



Investigating Romantic-Tone Transfers in the Human Translation Compared to AI Subtitling: A Case Study of the Dilan 1990 Film

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Abstract

This paper examines how romantic tone is carried across languages in film subtitling, where text must be brief, well-timed, and easy to read. We focus on *Dilan 1990*, a popular Indonesian teen romance known for playful, indirect lines that rely on inference and rhythm. Today, many studios generate first-pass subtitles with neural machine translation and then rely on human post-editors to refine style and timing. We ask how well AI handles this kind of subtle, affect-rich dialogue and where human editing still adds value. We compare 24 well-known lines addressed by Dilan to Milea in two versions: the official English subtitles and outputs produced by ChatGPT under the same line-level constraints. Using a practical set of translation techniques (e.g., modulation, compression, adaptation) and a tone rubric (playfulness/coyness, warmth, persona/rhythm), we perform a line-by-line analysis. The human subtitles tend to keep implicature and pace through concise, idiomatic choices that fit character and reading speed. The AI versions are fluent but more likely to explain subtext or lengthen the line, which can blunt teasing and shift the scene's mood. AI can match human choices when the source line is already compact and direct. Where meaning depends on ellipsis, metaphor, and micro-timing, human post-editing remains crucial. We close with practical guidelines for NMT-plus-post-editing workflows in romance subtitling.

Keywords: Audiovisual translation; *Dilan 1990*; Neural machine translation; Romance; Subtitling

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INTRODUCTION

Translating romantic film dialogue is a delicate task that extends beyond finding direct word equivalents, because in on-screen romance meaning resides not only in the words themselves but also in the pauses, playful hints, gentle exaggerations, and the tone of a character's voice. All of these nuances must be conveyed across a language barrier while the audience simultaneously reads subtitles and watches the performance. Because subtitles must coexist with image and sound, they operate under strict technical limits—character counts per second, a maximum of two lines on screen, and timing synced to cuts and dialogue. As a result, subtitling practice tends to favor brevity, idiomatic phrasing, and rhythmic ease of reading over strict literal translation (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014; Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998; Netflix, 2024).

Within romantic dialogue, tone is frequently encoded via implication rather than explicit statement, so preserving implicature is often a precondition for preserving

meaning. Relevance-theoretic accounts hold that audiences infer intended meanings from minimal cues and that spelling out subtext can reduce effect (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). In parallel, politeness theory predicts the use of hedges, indirection, and playful self-deprecation in courtship, allowing speakers to protect face while signalling interest (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Research on teasing shows how humorous, non-literal cues invite closeness without full commitment (Haugh, 2016; Keltner et al., 2001). Appraisal theory further clarifies how affect is encoded lexically and syntactically (Martin & White, 2005), while conceptual metaphor explains why images of distance, warmth, or weight travel well across languages (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In short, romantic tone is multi-layered, and each layer is at risk under compression—precisely the condition of subtitling (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014; Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998; Netflix, 2024).

The Indonesian film *Dilan 1990* presents a compelling case study for these subtitling challenges. Based on a popular novel by Pidi Baiq, the film became a cultural phenomenon among Indonesian youth, largely due to the protagonist Dilan's unique blend of toughness and poetic romanticism (Dara, 2023; Kertanegara, 2018). Dilan's dialogue is playful, charming, and often cryptic, including a now-famous line “Jangan rindu. Berat. Biar aku saja.” (roughly, “Don't miss me. It's heavy. Let me carry that burden for you.”). Such lines carry significant cultural and emotional weight in Indonesia. Prior studies note that Dilan frequently uses indirect speech acts—teasing promises, playful jokes, coy flirtations—that flout ordinary conversational norms (Bangol et al., 2023; Saefudin et al., 2025). This deliberate ambiguity and humor contribute to his appeal but also create additional difficulties for translators, who must convey not just the semantic content but the intended emotional effect. Other researchers note that his language reflects a modern masculine persona blending sensitivity with charisma (Dara, 2022; Kertanegara, 2018). Together, these characteristics make Dilan's romantic lines an ideal testing ground for subtitle translation strategies.

