

**THE COMPREHENSION STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR
ENGLISH AND WHITE AMERICAN
VERNACULAR ENGLISH IN THE INDONESIAN
SUBTITLES OF THE FILM *8 MILE***

Eriana Crista br Tambunan, Febrina S.L Lumbantobing, Susanti

Universitas HKBP Nommensen Medan

Email: eriana.cristabrtambunan@student.uhn.ac.id,

febrinalumbantobing@uhn.ac.id, susanti@uhn.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study examines the translation of vernacular language in the Indonesian subtitles of *8 Mile*, focusing on linguistic features, subtitling strategies, and identity representation shifts. The research aims to identify the types of vernacular varieties used in the film, analyze the subtitling strategies applied in translating those varieties, and investigate how such strategies affect the representation of social identity in the target language.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a sociolinguistic and audiovisual translation approach. The data consist of 60 selected utterances containing vernacular features, particularly African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and White American Vernacular English (WAVE). The data were collected through observation and documentation techniques and analyzed using linguistic classification and subtitling strategy frameworks.

The findings reveal that AAVE features dominate the dataset, including double negation, non-standard subject verb agreement, and the use of “ain’t.” WAVE features are primarily phonological reductions and informal lexical expressions. In translating these vernacular forms into Indonesian, the dominant subtitling strategies identified are leveling, neutralization, softening, omission. Among these, structural normalization through leveling and neutralization appears most frequently.

Furthermore, the analysis of identity representation shift indicates that leveling is the most dominant outcome, followed by loss, while preservation occurs in limited cases. Although the subtitles generally maintain semantic meaning and narrative coherence, they significantly reduce sociolinguistic markedness. As a result, the linguistic features that function as markers of racialized and subcultural identity in the source language become less explicitly represented in the target language.

This study concludes that the translation of vernacular language in audiovisual media is not merely a linguistic transfer process but a mediated reconstruction shaped by structural, technical, and ideological constraints. While narrative meaning is preserved, sociolinguistic distinctiveness is partially reduced in the Indonesian subtitles.

Keywords: *vernacular language, AAVE, WAVE, subtitling strategies, identity shift, audiovisual translation*

1. PENDAHULUAN

Background Of The Study

In the era of global audiovisual media, films play a crucial role in shaping audiences' understanding of language, culture, and social identity. As cinematic productions circulate beyond their original linguistic and cultural boundaries, translation becomes an essential bridge that enables international audiences to access meaning. Among various modes of translation, subtitling is the most widely used in multilingual film distribution due to its efficiency and cost-effectiveness. However, subtitling does not merely transfer spoken dialogue into written text; it inevitably involves interpretation, selection, and reduction of linguistic meaning under strict technical constraints. These constraints often affect how social meanings embedded in language are conveyed to the target audience.

One of the most challenging aspects of subtitling lies in the translation of non-standard language varieties, particularly vernacular speech. Vernacular language is deeply connected to social identity, power relations, and cultural belonging. When vernaculars are translated into another language, especially into subtitles that prioritize brevity and clarity, there is a high risk that sociolinguistic nuances will be simplified or erased. As a result, subtitles may successfully convey propositional meaning while simultaneously losing the social meanings that are crucial to character construction and narrative interpretation.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is not a neutral system of signs. Language functions as a social practice

through which speakers construct identity, negotiate social positions, and signal group membership. Linguistic variation naturally emerges from social diversity, producing different registers, dialects, and vernacular varieties. Vernacular language, in particular, represents the most natural and unmonitored form of speech used by speakers in everyday interaction. Contrary to popular assumptions, vernaculars are not deficient or incorrect forms of language. Linguistic research has consistently demonstrated that vernacular varieties possess systematic grammatical structures, stable patterns, and communicative effectiveness comparable to standard language varieties.

