On formulaic language in subtitling and voice-over

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Abstract: The translation of elements of formulaic language is extremely difficult in subtitles or voice-over due to time and space constraints. Besides, it is very difficult to provide a comprehensive definition of formulaic language as its sequences exist in so many forms. Traditionally, 6 basic formulas are distinguished: polywords, phrasal constraints, meta-messages, sentence builders, situational utterances, and verbatim texts. The analysis of subtitles and a voice-over version of a film shows that differences in the procedures applied for the translation of formulaic language are insignificant, and the strategies used are distributed almost evenly between preservation of content, transformation and localisation.

Keywords: audio-visual translation, subtitles, voice-over, elements of formulaic language.

Zusammenfassung: Die Übersetzung von Elementen der formelhaften Sprache ist extrem schwierig, in Untertitel oder Voice-over aufgrund Zeit- und Platzgründen. Es ist sehr schwierig eine umfassende Definition der Mustersprache bereitzustellen, wie seine Sequenzen in so vielen Formen vorliegen.Traditionell sind sechs Grundformeln hochgestellt: Polywords, Phrasenbegrenzungen, Meta-Nachrichten, Satzbilder, Äußerungen der Situation und wörtliche Texte. Die Analyse der Untertitel und Voice-over-Version eines Films zeigt, dass die Unterschiede in dem Verfahren für die Übersetzung von formelhaften Sprache unbedeutend sind und die Strategien verwendet werden, fast gleichmäßig zwischen der Erhaltung der Inhalte, Transformation und Lokalisierung.

Schlüsselwörter: audio-visuelle Übersetzung, Untertitel, Voice-over, Elemente der formelhaften Sprache.

Introduction

Audiovisual translation (AVT) does not exist on its own. It is an interdisciplinary subject connecting languages, technologies, culture and semiotics. New translation technologies have a direct impact on working practices. As there is no substantial AVT tradition in Lithuania, the translation of cultural aspects is based solely on the proficiency of the translator. According to Bogucki (2013), being

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interdisciplinary, AVT quality is difficult to evaluate. The inevitable part here depends on the translator, who must have an excellent understanding of both the source and target languages.

Formulaic language has not been extensively analysed, although it has always been significant in communication, especially in fluent speech production (Biber, Conrad & Cortes, 2004). Because the elements of formulaic language are specific to a particular language, their translation requires a translator's competence and skills, particularly in different types of audiovisual translation due to the applicable constraints of time and space. Subtitles and voice-overs from a feature film are analysed in this paper, as these are the most common audiovisual translation types in Lithuania as noted by Koverienė and Satkauskaitė (2014, 26). The aim of this analysis is to determine what translation procedures are used to translate the elements of formulaic language in a selected audiovisual product from English (source) into Lithuanian (target) in two different AVT modes, i.e. voice-over and subtitling.

Constraints of audiovisual translation

The concept of audiovisual translation represents not only film translation but the translation of audiovisual products in general (Díaz Cintas 2009, 1; Chang 2012, 71), e.g., sitcoms, cartoons, documentaries, corporate videos, commercials, educational and edutainment productions, video games, cookery and property programmes, interviews, etc. (Díaz Cintas 2009, 6). According to Gonzales (2009, 13), "audiovisual texts include language, image, music, colour and perspective", while Chiaro (2009, 141) defines AVT as a medium covering "the interlingual transfer of verbal language when it is transmitted and accessed both visually and acoustically, usually, but not necessarily, through some kind of electronic device." However, it may be argued that not only verbal language can be translated in AVT products, but also various signs, symbols and markers, etc. (Díaz Cintas 2009, 9). The synchrony between verbal and non-verbal information is very significant because visual and acoustic channels exist in AVT products (Bartrina 2004, 157). The first studies in AVT were concise and not made available to the broad public. Even though this situation has changed and AVT is now a prominent area for research, there is still a lack of AVT historiography. However, recently AVT has emerged as an independent theoretical and methodological approach and has its own scholarly area of research (Díaz Cintas 2009, 7). The position of AVT has changed with the emergence of cable television.

