Subtitling English Documentaries into Indonesian: Trends, Challenges, and Audience Impact (A Systematic Review)

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Keywords	Abstract
Subtitling; documentaries; English to Indonesian translation; systematic literature review ***Correspondence Email:*** *niken@widyagama.ac.id*	This systematic literature review examines subtitling strategies employed in the translation of documentary videos from English into Indonesian. Based on an analysis of scholarly articles published from 2020 to 2025, this review synthesizes findings on the primary translation strategies, the reasoning behind their application, and their resulting impact on the target audience. The data sources for the reviewed studies include documentaries from TV programs, feature films, and streaming platforms like YouTube and Netflix. The findings indicate a prevalence of strategies aiming for equivalence and cultural adaptation, driven by the need to bridge linguistic gaps and ensure viewer comprehension while navigating the technical constraints of subtitling. The impact of these strategies generally points towards enhanced accessibility and understanding, although challenges in translating cultural nuances remain.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized digital media landscape, subtitling has become a crucial component in enabling cross-linguistic access to audiovisual content. As international media circulate widely through television networks, online platforms, and subscription-based streaming services, subtitles play a central role in facilitating viewer comprehension across diverse linguistic communities. Subtitling is considered one of the most efficient and accessible modes of audiovisual translation (AVT), allowing audiences to retain exposure to the original soundtrack while receiving linguistic support through written text (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). Its relevance continues to grow as global consumption of multilingual content accelerates.

Documentary films, in particular, occupy a unique position as educational instruments and cross-cultural communication media. They convey factual information, scientific explanations, and socio-historical narratives that require accurate and contextually appropriate translation for non-native audiences. As noted by Corner (2018), documentaries serve as both "knowledge transmitters" and "cultural interpreters," making linguistic clarity essential for ensuring that viewers grasp the intended message. When documentary content is translated into another language, subtitlers must balance informational density, cultural nuance, and multimodal interaction between spoken narration, on-screen text, and visual storytelling.

Despite its communicative importance, subtitling presents several technical and linguistic challenges. Subtitlers must work within strict temporal and spatial constraints, including limited character counts, synchronization with speech, viewer reading speed, and the need to avoid obstructing key visual information (Gottlieb, 2004; Karamitroglou, 2020). These constraints often require the use of specific translation strategies—such as reduction, paraphrasing, equivalence, or cultural adaptation—to condense or reshape meaning without distorting the source message. For English–Indonesian documentary translation, these challenges are heightened by linguistic structural differences and cultural contextual gaps that necessitate deliberate decision-making.

Existing studies have examined a variety of English–Indonesian subtitling strategies, ranging from literal and equivalence-based translations to adaptation and reduction approaches (Hapsari & Rema, 2021; Sari & Nababan, 2020). However, prior research tends to focus on entertainment or fictional genres, leaving documentary subtitling comparatively understudied. Moreover, while individual studies discuss the types of strategies employed or the reasoning behind them, there remains limited synthesis regarding their overall impact on Indonesian audience comprehension. This reflects a research gap, particularly the absence of a systematic review that consolidates findings from 2020–2025 and focuses specifically on English–Indonesian subtitling in documentary media.

To address this gap, the present study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to describe current trends in subtitling strategies used for English–Indonesian documentary translation; identify linguistic, cultural, and technical factors influencing the application of these strategies; and analyze how these strategies affect comprehension among Indonesian viewers.

By synthesizing recent empirical and descriptive studies, this review aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how subtitling practices shape meaning transfer in documentary media and support viewers' educational and cultural engagement.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Translation Studies and Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

Translation studies provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how meaning is transferred across languages and cultures. Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence emphasizes producing an effect on the target audience equivalent to that experienced by the source audience, highlighting naturalness and contextual appropriateness (Nida, 1964). Catford (1965) defines translation as the replacement of textual material in one language with equivalent material in another, placing emphasis on linguistic structure and shift. Baker (2018) expands the notion of equivalence by discussing its lexical, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic dimensions within real translation contexts.

As media communication evolves into multimodal formats, translation increasingly engages with audiovisual materials. Audiovisual Translation (AVT) encompasses subtitling, dubbing, voice-over, and other modes that transfer meaning across languages in media combining image, sound, and text. AVT plays an essential role in global content circulation, particularly as streaming services expand multilingual access (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). In multimodal environments, translators must consider interactions among dialogue, visual cues, sound effects, and on-screen text (Chaume, 2020). This complexity is particularly evident in documentary translation, where factual accuracy and ideological framing depend heavily on how linguistic content is rendered for audiences.