Despite their linguistic legitimacy, vernaculars are often socially evaluated in unequal ways. Standard language is typically associated with education, authority, and prestige, whereas vernacular varieties are frequently stigmatized due to their association with marginalized social groups. This unequal valuation reflects broader social hierarchies related to race, class, and power. Consequently, vernacular language becomes a key site for examining how linguistic choices reflect and reinforce social inequality.

In the context of American English, vernacular variation is particularly salient due to the country's complex social history involving racial segregation, economic stratification, and regional diversity. Among the various vernacular varieties that have emerged, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and White American Vernacular English (WAVE) occupy prominent yet socially distinct positions. These two varieties differ not

only in linguistic features but also in the social meanings they index.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is one of the most extensively studied vernacular varieties in sociolinguistics. It is associated with African American communities and has developed through historical processes shaped by slavery, segregation, and systemic racial discrimination. Linguistically, AAVE is characterized by distinctive grammatical features such as copula absence, invariant *be*, habitual constructions, negative concord, and unique lexical items. These features operate according to consistent grammatical rules rather than random deviation from Standard American English. Beyond its structural characteristics, AAVE functions as a powerful marker of African American identity, cultural solidarity, and resistance to dominant norms. In cultural domains such as hip-hop, rap music, and spoken-word performance, AAVE is closely associated with authenticity, verbal skill, and social credibility.

White American Vernacular English (WAVE), although less frequently examined in academic research, is equally significant from a sociolinguistic standpoint. WAVE generally refers to informal, non-standard varieties of English used by white speakers, particularly those from working-class or regionally marked backgrounds. Linguistically, WAVE may include non-standard verb forms, informal negation, reduced pronunciation, and colloquial lexical choices. Unlike AAVE, WAVE is not strongly racialized; instead, it primarily indexes class, locality, and social background. While WAVE also

diverges from standard norms, it is often perceived as less stigmatized due to its association with socially dominant groups. This asymmetry highlights how social power influences the evaluation of linguistic variation.

The distinction between AAVE and WAVE demonstrates that vernacular language encodes different dimensions of social identity. AAVE is closely tied to race and collective historical experience, whereas WAVE is more strongly associated with class and regional belonging. In social interaction, these vernaculars allow speakers to position themselves and others within complex social hierarchies. Therefore, analyzing the contrast between AAVE and WAVE provides valuable insight into how language reflects and reproduces social structures.

2. KAJIAN TEORI

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that combines **sociolinguistics**, **audiovisual translation (subtitling)**, and **identity representation** to analyze how vernacular language is translated in film subtitles. The framework is designed to ensure analytical focus and coherence by employing **three core theoretical pillars** that are directly applied in the data analysis.

2.1.1 Sociolinguistic Theory of Vernacular Language

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this study draws primarily on theories of **language variation and vernacular speech** as proposed by Labov (1972), Green (2002), Rickford (1999), and Wolfram and Schilling (2016). Vernacular

varieties are understood as **systematic, rule-governed forms of language** that function as markers of social identity, group membership, and social positioning.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is treated as a socially and historically grounded variety that indexes racial identity, cultural affiliation, and solidarity within African American communities. Its grammatical, phonological, and lexical features such as invariant *be*, copula absence, and negative concord are analyzed as meaningful linguistic resources rather than deviations from Standard English. White American Vernacular English (WAVE), in contrast, is conceptualized as a non-standard variety associated primarily with **class and regional identity**, particularly among white working-class speakers. Although linguistically closer to the standard variety, WAVE still functions as an identity marker within specific social contexts.

These sociolinguistic theories serve as the foundation for **identifying, classifying, and interpreting** vernacular features in the source text of the film *8 Mile*. They allow the researcher to determine whether a dialogue exhibits characteristics of AAVE or WAVE and to explain the social meanings attached to each variety within the narrative.

