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Analysis of Translation Techniques in Selected Songs from Taylor Swift's *"The Life of a Showgirl"*

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ABSTRACT

This study analysed the translation techniques employed in the Indonesian translation of three selected songs, "The Fate of Ophelia," "Elizabeth Taylor," and "Wi$h Li$t," from Taylor Swift's album The Life of a Showgirl (2025). The translated lyrics were obtained from Blinkboxmusic.com, an online platform providing unofficial Indonesian lyric translations. The three songs were selected because they represent different linguistic registers and contain diverse cultural references, including literary allusions, celebrity iconography, and contemporary colloquial expressions. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach and close comparative reading, this study uses Molina and Albir's taxonomy of translation techniques as its primary analytical framework. Data were collected through transcription, segmentation into translation units, technique classification, and pattern interpretation. The findings indicate that established equivalence (27.27%) and literal translation (18.18%), followed by adaptation, modulation, and amplification (each at 13.64%) are the most frequently identified techniques across the corpus. These techniques facilitate the transfer of culturally embedded meanings while maintaining readability and comprehensibility in Indonesian. The analysis also reveals a recurring tendency toward the formalization of colloquial English expressions into more standard Indonesian forms. Ultimately, this study enhances the understanding of audio-visual translation by demonstrating how specific techniques negotiate register variation and bridge cultural gaps in contemporary popular music.

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INTRODUCTION

Translation is fundamentally an act of cultural and linguistic mediation. When the source text is a song lyric, a genre characterized by its intricate interplay of sound, rhythm, imagery, and cultural specificity, the translator faces a uniquely demanding set of challenges (Low, 2016). Unlike prose or technical texts, song lyrics carry aesthetic

constraints that go beyond the semantic: a good translation must often attend simultaneously to meaning, tone, meter, and the emotional resonance that the original performs for its audience (Low, 2016). As popular music continues to circulate globally through streaming platforms, the demand for song lyric translation, particularly into Indonesian, has grown substantially, making the field an important site of inquiry for translation studies scholars. Taylor Swift's twelfth studio album, The Life of a Showgirl, released on October 3, 2025, presents an especially rich corpus for translation analysis.

The three songs were purposively selected on the basis of three shared characteristics that together provide a coherent and productive rationale for comparative analysis. First, all three songs are among the most widely discussed tracks in both international and Indonesian popular media, ensuring that Indonesian translations are available and in active circulation among target readers. Second, all three songs share a common structural feature: each contains a high density of culturally specific references that require transliteral intervention beyond simple literal transfer Shakespearean intertextuality in "The Fate of Ophelia," celebrity iconography and luxury brand references in "Elizabeth Taylor," and contemporary American consumer-cultural idiom in "WihLit" (Pedersen, 2011). Third, the three songs collectively represent the full spectrum of registers employed across the album from the literary-allusive to the cinematic-cultural to the intimate-colloquial ensuring that the analysis captures the breadth of translation challenges the album poses rather than focusing narrowly on a single register. Together, these three criteria ensure that the selected corpus is both representative and analytically productive. The album draws on a diverse range of literary, cinematic, and cultural references.

The opening track, "The Fate of Ophelia," engages directly with Shakespearean intertextuality, reimagining the tragic heroine from Hamlet. "Elizabeth Taylor," the album's second track and widely regarded as its emotional centrepiece, draws on the life and mythology of the iconic Hollywood actress, invoking references to Richard Burton, Portofino, Cartier diamonds, and the complex intersection of fame and femininity. "Wi$h Li$t," Taylor Swift's self-described favourite track on the album, operates in a more intimate register, cataloguing the aspirations and desires of both ordinary people and the artist herself. Together, these three songs traverse a wide spectrum of registers from the literary to the colloquial making them ideal objects for a comparative study of translation technique.

