

Feminist Discourse in the Indonesian Subtitles of Disney's *Mulan* (2020)*Joyce Trinita Simorangkir^{1*}, Salshabila Zahwa¹, Mutia Hanum Siagian¹, Alberto Pramana¹*¹Universitas Sumatera Utara
*salshabilazahwaa@gmail.com****ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates how feminist discourse is represented in the Indonesian subtitles of Disney's *Mulan* (2020). The research aims to find out if feminist messages of empowerment, equality, and resistance to patriarchal norms are preserved, reconstructed, or neutralized across languages. By applying a descriptive qualitative method, data were taken from selected English–Indonesian subtitle pairs in the official Disney+ Hotstar version. Dialogues expressing the meaning of feminism were thematically grouped into empowerment and self-agency, resistance to patriarchy, and ideological neutralization. The analyses utilized the concepts of feminist discourse theory by Tong (2009) and Butler (1990), and audiovisual translation frameworks by Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007). The results show that while most liberal feminist ideas of autonomy and agency have been successfully preserved in subtitles, some expressions of resistance have been softened partially in order for them not to violate Indonesian cultural values. This ideological negotiation can be seen as an example of how translation functions not only as a mere linguistic transfer but rather as one of the modes of cultural mediation as well. Hence, subtitling is crucial for the interpretation of global feminist narratives by local audiences.

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**ARTICLE INFO****Keywords:**

audiovisual translation;
feminist discourse;
ideology;
Indonesian subtitles;
Mulan (2020)

Article History:

Received: 9 November 2025
Revised: 2 March 2026
Accepted: 3 March 2026
Published: 3 March 2026

How to Cite in APA Style:

Simorangkir, J. T., Zahwa, S., Siagian, M. H., & Pramana, A. (2026). Feminist Discourse in the Indonesian Subtitles of Disney's *Mulan* (2020). *Lexeme : Journal of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics*, 8(1), 187–194.
<https://doi.org/10.32493/ljal.v8i1.54655>

INTRODUCTION

Disney's *Mulan* 2020 is one of the best live-action remake films of recent times, which presents a woman who dares to break the stereotypical norms and redefine femininity in a traditionally male-dominated society. Consequently, the film's plot originates from the ancient Chinese ballad of Hua Mulan, about a young woman disguising her identity as a man to replace her father in the army. However, the 2020 rendition does not present Mulan simply as an obedient daughter but as an empowered heroine who rewrites her expected femininity and insists on her independence. With it, *Mulan* 2020 has transformed into a global text reflecting feminism and gender equality.

From a feminist perspective, *Mulan* (2020) offers a rich site for examining how patriarchal ideologies are resisted and reimagined through cinematic representation. Liberal feminism focuses on the rights of women to equality, independence, and opportunity, while radical feminism challenges the systemic oppression perpetuated by patriarchal institutions (Arat, 2015). Butler (1990) further enriches this discussion with the proposition of gender performativity, wherein the idea that gender as an identity is not pre-given, but rather constructed through repeated

performances of culture. It is within this framework that Mulan (2020) manifests the ideals of feminism most visibly: the refusal of a girl to act according to convention, her metamorphosis into a warrior betraying linear expectations to assert agency and strength, can be viewed as an act of enunciation that rebels against the prescription of patriarchies.

However, through translation and cultural adaptation, audiences experience Mulan differently around the world. In Indonesia, viewers would have mainly been exposed to the film through subtitling, which is the primary channel of meaning transfer. Subtitles are not simply linguistic information transferred into other languages, but also carriers of ideological and cultural values. Subtitling is an interpretative act constrained by time, space, and readability, which often makes translators make choices with ideological implications (Cintas, 2013). That means subtitling can shape how the audience perceives a film's message—whether the feminist discourse is preserved, transformed, or diluted in this case.

Although several previous studies have discussed feminism in Mulan (2020), most of them focused on the film's narration or visual representation. Indriani and Wenerda (2024) explored liberal feminism in Mulan and came to a conclusion that the character represents leadership and equality. Handari et al. (2025) discussed gender empowerment, while Sihite et al. (2021) used semiotics to analyze how the movie reinforces and resists patriarchal culture. These studies affirm the feminist nature of Mulan, but they do not consider how these feminist messages are conveyed linguistically by translation.