Traditionally, countries are divided into four major AVT blocks or categories: 1) source language countries, i.e. English-

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speaking countries, a narrow market of imported AVT products; 2) dubbing countries (German-, Italian-, Spanish- and French-speaking countries); 3) subtitling countries (Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Japan, Romania, etc); 4) voice-over countries (Eastern European countries, e.g. Russia, Poland, etc.) (Gottlieb 2001, 244; Koverienė and Satkauskaitė 2014, 27; Pedersen 2011, 4). Pedersen (2011, 5) claims that different factors determine the selection of the AVT categories listed above. The application of a particular AVT category may depend on language policy, e.g., dubbing and voice-over countries promote local languages. Another reason for AVT category selection may be economic, as often television companies seek to save at the expense of AVT, e.g. the cost of dubbing is 15 times greater than that of subtitling (Luyken et al. 1991). AVT choice may also vary depending on the genre. For example, cartoons, in the majority of cases, are dubbed.

Subtitling can be made up of any combination of a written text of original dialogue or translation of the text spoken by characters, linguistic elements forming visual images (e.g., pictures, banners, titles, letters, etc.), and/or a soundtrack (Díaz Cintas 2009, 5). The text of subtitles should be made up from between 40% and 75% of the original spoken dialogue. Consequently, the translator has to reduce the length of the original text (Antonini 2005, 213). According to Georgakopoulou (2009, 21), subtitles should take a very discrete form in order to be barely noticeable by those who read it. The aesthetics of subtitles are crucial, and it is necessary to arrange the words on the screen to enhance their readability. Subtitles should cover no more than 20% of the total screen area (Georgakopoulou 2009, 22), and the length of time of each subtitle should be from between three and five seconds. The form and the content of subtitles are limited by time as synchrony is one of the most significant constraints of subtitling. It is worth noting that 'different languages use varying amounts of verbal content to express the same meaning', i.e. some words in one language can have more characters than in another, for example, English words are shorter compared to their German equivalent, although, subtitling constraints are the same for all (Chiaro 2009, 150). As the written text has to be shorter than its spoken counterpart, some redundant elements of speech have to be omitted. Voice-over is also known as partial dubbing, non-synchronised dubbing or half dubbing, thus revealing a tendency to be considered of lower quality than dubbing (Woźniak 2011, 215). Voice-over is the reduction of the volume of the original soundtrack to a minimal auditory level with a translation orally overlapping the original soundtrack. In voice-over, it is very important that the original soundtrack is heard clearly, at the same time not disturbing the "audibility of the reader's voice", although, broadly speaking, "the

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voice-over message tends to be similar in duration to the original" (Woźniak 2011, 216).

Formulaic language and translation

All languages are formulaic, because discourse is composed of the combination of words rather than separate words themselves. According to Schmitt and Carter Schmitt (2004, 2), it is very difficult to provide a comprehensive definition of formulaic language, as its sequences exist in so many forms. Therefore, the absence of a clear definition is one of the most significant problems in the area. Wray and Perkins (2000, 1) describe formulaic language as a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other meaning elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from the memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar. Formulaic expressions cover any kind of linguistic unit considered to be formulaic in any research field (Wray 2002, 9). Formulaic language is diverse, thus, sometimes causing difficulties in identifying sequences in the text. Defining what formulaic is, Wray and Perkins (2000, 4) invoke Becker's six basic formulas: polywords operate as single words allowing no insertions, e.g., *for the most part, for good,* etc.; phrasal constraints allow variations of lexical and phrase categories, e.g., *a while ago, by sheer coincidence,* etc.; sentence builders allow the construction of full sentences with fillable slots, e.g., *I think that … , not only … but … ,* etc.; situational utterances are fixed pragmatic units bound to a specific situation, e.g., *how can I ever repay you;* meta-messages convey an underlying message implied; and verbatim texts involve fixed longer phrases often used as clichés, e.g., *better late than never*. Formulaic language carries a metaphorical meaning. Thus, sometimes a hearer may not understand the meaning without substantial pragmatic or direct explanatory context (Wray and Perkins 2000, 4).

According to Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992, 45), it is hard to make a distinction between polywords, phrasal constraints and sentence builders. The authors (1992, 38-39) note that canonical and non-canonical polywords are short phrases that act like a lexical item. Polywords relate and shift topics, etc. They permit syntagmatic variation at the beginning or end of the phrase (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992, 45). Usually being continuous, phrasal constraints are phrases of short or medium length that perform various functions (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992, 41). The authors (1992, 46) claim that typical examples of phrasal constraints are *…ago*, *the …-er, the …-er*. Being either continuous or discontinuous, "[s]entence builders are lexical phrases that provide the framework for the whole

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sentences" (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992, 42). They can be both canonical and non-canonical. Situational utterances are also known as bound utterances (Kecskes 2000, 605), situation-bound utterances (605), institutionalised expressions (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992), etc. Situational utterances are "highly conventionalised, prefabricated pragmatic units whose occurrence is tied to standardised communicative situations" (Kecskes 2000, 606). Elements of formulaic language are hard to define and categorise as they might belong to more than one category of the taxonomy described.