To evaluate specific subtitle choices in such contexts, this study adopts Molina and Albir's (2002) technique typology. On this view, translators deploy procedures such as literal translation, borrowing/calque, transposition, modulation, established equivalence, adaptation, compression/reduction, amplification, discursive creation, and compensation, among others. In time-pressured media, combinations of modulation, established equivalence, and compression are generally effective for maintaining readability while signalling tone; by contrast, excessive amplification or overly literal mappings can introduce bluntness or lengthen rhythm—both risky for flirtatious lines (Molina & Albir, 2002; Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014; Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998). Empirically, human subtitlers working in romance genres often rely on creative techniques to convey humor and affection without overrunning constraints. For example, Sugihartono et al. (2023) found that professional translators of the Hollywood romance *50 First Dates* used cultural adaptation, modulation, and compensation to preserve the film's playful tone and emotional impact, underscoring that successful romantic subtitles involve interpretive choices attuned to the audience's cultural context and expectations.

Meanwhile, neural machine translation (NMT) systems like ChatGPT have made remarkable strides in producing fluent, grammatically correct sentences, and many workflows are moving toward NMT-first pipelines with human post-editing (Karakanta, 2022; Bolaños García-Escribano & Díaz-Cintas, 2023). Case studies integrating GNMT into film subtitling likewise indicate that post-editing is used to correct and tone-shape MT drafts (Liang et al., 2024). However, studies report that when it comes to context-dependent, emotive content, these systems often fall short of human subtitling. The tone of a joke or flirtation may be “flattened,” implicit meanings are translated too explicitly, and creative turns of phrase are handled awkwardly or literally (Castilho et al., 2018; Guerberof-Arenas & Toral, 2022; Läubli et al., 2018). In quality assessment, the FAR

model operationalizes function, acceptability, and readability for interlingual subtitles and provides a useful complement to technique-based diagnostics (Pedersen, 2017). Taken together, the literature suggests a division of labor: NMT can draft, but human post-editing remains pivotal for tonal calibration—especially in romance—within ongoing studio timing and layout constraints (Netflix, 2024).

Against this backdrop, *Dilan 1990* functions as a pragmatic “stress test” for romantic subtitling. In the teen romance genre, where affection is often implied or teased rather than explicitly declared, even a small change in phrasing can alter the tone. A single added clause might turn a coy, flirtatious remark into a blunt statement; an overly strong term of endearment can feel out of place in a lighthearted moment. Preserving the subtle tone of romance is therefore essential to preserving the intended meaning (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Haugh, 2016; Keltner et al., 2001; Martin & White, 2005; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), all while respecting the formal constraints of subtitling (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014; Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998; Netflix, 2024).

This study directly compares AI-generated and human-crafted subtitles for key romantic lines in *Dilan 1990*. The objective is to evaluate how each approach handles the delicate balancing act of conveying Dilan’s playfulness and warmth under real subtitle constraints. We identify the dominant translation techniques (in the sense of Molina & Albir, 2002) used in each version and examine how those choices impact the perceived romantic tone. In doing so, we highlight the strengths and weaknesses of an AI translator in this context. By focusing on a culturally resonant, romance-centered film, this comparison reveals whether a state-of-the-art AI translation can meet the nuanced expectations of viewers or if important interpersonal subtleties are lost.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research design

The study adopted an interpretivist, qualitative comparative textual analysis of a single case. In qualitative research, comparative textual analysis means reading texts closely, side by side, to see how meaning is built and how small choices change the effect on readers or viewers. It combines careful, line-by-line interpretation with systematic comparison across versions of the same text (Given, 2008; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000). In translation studies, this approach has long been used to relate micro-choices on the page to broader effects such as tone, style, and function (Saldanha & O’Brien, 2013). Building on that tradition, the study treated each subtitled line from *Dilan 1990* as a small artifact and compared the official human subtitle with a ChatGPT translation, asking how the translation technique adopted in each version shaped the romantic tone that viewers would perceive (Molina & Albir, 2002).

