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POPULAR OR POPULER? COMPARING AI AND HUMAN TRANSLATION OF NONCE WORDS IN *WICKED*'S INDONESIAN SUBTITLES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the process of translating nonce words in Indonesian subtitles of the musical fantasy film *Wicked,* focusing on the challenges posed by highly creative and humorous expressions that remain underexplored in audiovisual translation studies. Set in the magical land of Oz, the film incorporates playful and imaginative expressions like *Galindafied* and *braverism*, which present unique translation difficulties. The study employs content analysis to compare human-generated subtitles from Apple TV with AI-generated subtitles produced by ChatGPT. While both human and AI translations tend to convey the general meaning of the nonce words, they fail to capture the stylistic and humorous nuances present in the source language. Human translations can be literal or omit creative expressions entirely, suggesting that neither method fully encapsulates the inventiveness and playfulness of the source language. This study underscores the importance of developing more adaptable strategies for translating highly creative audiovisual texts.

Keywords: *AI-generated translation; human translation; language creativity; nonce words; subtitle translation*

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INTRODUCTION

In certain instances, the creative aspect of translation becomes crucial. This is particularly true when translating works that are rich in wordplay, such as literary texts, films, or other creative media. Translators should not only strive for semantic accuracy in their translation but also be able to capture the humor inherent in the source language (SL) and convey it effectively in the target language (TL). As stated by Newmark (1988), translators must prioritize the author's nuanced meaning, especially if it's subtle and challenging, over the reader's response. Supporting this view, Pilyarchuk (2024) finds that the translator's creativity may play a more important role than the proximity between the SL and TL when handling wordplay-based humour. Additionally, Mohebbi (2023) emphasizes that by

leveraging cultural conceptualizations in the translation process, translators can ensure that the humour of the original joke is retained in the target text.

If nuance is already delicate in literary translation (Newmark, 1988), it becomes even more risky in audiovisual translation (AVT), such as subtitles, where subtitlers must condense meaning under severe time and space limits. Subtitlers must negotiate multiple semiotic channels while producing concise written text that remains readable within limited on-screen duration (Diaz Cintas & Remael, 2007). As a result, humor, especially language and culture-specific humor, frequently undergoes reduction in subtitles, leading to a diminished humorous effect compared to other AVT modes (Zolczer, 2016; Hallberg, 2024). Such constraints often force translators to choose between brevity and the preservation of wordplay-based humor, a dilemma less pronounced in literary translation, where readers can pause, reread, or consult external references.

Among the many challenges in humour translation, one particularly underexplored phenomenon is nonce words. Crystal (2008) defines a nonce word as a linguistic form coined consciously or accidentally for single-use purposes, often arising from the need to creatively fill lexical gaps. While not all nonce words are intended to be humorous, many are used for comedic or playful effect, particularly in literature, poetry, children's media, and even in film dialogue. Their unfamiliarity, creative form, and context-specific meaning make them difficult to translate, especially under the spatial and temporal limitations of subtitles. As Chiaro (2006) notes, humorous elements, especially those based on wordplay or puns, often lose their effect when translated due to lack of linguistic equivalence and time-space limitations.

Empirical analysis of *Modern Family* subtitles by Valli (2020) shows that nonce-word puns comprised the most frequent pun type in the material, and translators often relied on strategies such as "pun → pun" to preserve humour despite tight constraints. Complementing this, a broader study on the loss of humour in animation, using *SpongeBob SquarePants* as a case, reports that linguistic humour (including nonce-like playful lexemes) suffers disproportionately under AVT constraints due to cognitive and technical limitations (Xia, 2023). Additionally, theoretical frameworks on multimodal humor translation emphasize that nonce words often resist literal equivalence and call for creative, context-aware adaptation, especially when confined by subtitle length and duration constraints (Zabalbeascoa, 2020).

In many instances, the inventiveness of nonce words stems from morphological manipulation, such as creative suffixation, blending, or pseudo-derivation. When this manipulation evokes a humorous effect, the resulting word becomes a case of morphological wordplay. As Delabastita (2016) points out, in morphological puns, words are often construed as compounds or derivatives in ways that are etymologically "incorrect" but semantically effective. This supports the view that many nonce words are not only novel formations but also play with morphology to create humorous or stylistic effects. Thus, translating them requires more than just conveying meaning; it also involves preserving their creative and playful function. In some cases, humour may be replaced with a different form of humour that fits the target audience better, known as functional equivalence (Nida, 1964). In others,

translators may rely on compensation, using later lines to recover the lost humorous effect. Empirical research by Poix (2018) on Roald Dahl's *The BFG* highlights how derivational wordplay, specifically inventive blends and affixation, is central to the novel's charm and challenges translators to render these formations while retaining playful resonance. Similarly, studies of translated wordplay in *Roald Dahl's* works into Indonesian reveal that morphological structures constitute the largest category (31.5%) of wordplay, and translators frequently opt for "wordplay → non-wordplay" strategies to approximate function when direct equivalence is impossible (Aisyiyah, 2016). Theoretical models of humour translation also caution that morphological wordplay often resists literal equivalence and instead demands creative re-interpretation—strategies such as compensation, adaptive paraphrasing, or culturally equivalent wordplay may better preserve the comedic effect under subtitle constraints (Asimakoulas, 2004).