The present study is situated within the framework of Molina & Albir, whose taxonomy of translation techniques has become one of the most widely adopted analytical frameworks in descriptive translation studies, particularly in the Indonesian scholarly context (Atmojo, Nugroho, 2025; Mukminin, 2024; Nofianty, 2025). The framework identifies eighteen distinct techniques, ranging from literal translation and established equivalence to adaptation, modulation, and discursive creation, and has proven especially productive for the analysis of song lyrics, where technique choice has direct consequences for both semantic accuracy and pragmatic effectiveness. By applying this framework to Taylor Swift's lyrics and their Indonesian translations, this study aims to shed light on the translation decisions that govern how foreign cultural artifacts are domesticated for Indonesian audiences.

While previous studies have examined translation techniques in song lyrics, most have primarily focused on identifying and classifying the techniques employed by translators. Limited attention has been given to how translation techniques operate in contemporary song lyrics characterized by literary intertextuality, celebrity discourse, and consumer-cultural references. Moreover, few studies have explored how these techniques reflect broader translation tendencies such as domestication, cultural adaptation, and register shift in Indonesian song translation.

Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by not only identifying the translation techniques used in the Indonesian translations of selected songs from Taylor Swift's The Life of a Showgirl (2025), but also by examining how these techniques function in mediating culturally embedded meanings for Indonesian audiences. In addition, this study demonstrates how translation choices contribute to the domestication of foreign cultural references and the formalization of colloquial English expressions into more natural Indonesian forms. Thus, the research extends the application of Molina and Albir's framework to contemporary digital-era song lyrics and contributes to broader discussions on cultural mediation, intertextuality, and celebrity discourse in translation studies.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which is appropriate for the interpretive analysis of translation choices and their effects (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative description allows the researcher to attend closely to the particularities of individual translation decisions without reducing them to statistical frequencies (Sugiyono, 2019). At the same time, a descriptive orientation ensures that the analysis remains grounded in the textual data, avoiding interpretive overreach.

The analytical method is close comparative reading (Venuti, 2013), in which the English source lyrics and the Indonesian target texts are read in parallel, with attention to points of divergence and the techniques used to manage them. Each identified translation unit, typically a phrase or line, is classified according to (Molina; Albir, 2002) taxonomy, and the rationale for each classification is provided in the analysis. Where relevant, additional context is drawn to illuminate the management of cultural references. The primary data for this study consist of the English source lyrics of three songs from Taylor Swift's *The Life of a Showgirl* (2025), "The Fate of Ophelia," "Elizabeth Taylor," and "Wi$h Li$t", and their Indonesian translations as published on Blinkboxmusic.com. The bilingual format of these publications, presenting source and target lyrics in parallel, makes them particularly suitable for translation analysis. The songs were selected on the basis of their thematic and linguistic diversity: "The Fate of Ophelia" represents the literary-allusive register; "Elizabeth Taylor" represents the cinematic-cultural register; and "Wi$h Li$t" represents the intimate-colloquial register.

The data were collected and analyzed in a systematic four-stage process adapted from (Miles, Matthew B.; Huberman, A. Michael; Saldaña, 2019): (1) transcription of both source and target texts into a comparative table; (2) segmentation of the texts into translation units at the phrase or line level; (3) identification and classification of translation techniques applied to each unit, using Molina & Albir, as

the primary analytical lens; and (4) interpretation of the dominant patterns and their implications for the translation of culturally embedded song lyrics. To ensure analytical consistency, each translation unit was independently analyzed and then reviewed in context. Where a single unit exhibited multiple techniques, the primary technique was identified, with alternatives noted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the translation techniques used in the Indonesian translation of three songs from Taylor Swift's The Life of a Showgirl (2025). Across the selected corpus, a total of 22 translation units were identified and analyzed based on (Molina; Albir, 2002) taxonomy. Before examining individual songs, the overall quantitative distribution of the identified translation techniques is summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Overall Distribution of Translation Techniques across the Corpus

No	Translation Technique	Frequency *(f)*	Percentage *(P)*
1	Established Equivalence	*6*	27.27%
2	Literal Translation	*4*	18.18%
3	Adaptation	*3*	13.64%
4	Modulation	*3*	13.64%
5	Amplification	*3*	13.64%
6	Reduction	*2*	9.09%
7	Discursive Creation	*1*	4.55%
	Total *(N)*	22	100.00%

The quantitative findings indicate that established equivalence is the most dominant technique used across the entire corpus, accounting for 27.27% of the data. This is closely followed by literal translation (18.18%), while adaptation, modulation, and amplification appear with equal frequency at 13.64% each. These macro-patterns reveal how the translator consistently balances semantic accuracy with target-language readability, a core negotiation in the multi-faceted constraints of music text adaptation (Franzon, 2008; Sutopo, 2020). To ground these quantitative frequencies in structural textual evidence, the following subsections provide a comprehensive qualitative analysis of each song.