2.2 Subtitling: Concepts and Constraints

Subtitling is the process of presenting written translations of spoken dialogue on screen, synchronizing text with audiovisual content (Gottlieb, 2004). Subtitling is constrained by four major factors: linguistic constraints (condensation is frequently necessary because spoken language is more redundant than written language), technical constraints (limited space of only 35–42 characters per line, display time, and reading

speed norms (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021)), spatial constraints (subtitles must avoid obstructing important visual information), and temporal constraints (subtitles must remain on screen long enough to be read comfortably, while still matching the speech rhythm). Modern subtitling typically uses formats such as SRT (SubRip Text) for timecoded subtitles and closed captions for accessibility purposes, which include sound descriptions and speaker identification (Gernsbacher, 2015).

Documentaries pose additional subtitling challenges due to domain-specific terminology, rapid narration, and high-density visual information. Scientific and historical documentaries often contain specialized vocabulary requiring precise rendering to maintain informational accuracy. Rapid interview sequences or narrations may necessitate text reduction to fit temporal and spatial limits. Visual-heavy content demands careful subtitle placement to avoid interfering with charts, archival footage, or explanatory graphics (Kruger & Steyn, 2014). These challenges make documentary subtitling distinct from fiction or entertainment genres, requiring deliberate strategy application by translators.

2.3 Subtitling Strategies

Subtitling literature identifies several common strategies for managing linguistic and technical constraints (Gottlieb, 1992; Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021), including literal translation (close mirroring of source-language structure), equivalence (selecting target-language expressions with equivalent meaning or pragmatic effect), adaptation (modifying culture-specific elements to align with target audience norms), reduction (condensing text by omitting less essential information), expansion (adding short clarifications when needed for comprehension), transposition (modifying grammatical categories without changing meaning), cultural substitution (replacing unfamiliar cultural references with culturally relevant equivalents), and paraphrasing (re-expressing meaning using different wording to maintain clarity).

Although limited research specifically examines English–Indonesian documentary subtitling at the international level, global studies from the same period provide relevant insights. Subtitlers increasingly rely on reduction and paraphrasing to manage fast-paced or dense content (Pedersen, 2017; Szarkowska et al., 2020). Cultural adaptation improves comprehension when dealing with unfamiliar cultural references (Bogucki & Deckert, 2020). Studies on instructional and documentary materials show a tendency to combine strategies such as equivalence + reduction to meet readability and timing constraints (Kruger, 2019). Research also emphasizes the growing use of hybrid strategies in streaming-era subtitling, where multilingual audiences require clarity and accessibility (Díaz-Cintas, 2020). These studies demonstrate that subtitling decisions are shaped not only by linguistic differences but also by platform norms, genre expectations, and audience profiles.

2.4 Impact of Subtitling on Audience Comprehension

Subtitling strategies directly influence how audiences interpret and engage with audiovisual content. Research indicates that strategies prioritizing clarity—such as equivalence, paraphrasing, and adaptation—contribute to improved comprehension, especially in content with high cognitive load (Kruger & Doherty, 2016; Perego et al., 2016). When subtitles are too literal or overly condensed, viewers may experience reduced comprehension or misinterpretation, particularly in educational and documentary genres.

Cultural context also affects comprehension. Viewers rely on subtitles to understand culturally unfamiliar references, making cultural mediation strategies essential for bridging cultural gaps (Bogucki & Deckert, 2020). Furthermore, comprehension is influenced by reading literacy, familiarity with audiovisual translation conventions, and the viewer's cognitive processing capacity. Studies in multimodal learning environments show that subtitles can support information retention and enhance the learning value of documentaries when appropriately tailored to audience needs (Mayer & Moreno, 2003; Gernsbacher, 2015).

Overall, subtitling strategies shape viewers' emotional, cognitive, and cultural engagement with documentary content. Effective subtitling must therefore balance linguistic accuracy, cultural relevance, and cognitive accessibility.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize scholarly findings on English–Indonesian subtitling strategies in documentary media. An SLR approach enables a transparent, replicable, and comprehensive method for identifying, evaluating, and interpreting available research evidence (Snyder, 2019). Unlike traditional narrative reviews, SLRs follow a structured protocol that minimizes selection bias and enhances credibility.