The film *Dilan 1990* offered a theoretically rich context because its memorable romantic lines are short, metaphorical, and often playful. These properties made even subtle wording differences meaningful for tone. The comparison operated within the same item: for every Indonesian line spoken by Dilan to Milea, the study placed the human subtitle and the ChatGPT output side by side and interpreted how each wording handled playfulness, warmth, and the character’s “cool,” concise persona. No external raters were used. The study was conducted by a single analyst and was intentionally reflexive: an audit trail of coding decisions was kept, borderline judgments were revisited after short intervals, and interpretations were checked against widely used subtitling norms—brevity, rhythm, idiomaticity, and timing (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014; Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998; Netflix, 2024)—and against Pedersen’s FAR quality model, which foregrounds functional equivalence, acceptability, and readability in subtitles (Pedersen, 2017). The purpose was micro-level theory building about how technique shapes tone under subtitle constraints, rather than statistical generalization.

Data and Source of Data

The study compiled a parallel dataset of 24 romantic lines from *Dilan 1990*. For each item, the Indonesian source line was aligned with two English versions: the official human-translated subtitle available on Vidio.com and a ChatGPT translation produced for this project. The set included culturally well-known or figurative lines such as the “angkot” exchange, the iconic “Jangan rindu. Berat... Biar aku saja.”, the playful “long-distance kiss” banter, the *InsyaAllah* / God willing moment, and the birthday note.

Instruments

Two instruments supported the interpretations. First, the study used a translation-technique framework adapted from Molina and Albir’s (2002) functional taxonomy. For each human and ChatGPT translation, the study assigned the dominant technique—the operation that most clearly explained the wording and its tonal effect. Table 1 shows the full set of translation techniques used in the study with mini-examples. As shown in Table 1, techniques that reshape viewpoint (modulation) and manage space (linguistic compression) were especially important for preserving romantic tone in short lines.

Table 1. Translation techniques

No	Technique	Definition	Example (SL → TL)
1	Borrowing	Keep the source word as is.	<i>martabak</i> → “martabak”
2	Calque	Translate parts of a fixed expression literally.	<i>sun jauh</i> → “long-distance kiss”
3	Literal translation	Word-for-word, where grammar allows.	<i>Aku ramal kamu akan segera tahu namaku</i> → “I predict you’ll soon know my name.”
4	Transposition	Change word class or structure to fit English.	<i>Ini hari pertama aku duduk denganmu</i> → “This is the first time I’m sitting with you.”
5	Modulation	Change viewpoint or category, same idea.	<i>sayang</i> → “I care about you” (softer than “I love you”).
6	Established equivalent	Use a standard target-language phrase.	<i>Doain</i> → “Wish me luck.”
7	Adaptation	Use a culturally familiar counterpart.	<i>InsyaAllah</i> → “God willing.”
8	Description	Explain a culture-specific item briefly.	<i>TTS</i> → “a crossword puzzle.”
9	Linguistic compression	Say the same with fewer words.	<i>Gampang</i> → “Easy.”
10	Linguistic amplification	Add a small element needed for clarity.	<i>Biar aku saja</i> → “Let me do it for you.”
11	Reduction	Omit redundant elements.	Drop repeated “Milea,” where context is clear.
12	Generalization	Use a broader term.	Food list → “snacks.”
13	Particularization	Use a more specific term.	<i>roti</i> → “croquette.”
14	Compensation	Recover a lost effect elsewhere.	Add a playful tag later when wordplay cannot be kept.
15	Discursive creation	Coin a fresh phrase to match style.	<i>Proklamasi...</i> → “Proclamation...” with playful tone.
16	Substitution	Swap verbal and non-verbal cues.	Replace [blows a kiss] with “blows a kiss,” or vice versa.
17	Variation	Adjust dialect, register, or style.	Formal “yes” → “yeah,” where tone is light.
18	Reduction vs. amplification (pair)	Balance cutting and adding.	Cutting to “Easy,” adding “for you” only when needed.