A notable example of the use of nonce words in audiovisual media can be found in *Wicked*, a well-known musical fantasy film. Set in the magical land of Oz, the film introduces a unique fictional world with its own linguistic quirks. Beyond the plot itself, the characters frequently use invented expressions that reflect the distinctiveness of the "Ozian" language, which exists only within that universe. For instance, one of the characters, Glinda, uses words like *rejoicify* and *gratitution*, which, although somewhat understandable, are not grammatically correct in standard English. These creatively coined terms add a whimsical and playful tone to the film, making them a prime example of nonce words designed to evoke humour and fantasy.

When translated solely based on semantic meaning, the target audience may still understand the words. However, this approach may result in the loss of the linguistic creativity that makes the original dialogue unique, reducing the richness and charm of the film's language. To help overcome these limitations, many translators today increasingly turn to artificial intelligence (AI) as a supportive tool. As AI continues to evolve, human translators are adapting to new roles and integrating AI tools into their workflows to boost productivity and accuracy (Oni, 2025). A recent study exploring human-centred AI (HCAI) in translation underscores how translators value maintaining "control" and "autonomy" while adopting AI tools—a trend that supports collaborative human-AI workflows rather than full automation (Jiménez-Crespo, 2025). Moreover, comparative research on post-editing creative literary texts shows that while machine translation speeds up workflows, professional translators (working without aid) still produce significantly more creative outcomes—highlighting that AI serves as an aid, not a substitute (Guerberof Arenas & Toral, 2021).

This raises an important question: can AI truly capture and recreate the humour embedded in nonce words? While AI is an advanced tool capable of processing large amounts of linguistic data, it often lacks the cultural sensitivity, contextual awareness, and creative intuition required to preserve nuanced humour or stylistic inventiveness. On the other hand, human translators deeply understand the languages and cultures they are translating between and can accurately convey the intended meaning and tone of the original text. This aligns with Guerberof-Arenas et al. (2022), who explore the

capabilities and limitations of AI in creative translation. While advanced transformer-based models enhance fluency and context-awareness, they still struggle to capture emotional, cultural, and stylistic nuances. Similarly, Naveen & Trojovsky (2024) reviews the broader challenges of machine translation and underscores persistent difficulties in capturing idiomatic expressions, polysemy, and pragmatic or cultural subtleties—even when using advanced models—calling for human post-editing to ensure nuance and accuracy. Further, Moneus & Sahari (2024) finds that AI-driven translations in specific domains like legal texts, despite high technical accuracy, still lag behind human translation when cultural interpretation and nuanced context are required. Consequently, human translators remain indispensable for producing nuanced, culturally sensitive, and creative output, positioning AI as a supportive tool rather than a complete replacement. Without comprehending the narrative context or the intended tone, AI-generated translations may risk producing outputs that are technically accurate but emotionally or culturally flat.

Given these limitations, this study seeks to examine how such challenges emerge in a creative audiovisual context**.** Specifically, it examines how nonce words in the musical film *Wicked* are rendered in Indonesian by (a) a human-produced subtitle stream (Apple TV) and (b) AI outputs (ChatGPT). It aims to identify and classify source-text nonce words using Plag's (2018) word-formation taxonomy and to evaluate the extent to which creative effects such as humour, playfulness, and morphological inventiveness are retained or lost under subtitling constraints.

More specifically, this research aims to address the following questions:

1. What types of nonce words appear in the *Wicked* source text based on Plag's taxonomy?
2. How are these nonce words rendered in the Indonesian subtitles of Apple TV and ChatGPT?
3. To what extent are the creative elements (morphology, wordplay, and humour effect) preserved or lost in both versions?
4. Does prompting enhance the creative elements in ChatGPT?

These research questions structure the progression of the study and guide the organization of the subsequent sections. The first question is addressed through source-text analysis and classification of nonce words. The second and third questions are explored through a comparative analysis of human-produced and AI-generated subtitles, focusing on translation strategies and the preservation of creative effects. The final question is examined through prompted AI subtitle generation, assessing whether targeted prompting improves the creative rendering of nonce words within audiovisual translation constraints. Building on these findings, the study proposes transcreation-oriented alternatives and practical guidelines for handling nonce words in AVT, clarifying the complementary roles of human expertise and AI support.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have examined the translation of humour in AVT. Pilyarchuk (2024) analysed the subtitle of *The Simpsons* season 5 in three languages (Ukrainian, Russian, and German), highlighting the balance between humour equivalence and the constraints of AVT, including cases where humour relies on language play. Reception-based research has also been carried out on *Wallace & Gromit: A Matter of Loaf and Death* movie by Schauffler (2015), comparing two strategies for rendering wordplay into German and evaluating their impact on audience comprehension and appreciation of humour. On the other hand, Renwick and Renner (2019) explored the creative lexicon in *The Simpsons*, focusing on French translation and demonstrating the challenges of preserving both form and effect.