To structure the review process, this study adopts methodological principles from the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework. PRISMA provides a standardized and widely recognized protocol for conducting systematic reviews, including clear guidelines for article identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion (Page et al., 2021).

3.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

The data for this review were collected from reputable academic databases, including Google Scholar, as well as AI-based platforms Dimensions.ai and SciSpace. The search covered publications from 2020 to 2025 to ensure that the review reflects the most recent developments in audiovisual translation and subtitling practices. A systematic search was conducted using relevant keywords such as "English–Indonesian subtitling", "translation strategies", and "documentary translation". The search results were then documented and screened according to predefined criteria to ensure relevance to the study objectives.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included in the review if they met such requirements as (1) Focused specifically on English–Indonesian subtitling, (2) Analyzed documentary materials, including television documentaries, feature-length documentaries, documentaries on YouTube, documentaries on Netflix or similar streaming platforms, (3) Published within the period 2020–2025, (4) Peer-reviewed academic works (journal articles, conference papers, or book chapters), and (5) Reported or discussed subtitling strategies, rationales, or audience impact.

Articles were excluded if they met any of the conditions like (1) Analyzed non-documentary audiovisual materials such as movies, dramas, advertisements, or animations, (2) Examined translations involving languages other than English as the source language, (3) Were non-peer-reviewed sources, including blog posts, opinion essays, unpublished theses, or student papers, and (4) Focused solely on dubbing, voice-over, or other AVT modes unrelated to subtitling.

3.4 Data Extraction and Analysis

Each eligible article was reviewed in detail, and data were extracted systematically using a structured coding sheet. The extraction process included identification of (1) Subtitling strategies used in English–Indonesian documentary translation, (2) Rationale behind the application of these strategies, and (3) Audience comprehension outcomes.

Following extraction, the data were synthesized through a narrative qualitative approach, allowing thematic patterns to emerge across studies. The analysis focused on identifying dominant subtitling strategies, common challenges encountered by translators, and documented effects of subtitling choices on viewer comprehension.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 PRISMA-Guided Synthesis of Included Studies

4.1.1 Identification and Screening

Based on the search keywords "English–Indonesian subtitling", "translation strategies", and "documentary translation", the initial dataset consisted of 57,019 user-provided articles which were written in English and focusing on subtitling, and translation techniques. The number consisted of 42,100 articles in Google Scholar, 14,742 articles in Dimensions.ai, and 177 articles in SciSpace. Those articles were then screened for further

topic methodological sufficiency, the year of publication, and the type of article. The screening resulted in only 6 (six) studies that complied with the criteria. The papers were examined in term of research design, theoretical foundations, data sources, translation strategies, and impacts conveyed by using such strategies. All six studies satisfied the eligibility assessment. Below is the detail of the articles.

Table 1. Articles Analysis

NO.	AUTHOR(S)	TITLE	YEAR	JOURNAL NAME	ACCREDI-TATION
1	Mega Tri Utami, Nisrina Satyaningrum	Translation Techniques of Indonesian Subtitle in Our Planet Documentary Series	2022	Wanastra : Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Volume 14 No. 2 September 2022	SINTA 4
2	Baharuddin, Lalu Jaswadi Putera, Lalu Ali Wardana, Desi Herayana, I Gusti Agung Ayu Sasmitha Dewi Anggita Pramestya, Alia Fitrida Camila, Auliya Rahma, 1M. Sazwan, Duwi Wulandari	An In-Depth Translation Assessment on Subtitling Strategies in Documentary YouTube Captions	2025	JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching, July 2025 Vol. 13, No. 3	SINTA 2
3	I Gusti Agung Ayu Sasmitha Dewi Anggita Pramestya, Baharuddin, Lalu Jaswadi Putera, Lalu Ali Wardana	An Analysis of Subtitling Strategy on Netflix Documentary Films "Our Planet"	2024	Didaktik, Vol. 10 No. 01, March 2024	SINTA 5
4	Vallen Mutiara Halim, Angelique Nitsa, Annisa Ayuretno, Wulandari Santoso	Translation Strategies of Cultural-specific Items in Translating Subtitles Indonesian Documentary "Perempuan Tana Humba"	2024	SALEE: Study of Applied Linguistics and English Education, Vol. 5, No. 1, January 2024	SINTA 4
5	Soimatul Fitriani, Nur Hasibin, Arin Inayah	A Descriptive Study on Subtitling Strategies of Culture-Specific Items (CSIS) in the Documentary Film Entitled "The Mark of Empire Majapahit"	2022	LUNAR (Language and Art), Vol. 6 No. 2 November 2022	SINTA 5
6	Ika Kartika Amilia, Diah Merrita	Rendering Historical and Sociocultural References through Subtitles: The Case of English-Indonesian Translation in Netflix's History 101	2025	JOALL (Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literature), Vol. 10 No. 2, August 2025	SINTA 2