1. "The Fate of Ophelia": Literary Allusion and Intertextual Translation

"The Fate of Ophelia" is the opening track and lead single of The Life of a Showgirl. Lyrically, the song builds a sustained intertextual reference to Ophelia, the tragic heroine of Shakespeare's Hamlet, mixing Shakespearean diction with contemporary American slang to construct a narrative of romantic salvation. This generic hybridity

challenges the translator to navigate between the archaic and the modern, the literary and the colloquial.

The opening lines "I heard you calling on the megaphone / You wanna see me all alone" establish the contemporary register. The Indonesian translation renders these as "Kudengar kau memanggil lewat pengeras suara / Kau ingin melihatku sendiri saja," employing established equivalence (Molina; Albir, 2002). While "pengeras suara" straightforwardly preserves the meaning of "megaphone," the colloquial directness of "wanna" is formalized in Indonesian, reflecting the register asymmetry between colloquial English and standard Indonesian (Atmojo, Nugroho, 2025).

The chorus further juxtaposes Shakespearean elements with contemporary slang: "Keep it one hundred on the land, the sea, the sky / Pledge allegiance to your hands, your team, your vibes." The African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) phrase "keep it one hundred" has no direct equivalent; thus, the translator uses adaptation (Molina & Albir, 2002), replacing it with the semantic equivalent "Tetaplah jujur seratus persen di darat, laut, dan langit" for local readability. Additionally, the line "Pledge allegiance to your hands, your team, your vibes" invokes an American cultural ritual unfamiliar to Indonesian readers (Pedersen, 2011). The translation "Bersumpah setia pada tanganmu, timmu, dan energimu" shifts the civic-ritual frame into a universal frame of personal loyalty (modulation), while rendering "vibes" as "energimu" to make the slang more culturally accessible.

Finally, the song's bridge "'Tis locked inside my memory / And only you possess the key" employs the archaic diction "'Tis" to evoke the Shakespearean register. The translator renders this neutrally as "Hal itu" ("It"), applying reduction (Molina; Albir, 2002). Consequently, the original archaic stylistic register is lost, as comparable archaic Indonesian diction is not readily accessible to contemporary readers (Nofianty, 2025).

Table 2. Translation Techniques in "The Fate of Ophelia"

The source-language text	The target-language text	Technique
I might've drowned in the melancholy	*Aku mungkin tenggelam dalam melankolia*	Established Equivalence
Keep it one hundred on the land, the sea, the sky	*Tetaplah jujur seratus persen di darat, laut, dan langit*	Adaptation
Pledge allegiance to your hands, your team, your vibes	*Bersumpah setia pada tanganmu, timmu, dan energimu*	Modulation, Adaptation
The venom stole her sanity	*Racun itu merampas kewarasannya*	Literal Translation
Pledge allegiance to your hands, your team, your vibes	*Aku mungkin tenggelam dalam melankolia*	Established Equivalence
Tis locked inside my memory	*Hal itu terkunci dalam ingatanku*	Reduction
Saved my heart from the fate of Ophelia	*Menyelamatkan hatiku dari nasib Ophelia*	Established Equivalence

2. *"Elizabeth Taylor": Celebrity Iconography and Cultural Amplification*

"Elizabeth Taylor" is the most culturally dense of the three songs under analysis. The song constructs an extended parallel between Taylor Swift and the late Hollywood actress Elizabeth Taylor, deploying a network of culturally specific references to specific locations, material objects, biographical facts, and physical characteristics that presuppose considerable knowledge of Elizabeth Taylor's life and mythology. Taylor Swift has described her as "one of the most ultimate, quintessential showgirls" (Sager, 2025), and the song was the first written for the album.