2.1.2 Subtitling Strategies in Audiovisual Translation

To analyze how vernacular expressions are rendered in Indonesian subtitles, this study adopts **subtitling strategy theory**, with particular reference to Gottlieb's (1992) classification of subtitling strategies. Gottlieb identifies several strategies commonly used in subtitle translation, including **transfer,**

condensation, paraphrase, and deletion, which are especially relevant in audiovisual contexts due to technical constraints such as time, space, and readability.

Subtitling theory as developed by Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007; 2021) further explains that subtitles must balance linguistic accuracy with audience accessibility. As a result, translators often prioritize semantic clarity over stylistic or sociolinguistic variation. In the context of vernacular language, this frequently leads to **neutralization or standardization**, where non-standard features in the source language are rendered into more neutral forms in the target language.

In this study, subtitling strategies function as **analytical tools** to examine how AAVE and WAVE features are transferred, reduced, modified, or omitted in Indonesian subtitles. By identifying the strategies used for each vernacular instance, the research evaluates the extent to which translation practices preserve or diminish sociolinguistic distinctions between the two varieties.

2.1.3 Identity Representation in Translation

The third theoretical pillar of this study concerns **identity representation in translation**, drawing on sociolinguistic and translation-oriented perspectives proposed by Baker (2011; 2018) and Eckert (2018). Identity is understood as a socially constructed phenomenon that is indexed through linguistic choices, including dialect, style, and register.

In audiovisual narratives such as *8 Mile*, vernacular language plays a crucial role in constructing character identity, social hierarchy, and group belonging.

When vernacular varieties are translated into subtitles, shifts in linguistic form may result in shifts in identity representation. The loss, leveling, or modification of vernacular features can alter how characters are perceived in terms of race, class, authenticity, and power relations.

This study conceptualizes identity representation as observable through **translation shifts**, particularly when AAVE and WAVE are rendered into similar or identical forms in Indonesian. The framework allows the researcher to assess whether subtitling strategies contribute to **identity preservation, identity reduction, or identity leveling**, and how these outcomes affect the sociolinguistic contrast central to the film's narrative.

2.1.4 Integration of the Theoretical Framework

The three theoretical components sociolinguistic theory, subtitling strategies, and identity representation are integrated to form a coherent analytical framework. Sociolinguistic theory is used to identify and interpret vernacular features in the source text, subtitling theory explains how these features are translated under technical constraints, and identity theory provides the lens for evaluating the sociocultural impact of translation choices. Through this integrated framework, the study systematically examines (1) the vernacular features of AAVE and WAVE in the film *8 Mile*, (2) the subtitling strategies applied in their Indonesian translations, and (3) the resulting representation of social identity in the target text. This framework ensures that the analysis remains focused, theoretically

grounded, and directly aligned with the research questions and objectives.

3. METODOLOGI PENELITIAN

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach by Creswell (2014) with an interpretative and comparative design. A qualitative approach is selected because the focus of this study is not on measuring frequency or numerical patterns, but on examining how meaning, particularly sociolinguistic and identity-related meaning, is constructed and transformed through subtitle translation. The object of analysis consists of vernacular language forms and their sociocultural functions, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement.

The study is interpretative in nature, as it seeks to analyze how subtitling strategies mediate the social meanings embedded in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and White American Vernacular English (WAVE) when rendered into Indonesian subtitles. Identity representation in this research is understood as a qualitative outcome shaped by translation choices, rather than a variable that can be statistically quantified. Therefore, an interpretative approach is necessary to evaluate shifts in identity representation, including identity preservation, identity leveling, and identity loss.

In addition, the study adopts a comparative design to examine how two distinct vernacular varieties AAVE and WAVE are treated differently or similarly within the same subtitling context. By comparing these vernaculars, the study aims to reveal patterns of translation that

affect the representation of race- and class-based identities in Indonesian subtitles. This comparative qualitative design enables a systematic analysis of translation strategies and their implications, rather than a mere description of linguistic forms.