Beyond humor and wordplay, several studies have addressed neologisms in audiovisual and literary contexts. Lu (2023), for example, examined neologisms in *Harry Potter* from a multimodal perspective, showing that successful translation depends not only on lexical meaning but also on the interaction between word, image, and sound. These studies show that translating creative lexical items is challenging, especially when meaning, form, and effect are closely linked.

However, much of the existing research treats creative lexical items as broad or overlapping categories. Within this broad scope, nonce words are often subsumed under general neologism studies, despite their distinctive characteristics. Unlike conventional neologisms, which may enter wider usage over time, nonce words are typically coined for a single occasion, derive much of their meaning from local context, and often rely on morphological play to achieve humorous or stylistic effects. This distinction is crucial, as the translation challenges posed by nonce words differ substantially from those associated with more established or recurring neologisms.

On the AI side, experiments in literary translation by Arenas and Toral (2022) showed the creative limitations of Machine Translation (MT) compared with human translators. The Vonnegut project which involved translating English into Catalan and Dutch, revealed that human translations exhibited the highest creativity, followed by post-edited MT, with raw MT being the least creative. MT tends to be literal and resticts translators' creative freedom. Post-editing experiments on a novel by Toral et al. (2018) further demonstrated substantial editing effort and quality differences between statistical and neural approaches, highlighting the implications for style and coherence.

However, despite growing interest in AI-assisted translation and extensive research on wordplay in AVT, little attention has been given to how AI and human subtitlers each handle nonce words as a distinct category. Most studies incorporate them under broader neologisms or focus on literary prose rather than time-coded subtitles. Therefore, research that specifically distinguishes and compares nonce words in human platform subtitles versus AI outputs remains very rare.

This is the gap addressed by the present study, which specifically focuses on the translation of nonce words in the musical film *Wicked*, comparing Indonesian subtitles produced by a human subtitlers and ChatGPT.

By treating nonce words as an analytically distinct phenomenon rather than a subcategory of neologism, the study aims to contribute to both AVT scholarship and ongoing discussions on the creative limits and potential of AI-assisted translation.

METHOD

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the translation of nonce words in the Indonesian subtitles of the musical fantasy film *Wicked*. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), qualitative content analysis allows for the exploration of meaning, patterns, and linguistic features in textual data. The study compared the translation of selected nonce words across two subtitle types: human-generated subtitles (sourced from Apple TV) and AI-generated subtitles (from ChatGPT). In addition, AI outputs were examined under two conditions (unprompted and prompted) to assess the role of instruction in enhancing creative translation.

Data and Source of Data

The primary data consisted of English nonce words identified in the film *Wicked* and their corresponding Indonesian translations in two subtitle versions: Apple TV subtitles (human-generated) and ChatGPT translations (AI-generated). For the AI side, two conditions were tested: (1) raw, unprompted translations, and (2) prompted translations, where the AI was given explicit instructions to preserve creativity and playfulness. This dual dataset allowed for a comparative analysis between human and AI outputs.

Data Collection

The data collection involved identifying all nonce words in the *Wicked* movie. A total of 28 nonce words were identified in the movie. These items were then analyzed through an integrated analytical procedure comprising identification, comparison, and evaluation.

First, each nonce word in the source text was classified according to its morphological formation using Plag's taxonomy (e.g., blending, affixation, prefixation). Second, the Indonesian translations across the human subtitles and both AI outputs were compared qualitatively. The comparison examined form (morphological or phonological play), function (humor, wordplay, stance), and register (e.g., mock-ceremonial or Latinate tone versus neutral Indonesian).

Finally, the translations were evaluated to determine the extent to which creative elements were preserved, adapted, or lost. Creative retention was assessed based on three evaluative criteria: (1) morphological creativity (retention or recreation of word-formation play), (2) functional effect

(maintenance of humor, playfulness, or stylistic markedness), and (3) pragmatic suitability under subtitling constraints (brevity, readability, and timing). For AI-generated subtitles, an additional evaluative comparison was conducted between unprompted and prompted outputs to assess whether explicit prompting enhanced the preservation of creative effects. This integrated procedure allowed for a systematic comparison of human and AI strategies in handling nonce words within audiovisual translation constraints.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

A total of 28 nonce words were identified in the ST of *Wicked*. Using Plag's (2018) word-formation taxonomy, these items were classified into five categories: suffixation, prefixation, blending, pseudo-derivation, and other orthographic/phonological manipulations. The details are presented in the table below.