4.1.2 Eligibility and Inclusion

During full-text evaluation, six studies presented explicit strategy-based analyses. Three studies made use of one documentary series as their source of data, i.e. Netflix's series "Our Planet," but they took different theoretical approaches to analyze the subtitle translation strategies. Finally, all studies were incorporated into the qualitative synthesis.

4.2 Synthesis of Findings

After initial examination was made, the articles were then analyzed in term of the research methods and the results. Elements of research methods being examined were theoretical frameworks being employed, the object of study, the data and their source. From the Results & Discussion section, the examined aspects were the subtitling or translation strategies, the subtitlers' reason for using such strategies, and the impacts of using such strategies on audience comprehension (if discussed in the article). Table 2 shows the results of the descriptive examination.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of the Articles

No.	Article (short label)	Object / Corpus	Theory / Framework used	Data	Source of data	Research instruments / procedure	Strategies / techniques	Reasons for using strategies	Impact on audience comprehension
1	**History 101 – JOALL (2025)**	Netflix *History 101* (8 episodes)	Cintas & Remael (2021): cultural reference categories + subtitling strategies	Historical & sociocultural references in ST–TT subtitle pairs	Netflix subtitles (EN–ID) from 8 eps (purposive sampling)	Textual analysis; coding & tabulation (spreadsheet); dictionaries (Cambridge, KBBI); peer cross-check	Loan/borrowing (dominant), literal, substitution, calque, transposition, explicitation	Borrowing to preserve specificity/technical nuance; transposition for Indonesian grammar; explicitation to support accessibility; literal/calque/substitution to balance fidelity vs readability within constraints	Not empirically tested; argued that choices aim to maintain cultural specificity while keeping meaning accessible for Indonesian viewers
2	**Perempuan Tana Humba – SALEE (2024)**	Documentary *Perempuan Tana Humba* (YouTube, ~30 min)	Newmark (1988): CSI categories; Aixelá: CSI strategies	CSIs (words/phrases) and their translations	YouTube documentary subtitles	Observation + note-taking; CSI extraction; tabulation of ST–TT; thematic/descriptive analysis	Repetition (dominant), extratextual gloss, linguistic (non-cultural) translation, absolute universalization, deletion/omission (least)	Repetition to keep cultural terms and avoid cultural loss; gloss to explain unfamiliar CSIs; universalization to improve accessibility; deletion only if non-essential	No audience test; discussion suggests preservation + selective explanation helps comprehension without erasing