3.2 The Source Of the Data

The data source of this study is the film *8 Mile* (2002), directed by Curtis Hanson, along with its Indonesian subtitles. The film is selected because it contains extensive use of vernacular language, particularly African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and White American Vernacular English (WAVE), which function as markers of social identity within the narrative.

The data of this study consist of selected utterances in the film's dialogue that contain features of AAVE and WAVE, along with their corresponding Indonesian subtitle translations. The source language of the data is English, while the target language is Indonesian. The Indonesian subtitles analyzed in this study are taken from an official subtitle version to ensure reliability and consistency in translation.

3.3 The Instrument For Collecting

Data

In qualitative research, the instrument plays an essential role in ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the data collection process. Unlike quantitative studies that rely on standardized measurement tools, qualitative research positions the researcher as the primary instrument. The researcher is responsible for determining the focus of the study, selecting and identifying relevant data, interpreting linguistic features, and drawing conclusions based on contextual understanding. For this reason, the researcher's ability to apply sociolinguistic and subtitling theories becomes central to the reliability of the analysis.

In addition to the researcher as the main instrument, this study also employs several supporting instruments that help facilitate the systematic and precise collection of data. These instruments include technological tools, documentation materials, and theoretical frameworks that serve as analytical guides. The supporting instruments used in this research consist of:

1. The film *8 Mile* (2002) accessed legally through Amazon Prime Video, which provides the original English dialogues along with the official Indonesian subtitles. The use of a legally distributed version ensures that the subtitles analyzed represent the professional and authorized work of the platform's subtitlers.
2. A laptop or computer, used to access the film, review scenes repeatedly, document important segments, and record accurate time codes.
3. The official subtitle feature embedded in the Amazon Prime Video platform, allowing the researcher to verify the Indonesian translations of each dialogue.
4. A data identification sheet, which serves as a structured tool for recording the dialogues that contain features of AAVE or WAVE, their subtitle equivalents, and the translation strategies that appear.

These instruments were selected because they align with the nature of the data, which consist of dialectal features embedded in film dialogues and their Indonesian subtitle translations. The instruments also ensure that the identification, selection, and interpretation of data are conducted in a methodical manner and grounded in established theoretical principles. Their use enhances the consistency and reliability of the research, particularly in determining whether a dialogue qualifies as relevant data.

During the data collection process, these instruments are applied through several steps:

1. repeatedly watching the film *8 Mile* to understand the social and conversational context of each scene;
2. noting every dialogue containing identifiable AAVE or WAVE features;
3. recording the corresponding Indonesian subtitle and its time code;
4. organizing the selected data into the identification table;
5. applying sociolinguistic theories to categorize the dialectal features; and
6. using translation and subtitling theories to analyze the strategies used in the Indonesian subtitle.

To provide a clearer overview, the instruments used in this study are summarized in the following table:

Table 3.1 Instrument Of Collecting Data

N o	Instrum ent	Functio n	Data/Out put
1.	Research er	Main instrume nt for selecting and analyzin g data	Analytical notes, interpretat ions ²
2.	<i>8 Mile</i> (Amazo n Prime Video)	Source of AAVE and WAVE dialogue s	English utterances, time codes
3.	Official Indonesi an subtitles	Source of translatio n equivale nts	Subtitle text
4.	Data identific ation sheet	Docume nting and classifi ng data	Tables, checklists

With these primary and supporting instruments, the data collection process in this

study is conducted in a structured, reliable, and theoretically grounded manner. These instruments ensure that the selected dialogues and subtitle translations are relevant to the research objectives and align with the principles of qualitative linguistic analysis.

3.4 The Technique Of Collecting Data

In qualitative research, data collection techniques ensure that the process of obtaining data is conducted systematically and aligned with the objectives of the study. These techniques serve as a guide for selecting, recording, and documenting the data so that the findings are accurate and dependable. As stated by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), qualitative data collection involves observing, noting details, and examining documents in depth. Therefore, the data collection procedures in this study are designed to identify film dialogues containing features of AAVE and WAVE and to record their corresponding Indonesian subtitles in a structured manner.

4. HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study by interpreting the results in relation to sociolinguistic theory, subtitling strategies, and previous studies. It focuses on how vernacular language functions as a marker of social identity, how linguistic features are represented in film dialogue, how subtitling strategies are applied, and how these strategies influence identity representation in the Indonesian subtitles.

4.2.1 Vernacular Language as Social Identity Marker

The findings of this study demonstrate that vernacular language in the film *8 Mile* functions as a crucial marker of social identity, particularly in representing racial and class distinctions among characters. The dominance of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the dataset

(63.3%) indicates that linguistic variation is closely tied to the cultural and social environment portrayed in the film, especially within the hip-hop community. This finding supports the sociolinguistic perspective proposed by William Labov (1972), who argues that vernacular language represents the most natural form of speech and serves as an indicator of group identity and social positioning. In the context of this film, AAVE is not merely a linguistic variation but a symbolic resource that reflects cultural authenticity, solidarity, and in-group membership.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with John R. Rickford (2019), who emphasizes that AAVE functions as a strong marker of African American identity in media representation. The frequent use of AAVE in rap battles and informal interactions in the film reinforces its role as a linguistic expression of cultural legitimacy and resistance.

In contrast, the use of White American Vernacular English (WAVE) reflects class-based identity rather than racial identity. This aligns with the argument of Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling (2016), who state that white vernacular varieties are more closely associated with regional and socioeconomic background. However, unlike AAVE, WAVE carries less stigmatization, which reflects broader social power dynamics.

Compared to previous studies, this research extends existing findings by not only identifying vernacular usage but also examining the interaction between two distinct vernacular varieties within the same film. While earlier studies tend to focus on a single variety, this study highlights how the contrast between

AAVE and WAVE contributes to the construction of social boundaries and identity negotiation.

4.2.2 Linguistic Features in Film

Dialogue

The analysis reveals that slang (21 occurrences) is the most dominant linguistic feature, followed by confrontational expressions, double negation, and copula deletion. This indicates that informal lexical choices and expressive language play a central role in constructing the social environment of the characters.

This finding supports the argument of H. Samy Alim (2018), who states that vernacular language in hip-hop culture functions as a performative tool for expressing identity, power, and authenticity. In the film, the use of slang and confrontational expressions is particularly evident in rap battle scenes, where language becomes a means of asserting dominance and gaining social recognition.

In addition, the presence of grammatical features such as double negation and copula deletion confirms the systematic nature of AAVE, as proposed by Lisa Green (2002). These features are not random deviations from standard English but follow consistent linguistic rules that contribute to meaning-making and identity construction.

However, when compared to previous studies on subtitle translation, such as Mulyani and Pratama (2023), it becomes evident that these rich linguistic features are often simplified in translation. Their study found that informal language tends to be reduced through paraphrase and

condensation strategies, which may limit the representation of stylistic variation in the target language.

This study contributes to the field by showing that the reduction of linguistic features does not only affect stylistic variation but also impacts the representation of social identity, particularly when multiple vernacular varieties are involved.

4.2.3 Structural Constraints and Translation Choices

The findings indicate that subtitling strategies such as leveling, neutralization, softening, and omission are frequently used in translating vernacular language into Indonesian. These strategies reflect the constraints of audiovisual translation, including limited space, reading time, and the need for clarity.

This result is in line with the theory proposed by Jorge Díaz-Cintas (2020), who argues that subtitling is a constrained form of translation that often prioritizes readability over linguistic variation. As a result, non-standard language features are frequently simplified or neutralized in subtitles.

Similarly, the findings support Zhu (2024), who found that dialect leveling is a common phenomenon in subtitle translation, particularly when translating into languages that do not have equivalent sociolinguistic variations. In this study, both AAVE and WAVE are often translated into neutral Indonesian forms, resulting in reduced differentiation between characters.