Table 1. Classification and Percentage of Nonce Words

Word formation	Examples	Frequency	Percentage
Suffixation	rejoicify; confusifying; goodnesses; proudliest; galindafied; linguification; disgusticified/disgustikified; moodified; pronouncify; pronouncifying; pronuncification; fraughtless; disgustifying; ceremonyishly; astoundifying; braverism; definish: manifestorium	18	64.3%
Blending	gratitution; hideoteous; horrendible; scandalocious; pessimystical; froat	6	21.4%
Orthographic/Phonological Play	congratulotions; Gloryosky; populer	3	10.7%
Prefixation	degreenify	1	3.6%
Total		28	100%

The distribution shown in Table 1 reveals a clear dominance of suffixation, which accounts for 18 items (64.3%). This finding shows that the linguistic creativity of *Wicked* often relies on extending recognizable

affixes such as *-ify*, *-ous*, and *-tion* in exaggerated or humorous ways to produce novel effects. Blending is the second most frequent process, with 6 items (21.4%), where two lexical sources were merged to form hybrid, comic-sounding expressions. Orthographic and phonological play accounts for 3 items (10.7%), including cases like *populer*, where unconventional spelling or sound patterns contributed to the whimsical atmosphere. Prefixation is the least common, appearing in only 1 item (3,6%), but this still demonstrate deliberate manipulation of form to create playful verbs and adjectives. Taken together, these results confirm that *Wicked*'s nonce words are not randomly invented but systematically shaped by morphological creativity, with suffixation emerging as the most productive and characteristic mechanism.

When these patterns are examined from a translational perspective, a stable contrast emerges between human and AI handling of morphological creativity. Both approaches consistently preserve the core semantic meaning of the source expressions, yet tend to flatten stylistic effects. Human subtitles (Apple TV) generally domesticate the nonce words by prioritizing readability and naturalness in Indonesian, often softening or neutralizing creative affixation into conventional lexical forms. In contrast, ChatGPT tends to literalize evaluative meaning and occasionally attempts to mirror derivational structure. However, these AI outputs remain limited in capturing form-based humor and often lack pragmatic sensitivity to register and tone, producing translations that are closer to the sentiment than to the playful effect.

To gain a deeper understanding of these patterns, it is necessary to move beyond numerical distribution and examine each category in detail. Looking closely at the examples reveals how different word-formation processes contribute not only to the inventiveness of *Wicked's* lexicon but also to its humorous and playful tone. The following sections therefore discuss each category in turn, illustrating how individual nonce words operate within the film's linguistic creativity. Below is the detailed explanation, with TT1 (Target Text 1) referring to the human translation and TT2 (Target Text 2) to the ChatGPT-generated version.

Suffixation

1. Rejoicify

ST : Let us **rejoicify** that Goodness could subdue the wicked workings of you-know-who
TT1 : *Mari kita **bersukacita** bahwa kebaikan bisa mengalahkan pekerjaan jahat kau-tahu-siapa*
TT2 : *Mari kita **bersukacita** bahwa Kebaikan berhasil menundukkan perbuatan jahat si-tahu-sendiri.*

The nonce word *rejoicify*, uttered by Galinda in the opening number *No One Mourns the Wicked*, exemplifies the film's mock-ceremonial register. Morphologically, *rejoicify* is formed by adding the derivational suffix *-ify* to the verbal base *rejoice*. Under normal circumstances, *-ify* attaches to nouns or adjectives to form verbs, as in *beautify* or *simplify*. Here, however,

the suffix is redundant, since *rejoice* is already a verb. This redundancy is not an error but a deliberate play: the additional morpheme produces a mock-Latinate flavour, creating an exaggerated, absurd register that marks the language of Oz. Following Plag's (2018) framework, this construction illustrates a standard suffixation process that is repurposed for comic and stylistic effect, making it a textbook case of nonce word formation through playful affixation.

Both the Apple TV and ChatGPT subtitles translate *rejoicify* as *bersukacita*. While this choice maintains semantic accuracy and fluency in the target language, it fails to reproduce the morphological distortion that gives *rejoicify* its humorous edge. The loss of suffixation play results in a neutralization of stylistic creativity in both versions. This tendency reflects a broader pattern in subtitling: translators, whether human or AI, often prioritize clarity and concision, consistent with subtitling constraints identified by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007), but at the cost of linguistic playfulness.

2. Proudliest

ST : O hallowed halls and vinedraped walls, the **proudliest** sight there is
TT1 : *Ruang-ruang suci dan dinding dengan tanaman merambat, pemandangan* ***paling membanggakan*** *yang pernah ada*
TT2 : *Wahai aula yang suci dan dinding berbalut sulur, pemandangan* ***paling membanggakan***

The exaggerated form *proudliest* immediately enhances the tone of ceremony and formality, fitting the ceremonial atmosphere of the new students' arrival. It demonstrates playful overextension of English superlative morphology. Normally, *proud* can be directly inflected into *proudest* without the addition of *-ly*. In this nonce form, however, the redundant *-ly* produces a marked deviation from standard English morphology, exaggerating the sense of elevation while also sounding humorously "wrong."

Both subtitle versions reduce the expression to the conventional Indonesian superlative *paling membanggakan*. While these renderings are semantically accurate and contextually appropriate, they neutralize the morphological oddity of *proudliest*. The exaggerated layering of suffixes is absent, and with it, the subtle comedic undertone. The translations thus show a broader trend: subtitlers prioritize fluency and naturalness in the target language at the expense of preserving marked morphological play.