The line "I'd cry my eyes violet" is translated as "*Aku akan menangis sampai mataku berubah ungu.*" The Indonesian version employs amplification (Molina; Albir, 2002): it adds the causal connective "*sampai*" ("until") and the verb "*berubah*" ("turn/change"), making explicit the causal logic implicit in the English. This expansion serves a dual purpose: it aids comprehensibility for readers unfamiliar with Elizabeth Taylor's famously violet eyes, while simultaneously preserving the allusion for those readers who are familiar with it. "I would trade the Cartier for someone to trust" is translated as "*Aku rela menukar perhiasan Cartier demi seseorang yang bisa dipercaya.*" The Indonesian version again employs amplification (Molina; Albir, 2002): "Cartier" is specified as "*perhiasan Cartier*" ("Cartier jewelry"), and the word "*rela*" ("willingly/gladly") is added to intensify the emotional weight of the sacrifice. This is a good example of amplification serving both semantic and affective purposes (Nofianty, 2025).

"All my white diamonds and lovers are forever" presents an interesting case because "white diamonds" operates on two levels simultaneously: as a literal description and as an allusion to Elizabeth Taylor's bestselling perfume White Diamonds. The Indonesian translation "*Semua berlian putihku dan para kekasihku adalah abadi*" renders this through established equivalence (Molina; Albir, 2002), preserving both the literal meaning and the implicit allusion. Readers familiar with the perfume will recognize the reference; those who are not will simply understand the literal sense (Pedersen, 2011).

Table 3. Translation Techniques in "Elizabeth Taylor"

The source-language text	The target-language text	Technique
All my white diamonds and lovers are forever	*Semua berlian putihku dan para kekasihku adalah abadi*	Established Equivalence
You're only as hot as your last hit, baby	*Kamu hanya sepanas hitmu terakhir, sayang*	Literal Translation
Oftentimes it doesn't feel so glamorous to be me	*Seringkali rasanya tidak begitu glamor menjadi aku*	Literal Translation
I'd cry my eyes violet	*Aku akan menangis sampai mataku berubah ungu*	Amplification

I would trade the Cartier for someone to trust	*Aku rela menukar perhiasan Cartier demi seseorang yang bisa dipercaya*	Amplification
Be my NY when Hollywood hates me	*Jadilah New York-ku saat Hollywood membenciku*	Established Equivalence
Tell me for real, do you think it's forever?	*Katakan padaku sejujurnya, apakah kamu pikir ini akan selamanya?*	Modulation

3. "Wi$h Li$t": Colloquialism, Aspiration, and Discursive Creation

"Wi$h Li$t" occupies a distinctive position within the three songs: where "The Fate of Ophelia" is literary and "Elizabeth Taylor" is cinematic, "Wi$h Li$t" is intimate and aspirational. Taylor Swift has described it as the last song written for the album and as her personal favorite, noting that it details "all these different things that people aspire to have in their lives things in their lifestyle or things they want to buy or places they want to go." The song's title itself with dollar signs substituted for the letter S-signals a self-aware engagement with consumer culture and the performance of desire.

The title "Wi$h Li$t" poses an immediate translation challenge. The orthographic play ($ for S) visually encodes the song's thematic preoccupation with money and aspiration. In the Indonesian translation, this is rendered as "*Daftar Keinginan*" ("Wish List"), which is the established Indonesian equivalent for the concept. This constitutes established equivalence combined with reduction (Molina; Albir, 2002): the orthographic playfulness of the English title is inevitably lost in translation, because Indonesian orthography does not permit the same kind of letter-symbol substitution (Atmojo, Nugroho, 2025).