Meanwhile, other scholars have explored Mulan (2020) in light of translation and subtitling. For example, Toolan (2023) analyzed the film's style, including how stylistic variation impacts tone and meaning. Baharuddin et al. (2025) examined subtitling strategies in the Indonesian version, looking into strategies such as condensation, paraphrase, and reduction. Similarly, Tang (2008) presented subtitling strategies in Mulan; however, their research put more emphasis on technical rather than ideological aspects. Beyond Indonesia, Taylor (2003) decided to subtitling analysis in an attempt to prove that a translator's purpose influences meaning transmission, while Lin (2024) has shown how gender identities are negotiated in Chinese dubbing and subtitling. Overall, these studies have served to demonstrate that subtitles are never neutral; they are a site where ideology and culture meet.

Despite these contributions, no research has been conducted on how feminist discourses are represented in the Indonesian subtitles of Mulan 2020. This paper treads a critical path because the subtitle mediates Indonesian viewers' understanding of feminist messages of global media. The translation choices—whether maintaining, softening, or neutralizing feminist language—directly influence the way viewers interpret empowerment, independence, and gender equality. For instance, feminist lines like “I am not meant to be anyone's bride” lost their ideological weight when domesticated into culturally safer phrases such as “*Aku belum siap menikah.*” Such transformations have shown subtle negotiations between feminist ideology and local sociocultural norms.

Consequently, this research is conducted to analyze how feminist discourse is constructed and represented in the Indonesian subtitles of Disney's Mulan (2020). It addresses whether or not feminist ideas of empowerment, agency, and resistance against patriarchy are preserved, reconstructed, or lost in translation. This research uses a descriptive qualitative design. The importance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary contribution, which connects gender studies with translation studies. Through her analysis of subtitles as ideological artifacts, this research points out that translation is not only a linguistic task but also a political and cultural act. Firstly, this study contributes to feminist translation scholarship by showing how language choices can maintain or distort gender ideologies across cultures. Additionally, it shows how local translators navigate between global feminist ideals and Indonesian sociolinguistic conventions, therefore shaping the way feminism is interpreted within national audiences. This study, therefore, underlines how important it is to explore subtitling not only as an accessibility tool but, rather, as a privileged site where gender, culture, and ideology intersect. By focusing on Mulan (2020)-a

film that has become a global icon of women's empowerment—the study discloses translation decisions that can either help or hinder feminist discourse. By doing so, it provides precious insight into how audiovisual translation mediates cultural narratives and maintains ideological representation in the Indonesian context.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To examine how feminist discourse is articulated through subtitling in *Mulan* (2020), it is necessary to situate the discussion within two interrelated domains: feminist theory and audiovisual translation (AVT). The intersection of these fields enables a critical understanding of subtitles not merely as linguistic transfers but as sites of ideological mediation and cultural negotiation. A comprehensive review of feminist discourse theory, AVT scholarship, and prior empirical studies on *Mulan* (2020) establishes the intellectual foundation for analyzing how gender ideology may be preserved, reshaped, or diluted in translation.

Feminist discourse refers to the ways in which language and texts construct, reinforce, or challenge gender ideologies. Feminist Thought categorizes feminism into several strands, including liberal feminism, which advocates equal opportunity and autonomy, and radical feminism, which critiques systemic patriarchy (Tong & Botts, 2024). Complementing this perspective, Gender Trouble conceptualizes gender as performative, constituted through repeated social and cultural acts (Butler & Trouble, 1990). These theoretical perspectives frame *Mulan* (2020) as a cultural text in which gender is enacted and contested, positioning the protagonist as a symbol of resistance to patriarchal constraints.

Audiovisual translation theory further complicates this discussion by highlighting the constraints and ideological implications of subtitling. Cintas and Remael (2014) emphasize that subtitles are shaped by temporal and spatial limitations, requiring translators to condense and reformulate dialogue. These decisions inevitably influence meaning. Moreover, feminist translation theory, as articulated in *Translation and Gender* by Simon and Von Flotow (1997), argues that translation can function as a feminist intervention when it amplifies rather than silences women's voices. These frameworks support an understanding of subtitling as an interpretive and ideological act.

The primary research gap, therefore, lies in the limited examination of how feminist discourse in *Mulan* (2020) is represented in its Indonesian subtitles. While prior studies confirm the film's alignment with feminist principles and others document subtitling strategies, no research systematically analyzes whether feminist messages are maintained, reframed, or attenuated in translation. Accordingly, this study proposes an integrated conceptual framework that combines feminist discourse theory with audiovisual translation theory. By conceptualizing subtitles as ideological acts rather than neutral renderings, the study positions Indonesian subtitling as a mediating mechanism through which feminist ideals are interpreted and potentially transformed for local audiences.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative design to examine how feminist discourse is mediated through Indonesian subtitling in *Mulan* (2020). The objective was not to quantify variables but to interpret and synthesize patterns of meaning embedded in dialogue–subtitle pairs. A qualitative orientation was considered appropriate because the transmission of ideology, particularly feminist ideology, operates through nuanced linguistic, cultural, and contextual choices that require interpretive depth rather than statistical measurement. In addition, the study incorporated elements of library research. Scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles were systematically reviewed to construct the theoretical and analytical framework. This approach enabled the integration of multiple perspectives—feminist theory, discourse analysis, and audiovisual translation—thereby strengthening the conceptual rigor and interpretive validity of

the analysis.

