	“You work in a haunted house, yet you’re the most terrified one.”	Neutral Meaning – the irony is transferred with no change in tone, imagery, or target of the joke.	The humorous contrast remains fully effective, producing the same ironic punch.
“Kerja kok takut hantu? Ini ironis sekali.”	“How can you fear ghosts when this is literally your job?”	Change of Meaning – explicit meta-comment (“ini ironis sekali”) is replaced by an implied observation, shifting from direct statement to rhetorical questioning.	The humor becomes more conversational and implied, which may feel more natural to English audiences.
“Kalau ada setan beneran, mungkin dia kasihan sama kita.”	“If a real ghost appeared, I bet it would pity us instead.”	Gain of meaning – TL adds speaker attitude (“I bet”), increasing emphasis and certainty.	Humor becomes punchier; added emphasis makes the reversal sharper and funnier.
“Kenapa hantu itu lebih disiplin daripada kita?”	“Why is that ghost more disciplined than us?”	Neutral Meaning – Both SL and TL deliver the same ironic comparison with no shift in nuance.	Humor remains equally strong because the contrast (ghost > humans) stays intact.
“Kenapa masalah datangnya bergantian tapi selalu ke kita?”	“Why do problems take turns but always pick us?”	Gain of Meaning – “Pick us” personifies the problems more strongly than “selalu ke kita,” adding emotional emphasis not present in the SL.	Humor becomes slightly stronger because the TL intensifies the sense of being “targeted” by problems.
“Kenapa semua hal bodoh terjadi setelah kita bersumpah berubah?”	“Why do stupid things happen right after we promise to change?”	Loss of Meaning – The TL captures the general idea, but the SL nuance of “semua hal bodoh” (all stupid things/literally “every stupid thing”) is slightly softened to “stupid things,” so the exaggeration of “all” is reduced. Also, “bersumpah berubah” carries a slightly more solemn or ritualistic tone than just “promise to change.”	The humor remains, because the irony of misfortune happening immediately after a promise is still understandable, though the dramatic emphasis is slightly lessened.
“Kupikir hantu itu menyeramkan... ternyata hanya menyebalkan.”	“Turns out ghosts aren’t scary... they’re just annoying.”	Change of meaning, mainly in terms of perspective and the intensity of the word choice (“menyebalkan” → “annoying”). The translation reduces the personal viewpoint expressed in “Kupikir...” and slightly softens the emotional tone since “annoying” is less expressive than “menyebalkan”. However, the core meaning remains intact.	The humor is largely preserved, as the punchline and the expectation-versus-reality structure remain effective in English. The joke still delivers the same ironic twist, although the comedic nuance becomes slightly less vivid due to the softer emotional tone of “annoying.” Nonetheless, the humorous effect is still maintained.

7. Sarcasm

Sarcasm uses taunt, scoffing jibe or veiled sneer in evoking laughter. It is different to irony as sarcasm is sharper and may hurt other’s feeling. Cambridge for advanced learners dictionary 3rd edition (2008) describe sarcasm as a remark to hurt someone’s feeling or to give criticism which carries the opposite meaning of what is said in humorous way.

ST (SOURCE TEXT)	TT (TARGET TEXT)	MEANING SHIFT	THE IMPACT ON HUMOR
“Bos bilang kita harus kreatif. Kreatif gimana kalau lampu aja sering mati?”	“The boss wants creativity. How, when even the lights refuse to work?”	Gain of Meaning – the TL personifies the lights more strongly “refuse to work” adding extra ironic layer.	Humor becomes more vivid and sarcastic, amplifying the complaint about bad conditions.
“Jangan bilang ini ide bagus. Tidak ada yang bagus malam ini.”	“Don’t call this a good idea. Nothing tonight is a good idea.”	Change of Meaning – The TL keeps the overall negativity, but the SL’s casual, slightly sarcastic tone (“Tidak ada yang bagus malam ini”) becomes a bit more blunt and literal in TL, losing some of the natural flow and irony.	Humor is mostly preserved because the exaggerated pessimism is still clear, though the sarcastic vibe is slightly reduced.

8. Tall Tale

Tall tale rely on exaggerating the majority of details and occurrences related to the story’s characters, setting, and plots. It varies from the ludicrous to the impractical.

ST (SOURCE TEXT)	TT (TARGET TEXT)	MEANING SHIFT	THE IMPACT ON HUMOR
“Pengunjung sedikit, hantunya lebih banyak daripada tamunya.”	“There are more ghosts than actual visitors here.”	Gain of Meaning – the TL’s “actual visitors” sharpens the contrast and makes the exaggeration more explicit.	Humor becomes slightly stronger because the comparison reads more pointedly and absurdly.

9. Wit

The way Wit is phrased makes people laugh, and it has a contradictory, mocking tone. For a very long time, Wit has been associated with a well-developed mind and intelligence.

