
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Misinterpretation of Brainrot Humor by Automated Translation in TikTok Influencer Nathasya's Content

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| ABSTRACT

The expansion of social media has led to the emergence of new types of digital humour, including the niche internet humour genre known as "brainrot" humour, characterised by bizarre, viral catchphrases, memes, and references to context. Machine translation systems struggle with "brainrot" humour because it's so deeply embedded in internet culture and shared digital experiences. This research intends to analyse the untranslatability of "brainrot" humour in Nathasya's TikTok content and to find the elements that cause translation failure. The method of the research is qualitative descriptive. The theory used in the analysis is Mona Baker's theory of translation equivalence. Data was taken from a selected TikTok video that had "brainrot" humour expressions and their translations generated by TikTok's automatic translation tool. By means of observation, documentation, and manual comparative study eleven "brainrot" terms were discovered and analysed. Results suggest that majority of these idioms are not translatable with high accuracy, as their meaning is highly affected by online slang, meme culture, and specific use in some communities. In terms such as "Slay," "Skibidi Toilet Rizz," "Level 10 Gyatt," and "What The Sigma?" loss of meaning, distortion or outright translation failure was found. The present study shows that the problems of translation mostly present on the level of lexical equivalence, culture-specific ideas and pragmatic equivalence. Machine translation algorithms tend to focus on lexical forms and ignore cultural references and comedic meaning present in the source text. As a result, the comic effect is sometimes lost in translation. This study finds that the humour of "brainrot" is very difficult to automatically translate since it depends on digital culture, contextual awareness, and shared online experiences.

| KEYWORDS

Humor, brainrot, automatic translation, translation, TikTok

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

With the advent of social media, especially TikTok, other kinds of online communication have been developed that are based on internet trends with the use of humour (Matamoros-Fernández, 2023). Another example is "brainrot humor", humour that arises from the repetition of outrageous content, hyper-specific online references, wordplay, and intentionally illogical reasoning (Oxford University Press, 2024). The very term "brain rot" points to a situation in which a person is inundated with too much digital content that is considered to be trivial or cognitively unstimulating, which leads to the emergence of certain linguistic and cultural trends within online groups. This tendency has expanded swiftly through meme culture, TikTok and viral content in the younger age (Hazman et al., 2024).

Digital communication's brainrot humour is not just entertaining, but also an identifying marker for groups and a way to participate in internet culture (Zhou et al., 2023). This humour often uses viral phrases, multimodal references, popular audio recordings and meanings that are only understood by specific communities (Han & Zappavigna, 2024). These qualities make brainrot humour very reliant on common social, cultural, and digital experiences. Consequently, the meaning of this humour is not always universally recognised because many factors are implicit and contextual in the social media environment (Roderick, 2023).

At the same time, automated translation is increasingly used as an instrument for cross-linguistic communication across a range of digital media (Tong & Xie, 2025). Research has shown that automatic translation tools are quite successful in translating the lexical meaning and grammatical structure of a language. However, the ability to understand humour that combines wordplay, irony, satire, and cultural references is still restricted (Ardi et al., 2022). In translation studies, the successful transfer of meaning is typically associated with the concept of translation equivalence, the level of equivalence between the source text and the destination text. In brainrot humour, equivalence is more complicated because the meaning of humour depends not only on linguistic parts, but also in the digital cultural environment, the collective experience of Internet users, and the comedic effect to be.

Some other research has begun to explore the translation of multimodal social media content, i.e. content that blends text, sound, pictures and digital trends to generate meaning. These results imply that meaning on social media is produced not only by vocal language, but also by the interplay of other complementing kinds of communication. However, most study is still concentrated on internet memes, Twitter or YouTube. Research on the untranslatability of brainrot humour in the TikTok platform, especially generated by Indonesian influencers such as Nathasya, is still very restricted and has not been studied in depth.

Based on the background, there remains a gap regarding how automated translation handles brainrot humor, which is rich in references to digital culture, internet slang, and online community contexts. This study aims to identify forms of misinterpretation or even untranslatability in brainrot humor within Nathasya's TikTok content when translated using automated translation, as well as to analyze the factors causing such translation failures (Chia et al., 2024). The research questions posed are: what forms does the untranslatability of brainrot humor take in Nathasya's content, and what factors influence its occurrence? This study focuses on brainrot humor as a contemporary digital linguistic phenomenon within the content of Indonesian TikTok influencers as a topic that remains under-explored in translation studies.