Second, the study articulated a tone rubric grounded in appraisal and pragmatics. Romantic tone was read along three interrelated facets such as playfulness or coyness, warmth or affection, and persona fit. Table 2 summarizes the rubric's descriptors and illustrates each facet with a brief example from *Dilan 1990*. Playfulness or coyness captured whether a line let meaning remain implicit, for instance through teasing, metaphor, understatement, or whether it spelled things out. Warmth or affection captured how strongly the English wording expressed sweet talk, including how terms like *sayang* were adjusted. Persona fit captured whether the English kept Dilan's concise, confident voice and respected subtitle rhythm and compactness. These lenses drew on Appraisal theory's model of attitudinal meaning (Martin & White, 2005) and on decision-making in evaluation-oriented translation (Munday, 2012), while classic work on politeness and face, teasing, and metaphor helped explain why implicitness and understatement often feel more romantic in on-screen flirtation (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Haugh, 2016; Haugh & Pillet-Shore, 2018; Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, & Heerey, 2001; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Holmes, 1988; Gao, Kao, Mahmud, & Liu, 2017). Judgments about persona fit and readability were anchored to subtitling practice which deals with character-per-second limits, two-line displays, and shot timing (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014; Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998; Netflix, 2024).

Table 2. Tone Rubric

Facet		Appraisal link (Martin & White, 2005)	Descriptor	Representative example (SL → Human vs. ChatGPT)
Playfulness Cyness	/	<i>Appreciation</i> of style and <i>Graduation</i> (scalin g), plus implicature	How much meaning is left implicit through teasing, metaphor, or ellipsis, rather than being spelled out	<i>Sun jauh... nanti sun dekat</i> → Human : "Long- distance kiss... save it for a close-up kiss." (implicit, higher) vs. ChatGPT : "I'd rather give you a proper kiss instead of just a blown one." (explicit, lower)
Warmth Affection	/	<i>Affect</i> and <i>Graduation</i>	How strong the affection reads in English and whether it fits teen romance	<i>Aku sayang kamu</i> → Human : "I care about you." (softer, often better) vs. ChatGPT : "I love you." (can feel too strong in context)
Persona (voice rhythm)	fit +	<i>Judgment</i> of character and <i>Appreciation</i> of textual composition	Whether the line still sounds like Dilan (concise, cool, lightly poetic) and reads smoothly on screen	<i>Gampang</i> → Human : "Easy." (tight, in-voice) vs. ChatGPT : "Don't worry about that." (longer, softer stance)

Data analysis

The study proceeded through close reading and iterative comparison. For each Indonesian line, we first reconstructed the illocutionary force and immediate scene context—whether the line worked as a tease, a soft promise, or a playful threat. The human subtitle and the ChatGPT output were then examined in parallel. Using the technique grid, the study assigned one dominant technique to each data and wrote a short analytic memo explaining how the chosen wording affected playfulness, warmth, and persona fit. Attention was paid to features that matter for subtitles such as compactness, rhythm, line breaks, punctuation, and culture-specific items that might call for adaptation (e.g., translating *InsyaAllah* as "God willing") or retention when local flavor was important.

After the entire set had been memoed, the study conducted a cross-case synthesis to refine patterns. Repeated contrasts such as the human subtitle's reliance on modulation and compression to keep coyness and rhythm, versus ChatGPT's tendency

to literalize or explicate metaphors were traced back to their tonal consequences. Throughout, interpretations were checked against accepted subtitling expectations and against research showing that, despite strong fluency, neural machine translation still struggles with discourse-level context and pragmatic nuance in literature-like material (Läubli, Sennrich, & Volk, 2018; Castilho, Doherty, Gaspari, & Moorkens, 2018; Guerberoof-Arenas & Toral, 2022). In short, the analysis treated technique as a practical lever that shaped tone under real subtitling constraints, and it used a coherent set of theories to make those judgments transparent and replicable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Translation techniques