3. Braverism

ST : Such **braverism**.
TT1 : *Sungguh* ***pemberani****.*
TT2 : *Sungguh* ***keberanian yang luar biasa****.*

The nonce word *braverism* occurs as an evaluative response to Galinda's socially performative act and inflates a personal gesture into an abstract concept. Morphologically, the form combines the comparative adjective *braver* with the suffix *-ism*, which is typically associated with ideologies or doctrines. The coinage expands the act into something that sounds like a doctrine or philosophy, parodying the tendency of high society to label ordinary actions with pretentious terminology.

The two translations handle the term differently. Apple TV simplifies it to *pemberani* ("brave person"), which conveys the intended meaning but strips away the morphological oddity. ChatGPT expands it into *keberanian yang luar biasa* ("extraordinary bravery"), slightly amplifying the evaluation but again losing the pseudo-academic, inflated register of *-erism*. Both translations demonstrate the subtitling norm of prioritizing clarity and brevity (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007), but in doing so, they flatten the playful flavour. The suffix *-ism*, which lends the source word its mock-philosophical tone, has no equivalent in either rendering.

Blending

1. Scandalicious

a. ST : *Fiyero*: You ever been to the Ozdust Ballroom?
Galinda: The Ozdust Ballroom? I mean, isn't that place somewhat illegal? And **scandalocious**?
TT1 : *Fiyero*: *Kau pernah ke Ozdust Ballrom?*
Galinda: *Ozdust Ballroom? Bukankah tempat itu ilegal? Dan **memikat**?*
TT2 : *Fiyero*: *Kau pernah ke Balai Dansa Ozdust?*
Galinda: *Balai Dansa Ozdust? Maksudku, bukankah tempat itu agak ilegal? Dan **penuh skandal**?*

b. ST : Am I not the most **scandalocious** little fish in the sea?
TT1 : *Bukankah aku ikan kecil paling **memikat** di laut?*
TT2 : *Bukankah aku ikan kecil paling **penuh skandal** di lautan?*

The nonce word *scandalocious* occurs in two related scenes, both tied to Galinda's playful, socially ambitious character. In both contexts, the word exaggerates social transgression into something theatrically appealing, reinforcing the character's playful self-stylisation and the film's mock-ceremonial tone.

Morphologically, the word *scandalicious* fuses the base *scandal-(ous)* with the phonological tail of adjectives like *atrocious* (and, by family resemblance, *delicious*). The resulting *-ocious* sequence does not function as an independent productive suffix in English; rather, it reflects a playful reanalysis of word endings to create a hybrid that sounds simultaneously familiar and overblown. As Plag (2018) points out, nonce formations often mix affixation and blending. *Scandalocious* shows this by looking like a proper Latinate adjective but creating humour through sound

play and exaggerated style. The fake Latinate style matches *Wicked's* overall use of mock-ceremonial language.

In translation, both subtitle versions prioritize semantic accessibility but diverge in evaluative stance. Apple TV consistently renders the word as *memikat* ("charming"), reframing scandal as social allure and neutralizing its transgressive edge. ChatGPT translates it as *penuh skandal* ("full of scandal"), preserving the negative meaning but eliminating the playful exaggeration. In both versions, the morpho-phonological play, the blend that creates the overblown *-ocious* effect, vanishes, along with the comic, self-parodic tone.

2. Horrendible

ST : Well… someone wrote those **horrendible** words, on purpose, for him to see.
TT1 : *Begini, seseorang menulis kata-kata **kejam** itu, dengan sengaja agar dia melihatnya.*
TT2 : *Yah… ada yang menulis kata-kata **mengerikan** itu, sengaja, supaya dia melihatnya.*

The nonce word *horrendible* is used to intensify Elphaba's moral condemnation of a bullying act. While less overtly humorous than other coinages, the form amplifies evaluation through lexical excess, aligning with the musical's heightened emotional register.

Horrendible is a blend of *horrendous* and *horrible*, overlapping at *horrend-* and the suffix *-ible*. Instead of a normal derivation, it combines two similar adjectives into a stronger label, making it more intense than *horrible* and closer to *horrendous*, but still easy to say. The comic effect is small; its main function is simply to intensify meaning through the hybrid form.

Both Indonesian translations flatten this blend. Apple TV's *kata-kata kejam* ("cruel words") is idiomatic and concise, but it shifts the evaluation toward intentional malice rather than the shock/terribleness indexed by the source. ChatGPT's *kata-kata mengerikan* ("terrifying words") is closer to the *horrible/horrendous* field, yet it remains a standard adjective and loses the morpho-phonological play that makes *horrendible* unique. In both renderings, the clear overlap of the two English bases is lost, along with the escalatory punch Elphaba's line achieves.

Orthographic/Phonological Play

1. Congratulotions

ST : Welcome, new students. And **congratulotions** for having been accepted to Shiz.
TT1 : *Selamat datang, para murid baru. **Selamat** telah diterima di Shiz.*

TT2 : *Selamat datang, mahasiswa baru. Dan **selamat** karena telah diterima di Shiz.*

The nonce word *congratulotions* is a playful distortion of *congratulations*, achieved through orthographic and phonological manipulation rather than standard word-formation processes. By replacing *-lations* with *-lotions*, the form remains immediately recognisable while introducing a mildly nonsensical sound pattern. This alteration produces a whimsical effect that aligns with Madame Morrible's mock-ceremonial and grandiose speaking style.