ST (SOURCE TEXT)	TT (TARGET TEXT)	MEANING SHIFT	THE IMPACT ON HUMOR
“Kalau sepi begini, setan pun malas mampir.”	“Even ghosts wouldn’t bother coming to a place this empty.”	Change of Meaning – “malas mampir” (lazy to drop) becomes “wouldn’t bother” (not worth the effort), sifting tone from playful laziness to pragmatic dismissal.	The joke shifts to a more pragmatic exaggeration, so the playful personification is reduced but the exaggeration still amuses.
“Hantu pun bingung lihat kami, Bang.”	“Even ghosts get confused seeing us like this.”	Neutral Meaning – self – deprecating tone and personification transfer directly without loss.	Humor remains intact; the self-mockery reads the same to international viewers.
“Hantu apa itu? Lebih mirip pelanggan ngantuk.”	“What kind of ghost is that? Looks more like a sleepy customer.”	Change of meaning – “Curtomer” sounds more formal than the casual tone of “pelanggan”, creating a small sift in nuance.	The joke stays funny but feels slightly less playful in English.
“Kalau diganggu hantu, bilang saja kita tidak punya uang.”	“If a ghost disturbs you, just tell it we’re broke.”	Gain of Meaning – the TL uses “we’re broke” which is more informal and expressive than the neutral “tidak punya uang,” adding extra emotional color that wasn’t in the SL.	The humor becomes slightly stronger because “we’re broke” sounds funnier and more natural in English.

“Ini kejadian konyol atau awal karier kita?”	“Is this a stupid accident or the start of our career?”	Loss of Meaning – In Indonesian, “kejadian konyol” implies silliness + embarrassment. In English, “stupid accident” focuses more on mistake, losing the nuance of “goofy”.	The joke becomes slightly weaker because the playful tone (“konyol”) becomes harsher in the TL.
“Aku bukan pengecut. Aku cuma realistis.”	“I’m not a coward. I’m just realistic.”	Neutral Meaning – Both versions express the same self-defensive irony with no semantic change.	Humor stays intact; the defensive tone is equally clear.
“Aku ikut takut bukan karena hantunya, tapi karena kalian.”	“I’m scared not because of the ghost, but because of you guys.”	Loss of Meaning – The TL conveys the main idea, but the nuance of “ikut takut” (joining in fear or following other’s fear) is slightly lost in translation.	The humor is mostly preserved because the twist (“not the ghost, but you”) remains clear, though the subtle playful nuance of joining the fear is slightly reduced.
“Aku siap mati, tapi bukan dengan cara bodoh begini.”	“I’m ready to die, but not in such a stupid way.”	Gain of Meaning – The TL introduces “stupid” which SL doesn’t explicit have. This addition emphasis the absurdity of the situation and makes the complaint more colorful.	Humor is enhanced because the extra word adds sarcasm and a stronger sense of exasperation, making the statement funnier than the original.
“Kita harus kompak: kompak dalam kebodohan, kompak dalam solusi.”	“We must stick together: united in stupidity, united in solutions.”	Neutral Meaning – The TL preserves the original meaning perfectly, but the phrasing “stick together” vs “harus kompak” adds a slightly more motivational tone, while keeping the humor intact.	The joke still works because the contrast between “stupidity” and “solutions” is clear. The small stylistic tweak in wording gives TL a slightly punchier, structured feel without losing playfulness.
“Yang penting kita masih hidup... dan masih miskin.”	“The good news: we’re alive. The bad news: still broke.”	Gain of Meaning – The TL introduces “good news” and “bad news,” which SL doesn’t explicitly have. This adds structured, comedic contrast that wasn’t in the original.	Humor is enhanced because the “good news/bad news” framing exaggerates the situation, making the punchline funnier than the SL.
“Sudah cukup petualangan. Besok aku jadi orang baik-baik saja.”	“Enough adventures. Tomorrow I’ll live like a decent human.”	Change of meaning – The TL replaces “orang baik-baik” with “decent human,” which keeps the general idea but slightly shifts the tone from casual/friendly to more formal or effective.	Humor is preserved because the contrast between the chaotic “adventures” and the planned “decent life” is still clear, though the playful, casual vibe is slightly softened.

Conclusions

The analysis of verbal humor in Agak Laen (2024) shows that meaning shifts hold a central position in the process of transferring humor from Indonesian into English subtitles. The fact that change of meaning and neutral meaning each contribute to 32.5% of the total data demonstrates that many humorous expressions need semantic modification so as not to make them incomprehensible and thereby reduce the equal humorous effect of the message to viewers who are not familiar with Indonesian cultural references. The prevalence of wit, anecdotal humor, and irony underlines the culturally embedded character of Indonesian conversational humor, which often requires contextual adjustment in translation.

While losing inevitable shades of cultural nuance, the overall humorous intent of the movie remains largely preserved. These findings support the notion that the translation of audiovisual humor involves not just linguistic transfer but also cultural adaptation. Meaning shifts therefore represent necessary mechanisms that enable humor to be interpreted across languages and cultures. Future studies may extend this research by incorporating audience reception analysis or by comparing human-generated subtitles with machine-translated versions to further evaluate the effectiveness of humor transfer.

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