Across twenty-four lines, the human subtitles leaned on modulation, established equivalents, transposition, and linguistic compression, while ChatGPT more often used literal translation, linguistic amplification, and borrowing/calque. As shown in Table 3, human subtitles drew most often on modulation and established equivalents (about half of all cases), supported by compression and transposition. ChatGPT's dominant choices were literal translation (about two in five lines) and amplification, with borrowing/calque appearing more often than in the human set. This distribution helps explain later tone patterns: techniques that tighten and idiomatize lines tend to support teasing and cadence, whereas literal plus amplification tends to increase explicitness or length.

Table 3. Share of Dominant Techniques

Translation Technique	Human n	Human %	ChatGPT n	ChatGPT %
Modulation	7	29.2%	3	12.5%
Established equivalent	5	20.8%	1	4.2%
Linguistic compression	4	16.7%	2	8.3%
Transposition	3	12.5%	1	4.2%
Adaptation	2	8.3%	0	0.0%
Literal translation	1	4.2%	9	37.5%
Borrowing/Calque	1	4.2%	3	12.5%
Discursive creation / Compensation / Variation	1	4.2%	0	0.0%
Linguistic amplification	0	0.0%	5	20.8%
Total	24	100%	24	100%

Modulation tops the human list because it allows small viewpoint shifts that fit English teen talk without sounding heavy. Established equivalents (“Wish me luck,” “Easy,” “Never mind”) carry a lot of work in short subtitles. Compression keeps Dilan’s cool, clipped cadence intact. By contrast, ChatGPT’s high literal rate lines up with a tendency to say exactly what the Indonesian says, then add a clarifying piece (amplification) when the system judges context might be missing. Borrowing/calque appears in cultural items, which can be engaging but risky for readability if not balanced with audience familiarity. These tendencies set the stage for how tone travels in the next tables.

Table 4. The comparison of the use of translation techniques:
Human vs ChatGPT

Data No.	SL	Human (TL)	ChatGPT (TL)	Dominant technique (Human)	Dominant technique (ChatGPT)
1	<i>Aku ramal nanti siang kita akan bertemu di</i>	“I can see us meeting again today in the canteen.”	“I predict we’ll meet at the cafeteria this afternoon.”	Transposition + modulation	Literal

Data No.	SL	Human (TL)	ChatGPT (TL)	Dominant technique (Human)	Dominant technique (ChatGPT)
	<i>kantin.</i>				
2	<i>Kok tahu rumahku... Aku juga tahu siapa Tuhanmu.</i>	"How do you know my house?... I know who your God is too."	"How do you know where I live?... I also know who your God is."	Calque/literal	Modulation
6	<i>Milea...ka mu cantik. Tapi aku belum mencintaim u, gatau kalau sore, tunggu aja.</i>	"Milea... you're beautiful. But I've yet to fall for you. But this afternoon, who knows? We'll see."	"Milea... you're beautiful. But I don't love you yet. I don't know about this afternoon—just wait."	Modulation	Literal
8	<i>Pemberitahu. Sejak sore kemarin, aku sudah mencintaim u.</i>	"Information! Since yesterday's afternoon, I'm officially in love with you."	"Announcement: Since yesterday afternoon, I have fallen in love with you."	Discursive creation	Established equivalent + transposition
14	<i>Jangan pernah bilang ada yang menyakitim u. Nanti orang itu akan hilang.</i>	"Don't ever tell me if somebody hurt you. Because I will make them disappear."	"Never tell me if someone hurts you. That person will disappear."	Amplification /explicitation	Literal + compression
19	<i>Gampang, Lia kalau mau bikin aku nangis. Menghilang lah kamu dari bumi.</i>	"It's not hard to make me cry. If you disappear off the face of the earth."	"It's easy to make me cry, Lia. Disappear from the earth."	Modulation	Established equivalent
20	<i>Cemburu itu untuk yang tidak percaya diri... Ya dan sekarang aku sedang tidak percaya diri.</i>	"Jealousy is for the insecure. So tonight I'm feeling insecure."	"Jealousy is only for people who lack confidence. And right now, I'm feeling not so confident."	Modulation + compression	Literal + amplification
21	<i>Jangan rindu. Berat. Kamu ga akan kuat. Biar aku saja.</i>	"Don't miss me. It's too heavy. You won't be able to. Let me bear it for you."	"Don't miss me. It's heavy. You won't be able to handle it. Let me do it."	Linguistic amplification + modulation	Established equivalent + amplification