Both subtitle versions normalize the nonce word into the conventional Indonesian expression *selamat*. By doing so, they prioritize clarity and naturalness in Indonesian, ensuring that the meaning is accessible to viewers even if the wordplay is lost. From a stylistic perspective, the loss of orthographic/phonological play in translation removes some of the comic and whimsical effect of Morrible's language. In the ST, the altered form *congratulotions* hints at a kind of mock-ceremonial register, a deliberate puffery that characterizes Morrible's grandiose manner of speaking. In the translations, however, the humour is flattened, and the line comes across as a straightforward formal greeting.

2. Populer

ST : Not when it comes to popular
I know about popular
And with an assist from me to be who you'll be
Instead of dreary who you were
Well, are.
There's nothing that can stop you
From becoming populer
Lar

TT1 : *Dalam hal popularitas*
Aku tahu tentang populer
Dengan bantuan dariku kau akan berubah
Alih-alih dirimu yang sebelunya suram
Tepatnya sampai sekarang
Tak ada yang dapat menhentikanmu
Untuk menjadi popular
Ler

TT2 : *Kalau soal populer*
Aku tahu tentang populer
Dan dengan sedikit bantuan dariku, kau akan jadi dirimu sendiri
Bukan lagi siapa dirimu yang dulu
Nah, yang sekarang.
Tak ada yang bisa menghentikanmu
Untuk jadi populer
Lar

In Glinda's song *Popular*, the wordplay operates primarily at the phonological level. Rather than introducing a new lexical item, Glinda deliberately distorts the pronunciation of *popular* into *populer*, isolating the final syllable to create a rhyme with *were* and *are*. The humour arises from this exaggerated manipulation of sound and spelling, which reinforces the playful, self-aware tone of the performance. From the perspective of Plag's (2018) framework, this case illustrates orthographic and phonological creativity, where linguistic innovation does not involve new morphological structure but rather the strategic modification of an existing form. The base word *popular* remains intact semantically, yet its altered spelling and pronunciation generate a novel stylistic effect.

In Indonesian, such systematic phonological distortion is difficult to replicate, since the target language does not share the same rhyme network that motivates the original manipulation. Both subtitle versions attempt to reproduce the isolated syllable (*ler/lar*), indicating awareness of the phonological joke. However, clear differences emerge between human and AI translations. The human translation opts for a more naturalized rendering (*popular/ler*), treating the syllable as a minor playful residue while maintaining overall fluency. Notably, the human strategy can be seen as an attempt to replicate the source pattern of deviation, where a standard form is followed by a distorted variant. The line begins with a non-standard form and ends with a fragment that lacks a clear phonological motivation. The ChatGPT version, by contrast, more explicitly mirrors the formal structure of the source (*populer/lar*), preserving the visual and phonological oddity more directly. Nevertheless, neither translation captures the rhyme-based motivation underlying the distortion, as the Indonesian lines lack the corresponding phonetic contrast that drives the humour in the source text. As a result, the playful manipulation is reduced to an unexplained fragment, and the comic effect is only partially retained. This case demonstrates the difficulty of preserving rhythm- and rhyme-based wordplay in subtitles, where phonological humour often lacks direct functional equivalence in the target language.

Prefixation

1. Degreenify

ST : Would it be all right by you If I **degreenify** you?
TT1 : *Apakah kau keberatan jika **kubuat kau tidak hijau lagi**?*
TT2 : *Apakah tidak apa-apa jika aku **menghilangkan kehijauanmu**?*

The nonce word *degreenify* is formed through prefixation and suffixation, combining the reversative prefix *de-* with the base *green* and the verbalizing suffix *-ify*. The resulting form is transparent in meaning yet stylistically marked, as it compresses the idea of "removing greenness" into a single, mock-technical verb. This morphological compactness contributes to

the whimsical tone of the imagined dialogue and reinforces the fantasy logic of magical transformation in *Wicked*.

In the Apple TV subtitle, the line is rendered as *"Apakah kau keberatan jika kubuat kau tidak hijau lagi?"* ("Would you mind if I made you not green anymore?"). This version emphasizes the end result of the transformation, means Elphaba would no longer be green. By contrast, the ChatGPT version *"Apakah tidak apa-apa jika aku menghilangkan kehijauanmu?"* ("Would it be all right if I removed your greenness?") highlights the process of removing greenness, which more closely mirrors the morphological playfulness of the original prefixation. While both translations successfully convey the intended meaning, only the AI version partially retains the structural motivation behind the nonce formation. Nevertheless, neither rendering reproduces the compact, playful verb formation of *degreenify*, illustrating once again how subtitling tends to favor semantic clarity over morphological inventiveness.