Data Sources

The primary data consisted of English dialogues and their corresponding Indonesian subtitles in the official version of *Mulan*, released in 2020 on Disney+ Hotstar. Subtitle lines were selected as the unit of analysis because they reflect the translator's linguistic and ideological decisions in rendering feminist discourse for Indonesian audiences. Secondary data included academic books and peer-reviewed journal articles related to feminist discourse, gender performativity, translation studies, and audiovisual translation. Core theoretical references included *Feminist Thought* (Tong & Botts, 2024), *Gender Trouble* (Butler & Trouble, 1990), and *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling* (Cintas & Remael, 2014). Non-academic sources such as blogs and opinion columns were excluded to ensure scholarly reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a structured sequence. First, the researchers viewed the entire film and transcribed selected English dialogues alongside their Indonesian subtitles. Second, utterances containing explicit or implicit feminist meanings were identified. These included expressions of empowerment, assertions of independence, and statements challenging patriarchal authority. Subsequently, each English–Indonesian dialogue pair was categorized according to thematic relevance, such as empowerment, resistance, or ideological neutralization. Concurrently, relevant scholarly literature was reviewed to contextualize and substantiate the interpretive process.

Data Analysis Technique

The study employed thematic content analysis to identify and interpret recurring patterns across dialogue–subtitle pairs. The analytical process began with familiarization, during which the selected data were read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of how feminist discourse was conveyed in both languages. Next, coding was conducted by identifying lexical choices, shifts in meaning, condensation strategies, and reformulations that signaled empowerment, gender resistance, or ideological modification. The coded data were then organized into broader thematic categories, including: (1) empowerment and self-agency, (2) resistance to patriarchal norms, and (3) ideological neutralization. Finally, each theme was interpreted through the lens of feminist discourse theory and audiovisual translation principles. This interpretive stage examined whether subtitling choices maintained, attenuated, or reconfigured feminist meanings in the Indonesian version of the film.

Trustworthiness

To ensure methodological rigor, the study addressed credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced by grounding all findings in the original English dialogue and official Indonesian subtitles, which were systematically cross-referenced with established theoretical frameworks. Dependability was maintained through consistent application of the same analytical procedures across all data segments. Confirmability was achieved by anchoring interpretations strictly in textual evidence and theoretical constructs, thereby minimizing subjective bias.

Ethical Considerations

The study relied exclusively on publicly available audiovisual material and scholarly publications; therefore, no human participants were involved. Formal ethical approval was not required. Nonetheless, academic integrity was upheld through accurate citation practices and adherence to scholarly standards throughout the research process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The research identified that the Indonesian subtitles of *Mulan* (2020) both preserve and transform the feminist discourse of the original English dialogues. Empowerment, independence, and resistance to patriarchy were some of the feminist messages present though there were some linguistic and cultural transformations that affected the extent to which these values were conveyed to Indonesian audiences. Through qualitative thematic analysis, three macro-themes were identified: (1) empowerment and self-agency, (2) resistance to patriarchal norms, and (3) ideological neutralization in translation.

Theme 1: Empowerment and Self-Agency

The first of the dominant themes is how *Mulan*'s dialogues express empowerment and self-agency. In the original English version, there are many utterances that express *Mulan*'s bravery and belief in herself for instance, when she asserts her worth or challenges received gender norms. These are examples of what Tong and Botts (2024) call liberal feminism, which is centered on autonomy and equality. In the Indonesian subtitles, these empowering lines were largely maintained with the same meanings, suggesting that the translator maintained the feminist message. For example, the line "I will bring honor to us all" was translated as "*Aku akan membawa kehormatan bagi kita semua*", with *Mulan*'s determination and sense of responsibility intact. Similarly, "I am the proof that I can do this on my own" was subtitled as "*Aku bukti bahwa aku bisa melakukannya sendiri*", still conveying agency and independence. However, some nuances were lost somewhat due to linguistic compression, a common subtitling constraint (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007). For instance, emotional tones or emphatic stresses were sometimes omitted to fit time and space constraints. In spite of this, the ideological kernel of female empowerment remained largely intact.