"All the wishes that people are making all over the world" is translated as "*Semua harapan yang dipanjatkan orang-orang di seluruh dunia.*" The English "making wishes" is rendered as "*dipanjatkan*" (literally "offered up" or "raised"), which is the conventional Indonesian expression for making a prayer or wish (Mukminin, 2024). This is a modulation (Molina; Albir, 2002): the English conceptual frame ("making" as an act of production) is replaced by an Indonesian conceptual frame ("*dipanjatkan*" as an act of aspiration or supplication), which is more culturally natural. The addition of "*dipanjatkan*" also introduces a degree of amplification, as it implies earnestness and emotional investment not explicitly present in the English. The line "Then in the course, it talks about what mine would be" is translated as "*Lalu pada bagian tertentu, lagu ini membicarakan apa yang menjadi milikku.*" This represents a case of discursive creation (Molina; Albir, 2002): the phrase "in the course" is ambiguous in English (it may refer to the course of the song or the chorus), and the Indonesian translation resolves this ambiguity by opting for "*pada bagian tertentu*" ("in a certain part"), which is contextually appropriate but not semantically equivalent to any specific reading of the source (Nofianty, 2025).

Table 4. Translation Techniques in "Wi$h Li$t"

The source-language text	The target-language text	Technique
Wi$h Li$t (judul/title)	*Daftar Keinginan*	Established Equivalence, Reduction
All the wishes people are making all over the world	*Semua harapan yang dipanjatkan orang-orang di seluruh dunia*	Modulation, Amplification
Things they want to buy or places they want to go	*Hal-hal yang ingin mereka beli atau tempat yang ingin mereka kunjungi*	Literal Translation
Then in the course, it talks about what mine would be	*Lalu pada bagian tertentu, lagu ini membicarakan apa yang menjadi milikku*	Discursive Creation
I'm really into that one	*Aku benar-benar menyukainya*	Adaptation

Cross-Song Analysis: Dominant Patterns and Implications

Across the three songs, the most dominant translation techniques are established equivalence, adaptation, modulation, amplification, and discursive creation. This distribution is broadly consistent with the findings of previous studies on song lyric translation in the Indonesian context (Atmojo, Nugroho, 2025; Mukminin, 2024; Nofianty, 2025), and reflects the specific challenges posed by culturally embedded popular song lyrics. Established equivalence from Molina & Albir is dominant wherever the source lyrics contains culturally recognized expressions, proper nouns, or conventional phrases that have accepted Indonesian counterparts. Adaptation frequently appears in passages containing culturally specific slang, idioms, or references that may be less familiar to Indonesian readers. Modulation tends to be employed when the conceptual framing of the English source text does not align naturally with Indonesian pragmatic conventions.

In addition to the translation techniques discussed above, the findings can also be analyzed through broader translation perspectives related to domestication, register shift, and cultural adaptation.

Domestication and Foreignization in Song Translation

Besides using Molina and Albir's theory, the findings of this study can also be related to broader perspectives in song translation and cultural adaptation (Low, 2016). According to (Low, 2016), song translation often involves adjustments that make the lyrics more understandable and natural for target audiences.

Based on the analysis, the Indonesian translations in these songs tend to use domestication more often. Several English expressions that are closely related to American culture or slang are translated into more familiar Indonesian expressions. For example, the phrase "keep it one hundred" is translated into "*tetaplah jujur seratus*

persen." Even though the slang nuance from the original lyric is reduced, Indonesian readers can still understand the meaning easily.

This strategy helps Indonesian audiences understand the songs better (Mukminin, 2024), especially readers who may not be familiar with English slang, celebrity culture, or Shakespeare references. However, some stylistic uniqueness from the source lyrics is also reduced in the process. One example can be seen in the title "Wi$h Li$t." The use of the dollar sign in the original title gives a visual connection to money and consumer culture, but this meaning cannot be fully maintained in the Indonesian translation *"Daftar Keinginan."*

Even so, some foreign cultural elements are still maintained in the translations, such as "Hollywood," "Cartier," and "New York." These references are not replaced with Indonesian cultural equivalents because they are already widely recognized by global audiences. This shows that the translator combines domestication with selective foreignization depending on the context of the lyrics.

Register Shift and the Formalization of Colloquial English

Another important finding in this study is the shift from informal English expressions into more formal Indonesian language. Many English song lyrics use contractions, slang, and casual expressions to create a more personal and emotional feeling (Atmojo, Nugroho, 2025). However, in the Indonesian translations, these expressions are often changed into more standard Indonesian forms.