The translation of elements of formulaic language may also be problematic. In order to properly render the meaning, translators may employ different translation strategies. Domestication and foreignisation are usually perceived as very different poles of translation strategies that help the reader to approach the translated text and overcome all the misunderstanding barriers of the original (Koskinen 2012, 13). Consequently, it is essential to set the factors that estimate to what extent the target text can be either domesticated or foreignised. These factors include specific historical periods in certain cultures, text type, the nature of the target audience (children vs. adults) and the relationship between the target and the source cultures (Davies 2003, 69).

According to Palumbo (2009, 39), domestication is a translation strategy used in translation studies to produce a transparent and fluent style in the target language. Therefore, it involves a translation practice to translate foreign elements to the target culture by replacing them by more familiar ones (Kemppanen 2012, 51), and is used to refer to the adaptation of the cultural context or of culture-specific terms (Paloposki 2011, 40). A typical feature of domestication is transparency wherein non-idiomatic expressions, archaisms, jargon and repetitions are usually not domesticated. Moreover, based on Venuti, Kemppanen describes domesticating translation as "the dominance of linguistic, ethnic and ideological features of the target culture, [...], naturalness of syntax, unambiguity, modernity of the presentation and linguistic consistency" (Kemppainen 2012, 51). Foreignisation "entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by the dominant cultural values in the target language" (Munday 2001, 147). Hence, foreignisation means that linguistic, ethnic and ideological features prevail in the target text, the norms of fluency are omitted, and a translator is unmasked (Kemppanen 2012, 52). This paper focuses on procedures of domestication and foreignisation offered by Davies (2003, 72-89): preservation, addition, omission, globalisation, localisation, transformation and creation. It is claimed that preservation is

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employed when an identical cultural reference is used in the target text – the word is transcribed letter by letter (Petrulionė 2012; Jaleniauskienė and Čičelytė 2009). Addition involves the original item being kept and supplemented with the necessary information. The procedure of omission can be justified when the translator decides to omit a problematic aspect in order to avoid problems of comprehension. Globalisation occurs when a culture-related word is replaced by a neutral item. On the other hand, localisation includes phonological and/or grammatical adaptation, easily recognisable in the target language. Transformation involves "alteration or distortion of the original" (Davies 2003, 86) and differs from creation, which introduces a new or absolutely different item.

Methodology

The aim of this analysis is to determine what translation procedures are applied to translate elements of formulaic language in the voice-over and subtitled versions of a single, 165-minute feature film. This film was selected because of its genre, a Western in which the majority of the dialogue is spoken in African American vernacular English. Thus, it is likely to contain a considerable amount of examples for analysis of the translation of cultural elements. The film's translation into Lithuanian was made by one of the largest translation companies in the country, a company that also provides dubbing (recording and editing), subtitling, and voice-over services. All of the examples were taken from an original DVD which provides the viewers with an opportunity to watch and listen to the film in either English (original language) or Lithuanian (target language). The categorisation of the elements of formulaic language in this instance was based on Becker's taxonomy (in Wray and Perkins 2000, 4). The subtitled and voice-overed translations of each cultural element were analysed according to the translation procedures provided by Davies.

Results

In this research, 525 examples of elements of formulaic language were identified in feature film X. The elements of formulaic language were categorised in accordance with Becker's (cited in Wray and Perkins 2000, 4) classification: polywords; phrasal constraints; sentence builders; situational utterances; meta-messages; and verbatim texts.