2. Literature Review

Humour is a mode of communication that aims to entertain, amuse or make people laugh via the use of language and context. In linguistic studies, humour can originate from word play, irony, exaggeration, satire, and cultural references which rely on shared knowledge between speaker and audience (Pilyarchuk, 2024). The implicit and context-dependent nature of hilarious meaning raises serious problems for translators. One of the reasons humour is difficult to translate is because a joke may be good in one language but not in another language. Cultural and social variations can affect a joke as well as the differences in the structure of the language. Thus, humour translation is a significant field of inquiry in current translation studies.

One of the recent trends in digital humour is brainrot humour, a phenomenon that has gained popularity through social media platforms such as TikTok (Díaz-Lucena & Molina-Fuster, 2024). Brainrot humour is characterised by odd phrasing, purposefully nonsensical stories, internet slang, meme allusions, and viral catchphrases (Pilyarchuk, 2023). Brainrot humour frequently derives its comedic impact from shared participation in online culture and randomness, rather than a distinct joke structure, in contrast to traditional humour. Terms like "delulu is solulu" are mostly significant inside specialised online communities. So, this kind of humour is best understood when you are aware of online culture and current digital trends.

The theory of translation equivalence developed by Mona Baker is used in this study to examine the issues of translating brainrot humour. Baker maintains that the equivalent between source and destination text can be studied at multiple levels. They are: word level equivalence, above word level equivalence, textual equivalence and pragmatic equivalence (Baker, 1992). Word-level equivalence is about the transfer of lexical meaning. Above-word-level equivalence is about collocations, idioms and fixed expressions. Textual equivalence is concerned with cohesiveness and coherence while pragmatic equivalence is concerned with implicit meanings and communication intents. This paradigm is popular because it offers an extensive approach to the assessment of transfer of meaning across many linguistic and cultural settings.

Baker's theory is particularly pertinent to the study of digital humour, as funny content is often not found in the literal meaning of language. Brainrot humour sometimes relies on internet-specific references, community knowledge and pragmatic consequences that may not have a direct parallel in another language. These aspects are very frequently translated literally in machine translation, which causes the distortion of the meaning or the loss of the funny effect. Thus, mistakes in the translation of brainrot humour can be seen as examples of untranslatability, where linguistic, cultural and pragmatic features are not entirely replicable in the target language (Mohebbi, 2023). This approach makes it possible to identify characteristics that participate in the failure of translation in digital humour (Abu-Rayyash, 2024).

3. Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative descriptive design to explore the misinterpretation of Nathasya's TikTok humour content on brainrot <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSxT8EELV/>. The current study focuses on the analysis of humorous expressions in the original language and their translation given by TikTok's automatic subtitle translation tool. The research was based on a qualitative method, as the purpose is to explore the transfer of humorous meanings between languages and to find cases of non-equivalency. The analysis was guided by Mona Baker's theory of translation equivalence, in particular equivalence at word level, above-word level, textual level and pragmatic level.

The data source was a single selected TikTok video provided by Nathasya that contains brain rot humor, such as absurd expressions, internet specific humor reference, viral words. The data consisted of spoken utterances and their translated subtitles, which were automatically generated using TikTok automatic subtitles. The data were acquired by means of observation and documenting procedures. The researcher watched the video repeatedly and noted the original utterances and translated subtitles. The researcher recorded the part that contained the humor parts for further study.

The analysis was accomplished manually by comparing the utterances in the source language with the translations. The discovered translation units were analysed according to Mona Baker's equivalence framework to analyse the successful transmission of intended meaning, cultural references and funny effects. Special attention was paid to shifts, losses, distortions or changes of meaning in the process of translation. Those instances where equivalence could not be maintained were categorised as untranslatability. The cases were then analysed to discover the linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic reasons responsible for the failure of translation in delivering the desired humorous effect.