Retention of Creative Effects

Across the set, both the human (Apple TV) and AI (ChatGPT) subtitles keep the meaning but lose the wordplay, especially the playful shapes and sounds that make *Wicked*'s Oz-speak feel exaggerated, satirical, and fun. Suffix-based coinages like *rejoicify, proudliest,* and *braverism* are regularly turned into normal Indonesian (*bersukacita; paling membanggakan; keberanian yang luar biasa/pemberani*). The result is clear and correct, but the extra sparkle such asthe mock-Latinate *-ify*, the mock-academic *-ism*, the "over-the-top" layering drops out.

For blends such as *scandalocious* and *horrendible*, the pattern is similar. Apple TV often chooses a safer or more flattering word (*memikat* for *scandalocious*), which smooths the line but loses the cheeky mix of meanings. ChatGPT tends to keep the plain evaluation (*penuh skandal; mengerikan*), which fits the sense but still misses the playful fusion that makes the originals feel "extra."

With prefix/parasynthetic item (*degreenify*), both versions switch to straightforward phrases (e.g., *menghilangkan kehijauanmu; membuatmu tidak hijau lagi*). These are easy to read and perfectly fine for subtitles, but they drop the visual punch of the "de-X-ify" pattern that the English uses to mock quick fixes or fake science. Spelling/sound jokes (*congratulotions; populer*) also get normalized (*selamat; populer*), so the uniqueness created by odd spellings or clipped syllables disappears.

Three simple reasons keep showing up:

1. Subtitling limits (time and space) push translators toward short, very readable wording as there isn't much room for risky made-up words.
2. Register norms in Indonesian subtitles favor natural, smooth language; fake-Latin nonsense or deliberate misspellings can feel out of place.
3. Different habits, same outcome: Apple TV leans toward polished, domesticated phrasing; ChatGPT leans toward literal meaning. Both end up choosing safe meaning over style.

Even so, a little bit of style sometimes survives. Literal choices like *penuh skandal* or *mengerikan* keep the basic attitude; a boosted phrase like *keberanian yang luar biasa* keeps the intensity; and now and then a touch of rhythm from the song still comes through. These small wins point to a path forward: use compensation, like light alliteration, double intensifiers, or playful but clear Indonesian affixes, to convey the same sense of excess without confusing viewers.

In short, the creative elements like morphology, wordplay, and humorous tone are mostly thinned out in both versions, though for slightly different reasons. The message is intact; the style is not.

Can Prompting Make ChatGPT Keep the Play?

In line with the patterns observed earlier, unprompted runs of ChatGPT tend to deliver safe, literal Indonesian that preserves propositional meaning but trims away the nonce-word oddness. When the prompt is reframed, for example, "translate creatively, keep the humour/wordplay of nonce words; if form cannot be mirrored, compensate with brief alliteration or evaluative pairs; keep it subtitle-length", the outputs shift perceptibly. The model begins to propose compact paraphrases that signal excess or parody. In other words, targeted prompting can steer the system toward strategies that echo the source's playful stance even when morphology cannot be reproduced.

As an illustration, I prompted ChatGPT with "Translate the following nonce words into Indonesian creatively. Retain their humorous and playful nuances rather than literal meaning." Sample outputs included: *rejoicify* → *gembirakanisasi/bergembirakan*, *braverism* → *keberanianisme*, and *hideoteous* → *hideous-jelekoteus/jelekuteus*. Some outputs *do* preserve playfulness by echoing familiar Indonesian patterns (e.g., -kan, -isme), and they clearly signal "made-upness." Others, however, do not work: forms like -*oteus* have no place in Indonesian morphology and seem awkward or unclear. These mixed results confirm that human review is essential: even with a creativity-oriented prompt, outputs need to be checked for naturalness, register, and readability.

A further condition is medium-specific: subtitles are read fast. Invented Indonesian coinages, albeit clever, can confuse viewers, be misread as typos, or slow processing in time-coded lines. When a playful coinage is useful, subtitlers can reduce confusion by using italics (if the platform allows) to show intentional style. If not, concise strategies like short evaluative pairs or light alliteration can keep the sense of play while maintaining pacing.

In practice, the most reliable path is a human-in-the-loop workflow: use prompting to generate two or three short options per line (e.g., a literal baseline, a creative-compact rendering, and a compensated variant), then have the translator select and adjust the candidate that best fits tone, rhythm, and reading speed. In this arrangement, prompting does enhance the model's ability to retain traces of humor and play, but it does not replace editorial judgment. Human participation remains crucial to bring naturalness, avoid infelicities, and maintain cohesion across a song or scene.

Discussion

The findings show that *Wicked's* playful lexicon is systematic rather than random. Most items are formed through suffixation (e.g., *rejoicify, proudliest, braverism*), followed by blends (e.g., *scandalocious, horrendible*), with smaller numbers of prefixation and orthographic/phonological play. These patterns fit the show's tone: mock-formal, energetic, and slightly parodic. In context, the coinages do character work and deliver quick emphasis inside songs and rapid dialogue. When these items are rendered into Indonesian, meaning is generally preserved but form-based creativity is thinned out. The Apple TV subtitles tend to domesticate (polishing and smoothing the line, sometimes softening its "excess") while ChatGPT tends to literalize the words (e.g., *penuh skandal; mengerikan*) without reproducing the wordplay. In both, the morpho-phonological cues that signal humour and pomp (e.g., *-ify, -ism,* or the blending) largely disappear. This outcome is unsurprising under subtitling constraints: lines must be short, easy to read, and synchronized, which discourages riskier coinages and odd spellings.