For example, the word *"wanna"* is translated into *"ingin,"* which sounds more formal in Indonesian. Similarly, "I'm really into that one" becomes *"Aku benar-benar menyukainya."* Although the meaning is still delivered clearly, the casual tone from the original lyric becomes less noticeable.

This may happen because written Indonesian generally uses more standard grammar structures compared to English song lyrics. Translators may also choose safer and more neutral expressions to make the lyrics easier to understand for wider audiences (Baker, 2018). As a result, the translations sound more natural in Indonesian, but some of the original informal atmosphere is reduced.

In several lines, the translator also adds extra explanation to make the meaning clearer. For example, "I'd cry my eyes violet" is translated into *"Aku akan menangis sampai mataku berubah ungu."* The Indonesian version explains the meaning more directly, so readers can understand the imagery more easily. This shows the use of amplification to improve clarity for target readers (Molina; Albir, 2002).

Implications of the Study

This study shows that song lyrics are a very interesting object to analyze in translation studies. Lyrics are unique because they contain a lot of cultural references, emotional expressions, slang, and different language styles. Because of this complexity, translating lyrics is definitely not just about changing words from one language to another. The most important part is how to keep the original emotion and cultural context alive in the target language (Low, 2016). Therefore, this research implies that lyric translation must be treated as a whole communicative process, not just a simple linguistic transfer.

One of the main findings in this research is how modern popular songs now contain many elements from internet culture and celebrity identity. This is a big challenge for translators today. To solve this, the study shows that Indonesian translators usually prefer to prioritize readability and naturalness for local readers. They often choose specific techniques like adaptation, modulation, and amplification (Nofianty, 2025). By using these techniques, translators can simplify foreign cultural references so the text does not sound weird or awkward when read by Indonesian audiences.

This preference for readability also shows that translators often have to act as a cultural bridge. When dealing with fast-evolving internet slang, a literal translation usually fails because local readers will find it confusing. By adjusting these expressions, the translator ensures that the humor, sarcasm, or emotional weight of the song is still delivered well. In the end, choosing the right translation technique will decide how easily the audience can connect with the song's meaning. It proves that changing or sacrificing minor stylistic elements from the original text is sometimes necessary to make the translation more acceptable.

Lastly, this study gives useful insights for students and other researchers who study translation, especially in popular culture and music. The way this research maps out lyric translation can be a good reference for future projects. Other researchers can develop this topic further by comparing lyrics from different digital streaming platforms, or by doing direct studies to see how audiences actually react to the translated songs.

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the translation techniques employed in the Indonesian translation of three songs from Taylor Swift's *The Life of a Showgirl* (2025) utilizing Molina and Albir's taxonomy. The quantitative analysis reveals that established equivalence (27.27%) and literal translation (18.18%) dominate the corpus, supported by adaptation, modulation, and amplification (each at 13.64%). Together, these techniques serve as the primary mechanisms to navigate the multiple layers of challenges posed by these culturally embedded and register-diverse lyrics. These findings align with prior research in the Indonesian (Atmojo, Nugroho, 2025; Mukminin, 2024; Nofianty, 2025), while extending the analytical scope to a new and highly complex contemporary corpus. The management of cultural references emerged as a central challenge, requiring varied translation responses depending on the transparency of the source reference and the target audience's background knowledge. Distinct translation strategies were essential to handle the Shakespearean intertextuality of "The Fate of Ophelia," the celebrity iconography of "Elizabeth Taylor," and the consumer-cultural idioms of "Wi$h Li$t". Furthermore, a systematic tendency toward the formalization of colloquial English registers was observed in the Indonesian translations. This suggests that register asymmetry remains a persistent yet undertheorized challenge in song lyric translation (Low, 2016), highlighting the translator's priority to favor readability and target-language naturalness over preserving the stylistic foreignness of the source text (Akbari, 2012). While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited to three selected songs from a single unofficial translation source. Future research could expand the corpus or compare multiple

translation sources to provide broader and more comprehensive perspectives on contemporary song translation practices

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