A clear contrast appears when these lines are read back into their scenes. In Data 1 (*Aku ramal nanti siang kita akan bertemu di kantin*), an early flirt, Dilan plays fortune-teller. ChatGPT's literal "I predict... this afternoon" is brisk and sure of itself, matching his showy certainty and the light challenge he throws at Milea. The human "I can see us..." softens the stance and adds words, which loosens the swagger tucked into *aku ramal*.

The famous tease in Data 6 (*kamu cantik, tapi aku belum mencintaimu, gatau kalau sore, tunggu aja*) works because it says both "not yet" and "maybe soon." The human "I've yet to fall for you... who knows?" uses modulation to keep the flirt buoyant, allowing viewers to supply the smile behind the line. ChatGPT's "I don't love you yet" is accurate but blunter; the emotional calibration shifts from coy to declarative. Whereas in Data 8 (*Pemberitahuan... aku sudah mencintaimu*), Dilan steps into mock-formal voice. The human "Information!" tries to mirror the bit but stumbles ("yesterday's afternoon" jars). ChatGPT's established equivalent "Announcement:" with a tidy perfect aspect keeps the gag and reads cleanly, which fits Dilan's playful performance.

The protector joke in Data 14 (*Jangan pernah bilang... orang itu akan hilang*) sits halfway between joke and promise. The human line adds agency ("I will make them disappear"), which pushes the line toward real threat. The impersonal "'That person will disappear'" is shorter and still keeps the straight-faced, bold tone fans love to quote. Data 19 vocative *Lia* places intimacy in direct address and in the grand gesture. Dropping "Lia" and flipping to "not hard" dull both address and exaggeration; keeping the vocative and punchy imperative ("Disappear from the earth") brings back the dramatic play. Whereas Data 20 (*Cemburu itu untuk yang tidak percaya diri*) is a neat self-own that works like an epigram. The human version's tight phrasing lands on beat; the longer ChatGPT line is clear but blunts the snap that makes the line memorable.

Finally, Data 21 "Jangan rindu. Berat. Kamu ga akan kuat. Biar aku saja." is powerful because of its brief pauses and from using "heavy" as an emotion, not a literal weight. Here the official human subtitle makes the metaphor explicit "It's too heavy... Let me bear it for you" which increases clarity and warmth but lengthens cadence and pushes the line toward earnest comfort. ChatGPT, by contrast, keeps the iconic three-beat feel with "Don't miss me. It's heavy... Let me do it," which reads closer to Dilan's cool, teasing persona even though it adds the explanatory "handle it" earlier in the line.

Tone Shifts

The tonal picture matches the technique picture. The study tracked three facets: playfulness or coyness, warmth or affection, and persona fit (Dilan's voice and readable rhythm) and tagged each English version as higher (+), maintained (Ø), or lower (–) relative to the Indonesian. As shown in Table 5, human subtitles more often kept or raised playfulness and warmth and scored better on persona fit. ChatGPT sometimes matched or beat persona when the source line was already short and decisive, but it more often lowered playfulness by spelling out what the original leaves for viewers to infer.