These results align with earlier research on humour and wordplay in AVT. Studies on *The Simpsons* and *Wallace & Gromit* report a recurring trade-off between humorous equivalence and the technical limits of the medium; strategy choices affect audience comprehension and appreciation (Pilyarchuk, 2024; Schauffler, 2015; Renwick & Renner, 2019). Work on neologisms in *Harry Potter* underscores the value of managing word–image–sound relations rather than relying only on lexical matching (Lu, 2023), which echoes our observation that small compensations in rhythm or emphasis can help when morphology cannot be mirrored. On the AI side, experiments in literary translation show a creativity gradient—human > post-edited MT > raw MT—because machine systems tend to be literal and narrow translators' creative space (Arenas & Toral, 2002; Toral et al., 2018). This research mirrors that shape: unprompted ChatGPT is safe and literal; with targeted prompting it can move toward compact compensations, but it still needs human editing for naturalness, register, and timing.

When comparing the Indonesian subtitles of Wicked's human and AI translations, three main difficulties emerge. First, many English nonce words rely on morphological play that has no direct structural equivalent in Indonesian. Second, preserving humor requires sensitivity to register and rhythm, which is often flattened either by human domestication or by AI literalization. Third, subtitling constraints (space, timing, and readability) limit the possibility of compensating for lost wordplay.

Practically, two implications follow. First, when morphological play cannot be carried over, translators can still carry the attitude by using brief, readable cues in Indonesian using light alliteration, paired evaluatives, intensifiers, or (where platform style allows) italics to mark intentional play. Second, prompted AI can act as an assistant by suggesting creative, subtitle-length options that keep the humour or make up for lost form. Still, human judgment is essential to refine choices and ensure consistency in a scene. In short, *Wicked*'s nonce words carry their meanings into Indonesian, but much

of their style is lost; careful transcreation and human-guided AI can reduce, though not fully close, that gap.

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to examine how nonce words in *Wicked* are translated into Indonesian by a human-produced stream (Apple TV) and by an AI system (ChatGPT), asking what types of coinages occur, how they are rendered, how much of their creativity survives, and whether prompting can help AI do better.

Using Plag's (2018) word-formation lens, this study identified 28 nonce words, with suffixation as the dominant process, followed by blending, then orthographic/phonological play**,** and prefixation/ patterns. The comparison shows a stable pattern: both versions preserve meaning but flatten style. Apple TV tends to domesticate (polished, often softening) while ChatGPT tends to literalize evaluation (closer to the sentiment but not the play). In both, the form-based humour such as mock-Latinate *-ify*, pseudo-academic *-ism*, blend effects like *scandalocious* or *horrendible*, and odd spellings largely disappears. Some traces remain through intensifiers or emphatic wording, but most of the Ozian "excess" is lost, albeit unsurprising given subtitle limits and the need for readability in the target language. In line with the focus outlined in the title and abstract, the findings demonstrate that while both human and AI translations generally succeed in conveying core meaning, they consistently struggle to preserve the stylistic, humorous, and morphological inventiveness that defines nonce words in highly creative audiovisual texts.

Targeted prompting steers ChatGPT to produce more playful, concise options and to use compensation strategies such as short alliteration or paired evaluatives. Yet AI still requires a human editor to check naturalness, register, timing, and scene fit; creative prompts can also yield awkward affixation or length overruns. The most reliable path is a human-in-the-loop workflow: prompt for a small set of short alternatives, then select/tune the best candidate for screen constraints and tone. This finding reinforces the study's central implication: in the translation of playful nonce words, human expertise remains essential, particularly in audiovisual contexts where space, rhythm, and character voice must align on screen.

Practically, the findings support transcreation-aware subtitling: when morphology cannot be mirrored, use local cues (rhythm, intensifiers, reduplication, light alliteration) and, where platform style guides allow, discrete marking (e.g., italics) to signal deliberate play without harming legibility. Such moves help retain the source's attitude while respecting Indonesian subtitle norms. Such strategies acknowledge the creative function of nonce words rather than treating them as purely semantic units.

The study is limited by its single title**,** one human stream**,** one AI system**,** a modest token set**,** and researcher-led judgments without reception testing. Future work should scale to multiple films/series and platforms, compare several AI tools and prompt designs, include viewer

studies and rater-based evaluations**,** and test how compensation affects comprehension and enjoyment under real timing constraints.

In sum, *Wicked* demonstrates how nonce words are systematically constructed through morphological play, yet much of this play is attenuated in Indonesian subtitles. While prompted AI can assist in generating creative options, the findings reaffirm that effective translation of highly creative audiovisual language depends on human decision-making. The most productive model is therefore a human–AI collaboration, where AI supports ideation and humans ensure that creativity, readability, and character voice are successfully integrated in the final subtitle.

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