Theme 2: Resistance to Patriarchal Norms

A second main finding relates to how the subtitles express disavowal of patriarchal norms. *Mulan*, in the course of the film, continuously acts against male-dominated structures, portraying radical feminist ideals as elucidated by Tong and Botts (2024) and Butler and Trouble (1990). Exchanges that defy gender roles e.g., when *Mulan* dresses up as a soldier or insists on not "knowing her place" incarnate this opposition. The Indonesian subtitles largely maintained the combative tone, but some ideological impact was diluted. For instance, when the English line "Why must I be silent while men speak?" was translated as "*Mengapa aku harus diam saat mereka berbicara?*", "men" was replaced by "*mereka*," making the gender reference more general. Lexical choice depoliticized the feminist confrontation, showing that the translator valued naturalness over ideological foregrounding. These examples reinforce Butler and Trouble's (1990) argument that gender identity is performative and culturally constructed. The subtitling process then became a site wherein ideology was negotiated between maintaining feminist resistance and adapting to Indonesian linguistic norms and audience sensitivities.

Theme 3: Ideological Neutralization and Cultural Mediation

The final theme entails ideological neutralization, in which feminist discourse was compromised or generalized in translation. This was carried out mainly when the translator selected more neutral or culturally appropriate words. For instance, during emotionally charged scenes in which *Mulan* rejects traditional femininity, the subtitles softened explicit challenges to patriarchy. The English sentence "I am not meant to be anyone's bride" is an explicit refusal of women's subordination, yet in the Indonesian subtitle, it was translated as "*Aku belum siap menikah*", which changes the feminist refusal into a personal uncertainty. These shifts betray the means by which translation choices can subtly reshape ideological meaning. As Cintas and

Remael (2014) emphasize, subtitling involves a process of technical and ideological negotiation translators must balance accuracy, brevity, and audience comprehension. In this case, those negotiations at times diluted feminist force, demonstrating how language and ideology become intertwined in audiovisual translation.

Discussion

The results show that the Indonesian subtitle of *Mulan* (2020) exhibits complex interaction between feminist discourse and norms of translation. The preservation of empowerment and self-agency themes shows that liberal feminist concepts were largely maintained, in accordance with Baharuddin et al. (2025) and Lin (2024), which found that *Mulan* depicts gender empowerment. But partial neutralization of feminist speech especially in resistant speech is evidence that translation is not ideologically transparent. Translators make interpretive decisions that can exaggerate or delegitimize feminist messages. This supports Cintas and Remael (2014) contention that subtitling is not only restricted by time and space, but also by cultural expectation.

Further, the ideological negotiation that is found in Indonesian subtitles also captures (Butler & Trouble, 1990) concept of performative gender, where identity and ideology are remade continuously through discourse. In subtitling, this remaking occurs when translators adapt strong feminist statements in order to meet local politeness or modesty norms. Overall, the outcomes reaffirm that feminist discourse translated is a cultural mediation. While the Indonesian subtitles of *Mulan* (2020) stayed true to feminism's core, some patriarchal resistances were silenced illustrating how translation might preserve but also re-interpret feminist ideology in a multicultural context.

CONCLUSIONS

This research examined the representation of feminist discourse in Indonesian subtitles for Disney's *Mulan* (2020), with particular interest in whether empowerment messages, equality, and patriarchal resistance were preserved or altered through translation. Using a descriptive qualitative study and thematic content analysis, the research confirmed that Indonesian subtitles both preserve and modify feminist meaning from original film dialogue. The findings revealed three substantial patterns: firstly, empowerment and self-agency were highly retained, indicating liberal feminist values of autonomy and self-determination (Tong & Botts, 2024). Secondly, patriarchal norm resistance did materialize but sometimes got diluted through linguistic adjustments or cultural sensitivities. Thirdly, ideological neutralization was present in certain instances, whereby feminist claims got domesticated into more moderate or culturally palatable forms.

Such results support that subtitling is not just a linguistic activity, but an ideological performance (Cintas & Remael, 2014). Translators operate under constraints of time, space, and audience-expectations, which can influence the transmission of feminist meanings. In accordance with (Butler & Trouble, 1990) gender performativity, the translation process is an arena where ideology and identity are reconstructed through words. Overall, the Indonesian subtitles of *Mulan* (2020) are able to uphold the film's feminist tone of women empowerment, yet subtle linguistic options betray how feminist language is negotiated or watered down in translation. This suggests that audiovisual translation actually does matter in framing the perception and interpretation of international feminist storytelling by local viewers. For future studies, researchers can develop this research further by comparing subtitling between languages or investigating audience reception to determine how audiences process feminist messages in translated media.

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