However, this study goes beyond previous research by demonstrating that these translation choices are not merely technical decisions but also have sociocultural

implications. The use of leveling and neutralization strategies contributes to the homogenization of linguistic variation, which may obscure the social distinctions embedded in the source text.

4.2.4 Identity Shift in Subtitle Translation

One of the most significant findings of this study is the dominance of identity loss (25 data), followed by identity leveling (21 data), while identity preservation occurs in only a limited number of cases (14 data). This distribution indicates that the translation of vernacular language into Indonesian subtitles frequently results in the reduction or elimination of sociolinguistic meaning.

This finding supports the argument of Mona Baker (2018), who states that translation is not a neutral process but involves ideological choices that shape the representation of social identity. The neutralization of vernacular language in subtitles can be seen as a form of ideological filtering, where socially marked language is transformed into more acceptable or accessible forms.

Furthermore, the results are consistent with Zhu (2024), who found that subtitle translation often leads to dialect leveling, reducing distinctions between different social groups. In this study, both AAVE and WAVE are frequently translated into similar Indonesian expressions, which diminishes the contrast between racial and class identities.

However, this study provides a more nuanced contribution by distinguishing between identity leveling and identity loss. While previous studies often treat these phenomena as a single process, this research shows that identity leveling still

retains some degree of informality, whereas identity loss results in complete neutralization.

In the context of the film, this shift has important implications for audience perception. Characters who originally display strong vernacular identities may appear linguistically homogeneous in the Indonesian subtitles. As a result, the sociolinguistic richness of the original dialogue, particularly in representing race, class, and cultural belonging, becomes less visible to the target audience.

5. KESIMPULAN DAN SARAN

Conclusion

Based on the analysis conducted in Chapter IV, several conclusions can be drawn in relation to the research problems of this study.

1. In terms of subtitling strategies, the study finds that several strategies are used in translating vernacular language into Indonesian subtitles, namely leveling, neutralization, softening, and omission. Among these, leveling emerges as the most dominant strategy. This indicates that translators tend to simplify or standardize vernacular expressions in order to ensure clarity and readability for the target audience. Additionally, neutralization and softening are used to reduce the intensity or markedness of certain expressions, while omission is applied when certain elements are considered unnecessary or difficult to translate.

2. The study shows that the use of subtitling strategies significantly influences identity representation. The findings reveal three types of identity shifts: preservation, leveling, and loss. However, identity leveling is the most frequently occurring shift, indicating that distinctions between different vernacular varieties are often reduced in the subtitle. In some cases, identity loss also occurs when vernacular features are completely omitted. Only a small portion of data demonstrates identity preservation, where the original social meaning is maintained. This suggests that although the subtitles successfully convey the general meaning, they tend to reduce or simplify the sociolinguistic aspects of language, particularly those related to race and social class.

Overall, this study concludes that subtitling is not only a linguistic process but also a process that affects social meaning. While the subtitles remain effective in delivering the message, they inevitably alter the representation of identity embedded in the original language.

5.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several suggestions are proposed for future research and practical application.

First, for future researchers, it is recommended to expand the scope of the study by analyzing more films or different genres in order to obtain more

comprehensive results regarding vernacular translation. Future studies may also incorporate audience reception analysis to examine how viewers interpret and understand identity representation in subtitles.

Second, for translation studies, it is suggested that researchers explore alternative strategies that can better preserve sociolinguistic meaning, especially in translating vernacular language. This may contribute to a deeper understanding of how translation can maintain both linguistic and cultural aspects.

Third, for subtitle translators, it is important to be more aware of the sociolinguistic values embedded in vernacular language. Although technical constraints such as space and time cannot be avoided, translators are encouraged to consider ways to maintain identity representation as much as possible without sacrificing clarity.

Finally, this study is expected to contribute to the development of sociolinguistics and translation studies, particularly in understanding the relationship between language, identity, and translation in audiovisual media.

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