Table 5. Share of Dominant Tone Shift

Facet	Version	Higher (+)	Maintained (Ø)	Lower (–)
Playfulness / Coyness	Human	11 (45.8%)	10 (41.7%)	3 (12.5%)
	ChatGPT	5 (20.8%)	8 (33.3%)	11 (45.8%)
Warmth / Affection	Human	10 (41.7%)	12 (50.0%)	2 (8.3%)
	ChatGPT	6 (25.0%)	9 (37.5%)	9 (37.5%)
Persona fit (voice + rhythm)	Human	12 (50.0%)	7 (29.2%)	5 (20.8%)
	ChatGPT	8 (33.3%)	6 (25.0%)	10 (41.7%)

Read through the eight scenes, these distributions come into focus. Human choices like “fall for you” in Data 6, the clean “Announcement:” in Data 8, and the explicated yet warmer “Let me bear it for you” in Data 21 keep warmth high, even if rhythm sometimes stretches. Persona fit is generally higher in the human data, in line with compression and idiom that let viewers read at a glance, though Data 21 is an instructive counterexample where ChatGPT’s shorter rhythm better matches Dilan’s signature cool. ChatGPT shows its strength when the Indonesian is inherently crisp, as in Data 1 (*Aku ramal...*) and Data 14 (...*akan hilang*), where a literal line carries Dilan’s straight-faced style. The same numbers also reflect a drift toward explaining subtext, which lowers coyness and can stretch reading time; Data 21 spotlights how a small explanatory phrase can tip a flirt from playful to earnest.

Table 6. Technique–tone alignment on three facets

No.	Version	Playfulness / Coyness	Warmth / Affection	Persona fit (voice + rhythm)	Why (dominant technique → tonal effect)
1	Human	Ø	Ø	–	Transposition/modulation to “I can see us...” adds optimism but lengthens phrasing, softening Dilan’s crisp stance.
	ChatGPT	Ø	Ø	+	Literal “I predict... this afternoon” is compact and assertive, closer to Dilan’s brisk tone.
2	Human	Ø	Ø	–	Calque/literal “my house” reads odd in English and slightly stiffens the banter.
	ChatGPT	Ø	Ø	+	Modulation “where I live” sounds idiomatic, tightening persona fit.
6	Human	+	+	Ø	Modulation “fall for you,” plus light amplification (“who knows?”) maintains tease and warmth without overshoot.
	ChatGPT	–	Ø	+	Literal + compression keeps rhythm but blunts teasing with the more direct “I don’t love you yet.”
8	Human	Ø	+	–	Discursive creation “Information!” is playful yet the phrasing is clunky; warmth rises, rhythm suffers.
	ChatGPT	+	Ø	+	Established equivalent + transposition (“Announcement ... have fallen...”) keeps mock-formal joke and clean cadence.
14	Human	–	Ø	–	Amplification (“I will make them disappear”) removes ambiguity and heightens aggression, off-persona.
	ChatGPT	+	Ø	+	Literal + compression (“That person will disappear”) preserves swagger and brevity.
19	Human	Ø	Ø	–	Modulation “not hard” plus reduction of “Lia” loses the intimate vocative and the exaggerated punch.

No.	Version	Playfulness / Coyness	Warmth / Affection	Persona fit (voice + rhythm)	Why (dominant technique → tonal effect)
20	ChatGPT	Ø	Ø	+	Established equivalent cadence and vocative retention keep hyperbolic charm and addressivity.
	Human	Ø	+	+	Modulation + compression (“the insecure... tonight I’m...”) yields self-deprecating warmth and smooth reading.
	ChatGPT	Ø	Ø	Ø	Literal + amplification is clear but wordier, reducing snap without changing affect much.

Read as a continuous story, Table 6 shows that technique and tone move together in predictable ways. When the line carries its charm in what is left unsaid, small modulatory choices like softer verbs, idiomatic turns, compact rhythms keep that charm. When the source line is already tight and aphoristic, a literal mapping can carry Dilan’s cool certainty, provided it does not add explanation. The Indonesian source lines make this plain: *Aku ramal...* benefits from staying lean and confident; *belum mencintaimu...* sore, *tunggu aja* benefits from a wording that keeps the tease floating; *Pemberitahuan...* needs a clean mock-formal header more than an unusual synonym; *...akan hilang* works best as a tongue-in-cheek threat, not a detailed promise, and “Jangan rindu” is most itself when its three short beats are left to do their work.