4. Result

Based on the data collected, this study analyzed 11 brainrot terms currently trending on social media and in internet culture: *Slay*, *Skibidi Toilet Rizz*, *Level 10 Gyatt*, *Goofy Ahh*, *Hawk Tuah*, *Fine Shyt*, *Negative Aura*, *Delulu*, *Where Da Huzz At*, *What The Sigma?*, and *Who Dis Diva?*. All data was then translated using an automatic translator and compared with the meanings that have emerged within online communities. Preliminary results indicate that most terms were not accurately translated because they are slang, memes, or expressions heavily dependent on the context of digital culture and specific community usage.

Table 1

No.	Source Texts	Automated Translation	Meaning
1	Slay 🙌	Selai	A joke to applaud someone who looks wonderful, cool or performs something well and perfectly.
2	Skibiddi toilet rizz	Skibidy toilet ritz	"Skibiddi Toilet" is a phrase that originated from a series of memes on the internet (social media), usually incorporating amusing or ludicrous graphics that produce a comical effect. Meanwhile, "rizz" is a phrase used by Gen Z to describe one's ability to entice. So "Skibidi Toilet Rizz" is a funny way of referring to seduction, but in a nonsensical way.
3	Level 10 gyatt	lepel ten sik seven eight	Gyatt is like an exclamation of "Wow" or physically attractive and level 10 is the highest level therefore it indicates attractive with a perfect score.
4	Goofy ahh	Gupi abh	It is an expression that refers to something funny because there is someone who is silly, strange, or funny.
5	Hawk tuah	Hok cuah	Originated from a viral meme of a street interview and eventually used as a joke.
6	Fine shyt	Fine shiiiet	It is slang, to describe someone who is very attractive, handsome, or beautiful.
7	Negative aura	Negative aurora	It is a joke to express sarcasm about a bad or negative impression.
8	Delulu	Deluluw	Delulu is an abbreviation of the word delusional and hoping in an unrealistic way.
9	Where da huzz at	Where de hose et	It's a joke to ask where the girls are.
10	What the sigma?	-	This is an expression of surprise or confusion from the sigma male meme. However, in this case, the text cannot be detected by the autotranslator.
11	Who dis diva?	Hoe dis-..... DIFFA	It is a joke to ask "who is he/she", a kind of sarcasm but if used in

speech with someone you are familiar with it is considered a compliment.

Based on 11 data points. After being automatically translated, a small percentage of the phrases preserved the original meaning. On the other hand, there are words that have changed their shape and lost their original meaning, such as "Slay" translated as "Selai", and "Negative Aura" as "Negative Aurora". Also, there were words that could not be translated at all, like "What The Sigma?". The results suggest that the root of this difficulty is that machine translators have difficulty recognising viral language from online culture, because this vocabulary is often not available in conventional language dictionaries.

Most of the content focuses on absurd humour, irony, and hyperbole given the humour it includes. Humor is produced by the use of unexpected word pairings or absurd terms like "Skibidi Toilet Rizz," "Goofy Ahh," "What The Sigma?". On the contrary, expressions like Level 10 Gyatt, Fine Shyt, and Who Dis Diva? are more popular as a compliment to make a funny impression. These features suggest that brainrot humour is not always about literal meaning, but rather cultural understanding and the context of use on social media.

In general, the research findings indicate that the term "brainrot" is a form of popular language that has rapidly evolved in the digital environment and possesses a meaning understood by specific communities. The high dependence on internet cultural context makes many terms difficult for machine translation systems to understand. Therefore, the data found in this study reveal a discrepancy between the meanings produced by internet users and the results of machine translation. These findings serve as the basis for further discussion regarding the factors causing this discrepancy in meaning during the translation of the term "brainrot."

5. Discussion

According to Mona Baker's equivalence theory, the data of "Slay" suggests that there is an issue at the level of word equivalence because the meaning contained in the term was not properly transferred to the target language. In online culture, "Slay" is a word of praise used in a satirical way to compliment someone who is perceived as doing very well or making a great impact. However, the machine translation resulted in the word "Selai" which only phonetically resembles the word. Which makes the humour of the excessive praise fall flat.

In the "Skibidi Toilet Rizz" term, incongruities relating to culture-specific notions, as outlined by Baker, were uncovered. This word is a blend of two characteristics of online culture common among Generation Z and Generation Alpha. The joke of this phrase is based on a mixture of ridiculous words that are deliberately illogical, therefore producing a humorous impact. Machine translation just keeps the form of the words without the cultural references behind them. Consequently, the hilarious function existing in the source text cannot be understood by the readers of the target language. This shows that knowledge of cultural context is an important aspect in translating digital humour (Kurniawan, 2024).