									culture
3	**Mark of Majapahit – LUNAR (2022)**	Documentary *The Mark of Empire Majapahit*	Newmark: CSI types; Pedersen: CSI subtitling strategies	CSIs (words/phrases) in subtitle pairs	Documentary subtitles (EN–ID / ID–EN depending paper framing)	Observation/documentation; CSI listing; classification tables; qualitative descriptive analysis	Retention (dominant), calque, shift, specification, generalization; omission/substitution (least)	Retention when no TL equivalent and to keep proper names/terms; calque to keep form/meaning; specification/generalization/shift to adjust detail and naturalness; omission avoided due to meaning loss	No empirical test; notes potential confusion if retained without support; omission may reduce confusion but risks cultural/semantic loss
4	**Netflix Our Planet – IGA Ayu Sasmita (Didaktik)**	Netflix *Our Planet* (series/ episodes)	Gottlieb (1992): subtitling strategies	Subtitle segments (EN–ID)	Netflix documentary subtitles	Descriptive qualitative; data selection + tabulation of subtitle pairs; strategy labeling	Transfer (dominant), expansion, condensation, imitation, paraphrase, transcription, deletion	Transfer for direct meaning preservation; condensation for space/time limits; expansion for clarity; imitation/transcription for names/terms; paraphrase for naturalness	Not tested; implied that strategy mix supports clarity and function under audiovisual constraints
5	**YouTube Captions Our Planet – JOLLT (2025)**	*Our Planet* as YouTube videos (8 videos)	Pym: equivalence (assessment lens); Gottlieb (1992): strategies	Caption /subtitle lines in ST–TT pairs	YouTube captions for 8 videos (purposive; inclusion criteria)	Observation sheets; screen capture/recording; transcription templates; coding using equivalence + strategy labels	Transfer (dominant), expansion, condensation, transcription/paraphrase, deletion (the least)	Condensation to improve readability; deletion to remove redundancy/non-essential items; transfer/expansion to keep meaning while meeting clarity/constraint demands	Discussed conceptually: balanced strategy use supports readability /accuracy; over-condensation/deletion may reduce nuance and potentially harm comprehension
6	**Translation Techni**	Netflix *Our Planet*	Molina & Albir: 18	Subtitle lines (EN–ID)	Netflix documentary	Observation + note-	14 techniques found;	Established equivalent to keep meaning	Not experimentally

ques Our Planet – Wanastra (2022)	(series/ episodes)	translation techniques; Miles & Huberman: analysis steps		subtitles	taking; technique coding; reduction –display– verification	established equivalent (dominant), reduction, amplification, plus borrowing/ literal/lingu istic compressio n/particula rization, etc.	with natural TL usage; reduction/com pression to meet subtitle constraints; amplification when clarification needed	measured; argues techniques help Indonesia n viewers (including those with low English proficienc y) understan d content

4.3 Thematic Discussion

This systematic review synthesized findings from six studies examining English–Indonesian subtitling in documentary media, including Netflix documentary series and films as well as YouTube captioned documentaries. Using a PRISMA-style screening process applied to the six full-text articles provided, all records were retained for synthesis (n = 6), as each study explicitly reported a methods section and a results/discussion section that identified subtitling strategies or translation techniques in documentary subtitle/caption data. Across the included studies, methodological designs were largely descriptive and corpus-based: researchers extracted subtitle line pairs (ST–TT), coded them using one or more established frameworks, and reported frequencies alongside qualitative examples. Although the analytical lenses varied—ranging from general subtitling strategy models (e.g., Gottlieb; Cintas & Remael) to CSI-oriented models (Newmark coupled with Pedersen or Aixelá) and micro-technique taxonomies (Molina & Albir)—the studies converged on a similar set of functional translation behaviors that appear to characterize documentary subtitling into Indonesian.

A cross-study comparison indicates that the most consistently reported solutions fall into four recurring functional families: preservation-oriented rendering, explicitation, constraint-driven compression, and reformulation/adaptation. First, preservation-oriented strategies were prominent across the corpus, particularly when the documentary content contained dense historical, institutional, scientific, or culture-specific references. These strategies were labeled variously as loan/borrowing, retention, repetition, imitation, or transcription depending on the framework used, but they share the same functional intent: maintaining the source form (often partially or fully) to protect referential precision and cultural authenticity. The repeated prominence of preservation suggests that documentary subtitling tends to prioritize informational fidelity and authenticity, reflecting the genre's communicative purpose as explanatory and evidential discourse. However, several studies also acknowledge an inherent tension: while preservation maintains specificity, it can increase cognitive load when viewers lack relevant cultural or domain knowledge, particularly when retained items are not supported by contextual cues in the audiovisual channel.

Second, explicitation emerged as a recurring (though selective) solution to the potential opacity of preserved or culturally dense items. Across studies, explicitation appeared under labels such as expansion, extratextual gloss, amplification, specification, and explicitation itself. Functionally, these strategies aim to bridge knowledge gaps by adding brief explanatory material or narrowing meanings to more accessible references in the target language. In CSI-focused documentaries, explicitation was frequently justified as necessary for terms whose meanings are deeply embedded in local culture and therefore difficult to infer from the immediate context. In general documentary narration (e.g., nature and science content), explicitation was described as a means to maintain clarity when the source text relies on implicit assumptions. Nevertheless, explicitation is also constrained by subtitling's temporal and spatial limits; consequently, studies describe it

as deployed strategically rather than consistently, indicating that subtitlers must constantly weigh clarity gains against the risk of disrupting viewing flow or exceeding subtitle constraints.