Discussion

Overall, the results reveal that in subtitles, Subtitles have to do a lot with very little. Because viewers read quickly and space is tight, tone depends on technique. Human subtitlers use small, focused moves such as modulation, transposition, familiar equivalents, and compression. These moves make the English sound natural and easy to read. This follows standard subtitling advice on brevity, rhythm, and timing (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014; Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998; Netflix, 2024; Molina & Albir, 2002). It also fits Pedersen’s FAR model. The moves support function, acceptability, and readability (Pedersen, 2017). This is why many human lines feel right on screen even when they are not word for word.

ChatGPT tends to stay close to the source and then add short explanations when the context feels thin. Prior work on machine translation for emotional or literary text shows a similar pattern. A sentence can be fluent but still miss the tone across the scene, and systems often explain what human translators leave implied (Läubli, Sennrich, & Volk, 2018; Castilho et al., 2018; Guerberof-Arenas & Toral, 2022). The results here show both strengths and limits. When the Indonesian is already short and strong, for example *Aku ramal nanti siang kita bertemu di kantin* or the protective joke *...nanti orang itu akan hilang*, a mostly literal English line can keep Dilan’s cool. Sometimes a small cut such as dropping *nanti* then helps. When the effect relies on suggestion and rhythm, extra words can change the mood. In *Jangan rindu. Berat. Kamu ga akan kuat. Biar aku saja*, the human version adds warmth with “too heavy... bear it for you,” but it softens the wink. The shorter option keeps the three beat rhythm that people remember. Relevance Theory helps explain this. Audiences infer a lot from a few cues, and added explanation can blunt the effect (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

A pragmatics view and Appraisal theory help show why small shifts change playfulness, warmth, and persona. Teasing invites closeness only if the line leaves space for the other person to get it. Over explaining closes that space (Haugh, 2016; Haugh & Pillet-Shore, 2018; Keltner et al., 2001; Brown & Levinson, 1987). In the well known tease *kamu cantik... belum mencintaimu... sore, tunggu aja*, the human line “I’ve yet to fall for you... who knows?” keeps a gentle feel and moderate intensity. “I don’t love you yet” matches the dictionary meaning but reads as blunter for teen romance (Martin & White, 2005; Munday, 2012). The same tuning shapes persona. Compression and familiar equivalents such as “Announcement,” “Easy,” and “Wish me luck” support Dilan’s concise, slightly poetic voice and let viewers read the line at a glance within timing limits (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014; Netflix, 2024).

Cultural choices follow the same logic. Moving between adaptation, for example *InsyaAllah* to “God willing,” and careful borrowing, for example a brief item like *martabak*, balances audience needs with local color. This links to the domestication and foreignization debate and to a Skopos aware brief (Nord, 1997/2014; Venuti, 2017; Molina & Albir, 2002).

CONCLUSION

The study shows that romantic tone in subtitles depends on clear translation choices made under tight space and timing. Human subtitlers use modulation, transposition, established equivalents, and compression to keep teasing, warmth, and a brief, confident voice. ChatGPT tends to stay close to the source and add small explanations that protect meaning but can reduce coyness and slow the rhythm. When the source line is already short and punchy, a faithful rendering often works well. When the effect relies on implication and cadence, explaining a metaphor can raise warmth, while keeping the pause or ellipsis preserves pace and character. These patterns match guidance in audiovisual translation and Appraisal based accounts of affect and stance. They suggest simple steps for AI assisted subtitling of romance: keep metaphors and implied meaning unless clarity suffers, prefer compression to added detail, match terms of affection such as *sayang* to age and register, and finish with a brief FAR check for function, idiom, and reading speed. However, these patterns may not generalize since this study is limited by its small size and single case design and did not involve external raters.

RECOMMENDATION

Future research should test the rubric on larger and more varied data, include viewer studies, and compare more AI systems and prompt settings to see when tone is best preserved.

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