This is also a problem with Level 10 Gyatt. The term "gyatt" is a hyperbolic term used in online culture to express adoration for someone's beauty. The humour derives from the use of hyperbolic praise, which is comically effective. The mismatch, Baker explains, arises because the phrase has no equivalent in the target language. Machine translation does not recognise the slang meaning buried in it and translates it into a nonsensical sentence like "*lepel ten sik seben eight*". As a result, the humour created by hyperbole is not well retained and the reader is not aware of the social context behind the use of the term.

The humour of "Goofy Ahh", "Hawk Tuah", and "Fine Shyt" is mostly expressed in the informal vocabulary that has developed in internet groups. Baker's theory indicates that there are some translation issues in the pragmatic part since the intended meaning is based on the social function of the utterance. "Goofy Ahh" is something humorous and stupid, "Hawk Tuah" is a viral meme known to all internet users, and "Fine Shyt" is a slang form of appreciation. If the translation machine does not recognise this social and cultural background, then the funny effect embedded in the source text is lost (Thana, 2026).

The humour in 'brainrot' language is sometimes ironic and sarcastic, as seen in data on "Negative Aura" and "Delulu" "Negative Aura" is a funny way to describe someone who is notorious, while "Delulu" is used to describe someone who has unrealistic aspirations or fantasies. For Baker, phrases like these are examples of concepts that are significantly influenced by the culture of the people using the language. The core meaning is understandable, but machine translation fails to capture the comic overtones of these words. Thus the reader gets simply denotative information, and the genuine comic purpose is lost (Nugaraha, 2025).

Then, humour in the expressions like "Where Da Huzz At", "What The Sigma?", and "Who Dis Diva?" are derived from wordplay, slang, and allusions to social media trends. Mona Baker posits that translation failure arises from an absence of pragmatic equivalence, which pertains to the communicative goal and the anticipated reaction from the reader (Sarmi, 2025). These three terms not only provide information but also elicit humour through informal and intentionally exaggerated language. When these pragmatic elements are not effectively communicated, the target text forfeits its hilarious function, notwithstanding the potential recognisability of certain terms.

The research results conclude that the biggest issue in translating the phrase "brainrot" is not only linguistic differences but also to maintain the humour conveyed by the term. According to Mona Baker's approach, most of the data is affected by

incompatibilities at the word level, cultural concept level and pragmatic level (Amalia, 2022). Brainrot humour depends significantly on online cultural knowledge and the implicit meaning of the speaker is sometimes lost in the translation by machine translators. The hilarious reaction that the source material provokes is thus not reproduced in the target text. These results show that the translation of humour needs a wider knowledge of culture and context than the translation of words alone (Seyyedi et al., 2025).

6. Conclusion

This study indicated that most expressions of brainrot humour in Nathasya's TikTok contents could not be translated well or correctly by automatic translation. According to Mona Baker's framework, the main translation challenges arose at the levels of word equivalence, culture-specific notions, and pragmatic equivalence. Terms like Slay, Skibidi Toilet Rizz, Level 10 Gyatt, and What The Sigma? show how machine translation sometimes misses the cultural connections, internet slang and comedic intents found in digital language. This leads to loss of original context and humour in the translated material. These results indicate that the translation of brainrot humour cannot be simply a matter of vocabulary transfer, as the meaning is heavily rooted in internet culture and shared online experiences. However, this study exclusively focuses on eleven brainrot idioms from Nathasya's TikTok material and does not analyse translations created by other machine translation systems, thus the results cannot be generalised to all internet humour or machine translation systems.

In conclusion, based on these findings, future studies are encouraged to analyse a larger and more diversified dataset from other social media platforms, content authors, and language situations. Comparative studies of a number of machine translation methods and human translations may also lead to a better knowledge of how to better translate internet-based humour. Moreover, future studies should consider the multimodal aspect of brainrot humour, such as the combination of text, audio, visual features, and cultural allusions, to better understand the problems and implications of humour translation in present's digital communication environment.

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