Third, constraint-driven compression was consistently reported, especially in narration-heavy documentary content. Under Gottlieb's model and technique-based approaches, this family includes condensation, reduction, deletion/omission, and linguistic compression. The rationale is relatively stable across studies: documentary narration often contains dense propositional content delivered at a pace that may exceed feasible reading speed, making compression necessary to preserve overall coherence and subtitle readability. Compression is therefore framed as an operational response to subtitling constraints rather than purely a stylistic preference. At the same time, the studies converge on a cautionary point: excessive reduction or deletion risks attenuating nuance, weakening evidential detail, and in some cases producing shifts in emphasis. In other words, compression can improve legibility and pacing but may also introduce informational loss if not carefully managed.

Fourth, reformulation and adaptation strategies were present across the included studies, though typically less dominant than preservation and compression. These solutions include paraphrase, transposition, substitution, generalization, shift, calque, and literal translation/transfer. Their use was commonly justified by the need to produce natural Indonesian syntax and pragmatic clarity, as well as to accommodate differences in grammatical structure and conventional phrasing between English and Indonesian. This strategy family highlights the dual nature of documentary subtitling: it is not merely a transfer of information but also an act of re-encoding meaning into target-language norms under severe constraints. Notably, the presence of generalization and substitution in CSI-oriented studies indicates a pragmatic tendency to prioritize comprehensibility when highly specific cultural references cannot be carried over efficiently without explanation.

In terms of documented effects on audience comprehension, the evidence across the six studies is largely inferential rather than experimental. Most discussions frame impact through reasoned argumentation grounded in subtitling constraints and functional outcomes: preservation is argued to enhance authenticity and terminological precision, explicitation is presumed to support understanding of unfamiliar references, and compression is presented as facilitating readability under time/space constraints. However, none of the included studies provides robust reception-based validation (e.g., controlled comprehension testing, questionnaire-based viewer response, eye-tracking, or experimental comparisons between alternative subtitle solutions). As a result, the synthesis supports strong conclusions about "what strategies are used" and "why they are chosen," but only tentative conclusions about "how audiences actually comprehend" the subtitled content. What can be stated with greater confidence is the direction of the trade-offs recognized across studies: retention without support may raise processing demands; compression improves subtitle pace but can reduce nuance; and explicitation can enhance understanding but is limited by subtitle constraints and may affect viewing rhythm when overused.

Overall, the six studies collectively portray English–Indonesian documentary subtitling as a balancing act between fidelity to culturally and informationally dense source content and the practical limitations of subtitle form. The dominant strategic pattern is not a single "best" strategy but a layered combination: subtitlers often preserve key terms for accuracy and authenticity, compress surrounding material to meet readability constraints, and selectively explicate when a reference is likely to be opaque for Indonesian viewers. This layered pattern reflects the documentary genre's communicative priorities—informing, evidencing, and contextualizing—while also revealing a persistent need for stronger audience-centered evidence. Future work would benefit from reception-oriented methodologies that test how specific strategy combinations (e.g., retention vs. retention + gloss vs. substitution) influence Indonesian viewers' comprehension, recall, and perceived credibility of documentary content across platforms such as Netflix and YouTube.

5. Conclusions

This systematic review synthesized six studies on English–Indonesian documentary subtitling (Netflix and YouTube). Overall, the findings show that subtitlers repeatedly balance two main demands: preserving informational and cultural accuracy and meeting subtitle constraints (time, space, readability). Across different frameworks, the studies consistently report four broad solution patterns: preservation (borrowing/retention), selective explicitation (expansion/gloss), compression (condensation/reduction/deletion), and reformulation (paraphrase/transposition/generalization). This indicates that documentary subtitling is typically achieved through combined strategies, not a single approach.

However, most included studies discuss audience comprehension indirectly. They explain why certain strategies should help viewers, but they rarely test comprehension with actual audiences. As a result, evidence is stronger for describing what strategies are used than for proving how viewers understand them.

Among the possibilities for future research, two things can be considered: (1) conduct basic audience-based comprehension testing comparing alternative subtitle options (e.g., retention vs. retention+brief gloss), and (2) compare platform contexts (Netflix vs. YouTube) to see how different technical conditions shape strategy use and clarity.

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