Translation of polywords

In total, 172 polywords were identified in the original text of the film. Several translation procedures were adopted in their

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translation. Firstly, the procedure of content preservation was used 117 times in voice-over translation, whereas it was applied 121 times in subtitles, e.g., *I'm looking for – ieškau (EN. search-SG-1P-Pres), sit down – sėsk (EN. sit-IMP-SG)*. In all the cases where the preservation procedure was used, the content of polywords was preserved. In other cases, the procedure of transformation was employed, i.e. the meaning of a polyword was transformed (34 times of 172), e.g., *mess up - sučežinsit (En. rustle-FUT-PL-2P), wait a minute – pala (wait-IMP-SG-COLL), come on out – išeikit laukan (EN. go-IMP-PL outside), come on – nagi, eikš (EN. INT, come-IMP-SG)*. In the instance *come on out*, the word *laukan* is added due to the context because the leading characters of the film are invited to get out from the inside of the building. In the example *come on*, the verb in its imperative mood *eikš* is attached to the utterance alongside the interjection *nagi*, in order to emphasise what the character is required to do.

Another procedure used in translation of polywords was omission, which prevailed in 13 cases in the voice-over version and in 9 cases in the subtitles version, e.g., *Come on, get [...] outta*. According to Davies (2003, 79, 80), omission is applied when a problematic cultural aspect is confronted and it is hard to find a substitution in the target language. Therefore, it is omitted in the subtitles and voice-over version in order to avoid repetition. Also, some polywords are omitted when they function in the sentence as interjections; thus, their omission does not influence the meaning of the sentence.

Translation of phrasal constraints

In the film, 26 phrasal constraints were identified. With the purpose of translating phrasal constraints, 4 different procedures were applied. The most common procedure applied in voice-over (16 times) and subtitles (17 times) was preservation of content, e.g., *good morning – Labas rytas (EN. Good-SG-NOM-MSC morning-SG-NOM-MSC), badder they are, bigger the reward – Kuo jie blogesni, tuo didesnis atlygis (EN. what-INSTR they-NOM worse-PL-NOM-MSC, that-INSTR higher-SG-NOM-MSC reward-SG-NOM-MSC)*. These and other examples demonstrate that the meaning of the content is not changed but maintained. In a few cases, one word of a sequence of formulaic language was omitted because its omission did not affect the rendering of meaning, e.g*., my good man – gerasis žmogau (EN. good-SG-VOC-MSC man-SG-VOC-MSC), you goddamn son of a bitch – prakeiktas kalės vaikas (EN. curse-PRESPTCP-SG-NOM-MSC bitch-SG-GEN-FEM kid-SG-NOM-MSC)*. In these examples, parts of phrasal constraints are preserved: *good man – gerasis žmogau*, *goddamn son of a bitch – Prakeiktas kalės*

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vaikas. In the first case, the possessive pronoun *my* and in the second case the personal pronoun *you* are omitted.

In contrast to foreignisation, the domestication strategy was also applied in the translation of phrasal constraints as the procedure of transformation was used 8 times, e.g., *in other words – noriu pasakyti (EN. want-SG-1P-PRES say-INF)*, *till I see you again – iki pasimatymo (EN. till-PREP meeting-SG-GEN-MSC)*. These instances illustrate that something is transformed in the translations. For example, in the case of *in other words,* the direct translation of *noriu pasakyti* is *I want to say*, and in the case of *iki pasimatymo*, the most straightforward translation is *good bye*. However, the basic idea of the meaning is not changed so that it could not be perceived. Another domestication procedure is localisation. It was employed twice, e.g., *sons of bitches – šunsnukiai (EN. son-of-a-bitch-PL-NOM-MSC)*. A derogative substitution, which is more familiar in the target language, is selected in this case.

Omission is another procedure used in translating phrasal constraints; it was employed once in the voice-over version, e.g. *sons of bitches*. The phrasal constraint was omitted most probably because there is a dialogue among a group of people, and this phrase is of low importance; therefore, its omission does not influence the quality of the translation.

Translation of sentence builders

In this research, 65 sentence builders were found and several translation procedures were applied. The most common translation procedure identified in the translation of sentence builders was transformation, used 28 times. The procedure was invoked when some alterations in translation were made, e.g., *I do believe – regis (EN. seemingly-MOD)*, *I'm sure – neabejoju (EN. NEG-doubt-V-SG-1P-PRES)*. Another procedure applied was localisation. This procedure was used once, e.g., *damn sure – velniškai tikras* (*EN.* devil-ADV sure-SG-NOM-MSC).

Foreignisation was achieved by way of a number of procedures. First, content preservation was employed in both the voice-over version (13 times) and subtitles (14 times), e.g., *I'm sure that's – Aš tikras, jog (voice-over, EN. I sure-SG-NOM-MSC that), I believe – Aš tikiu (EN. I believe-SG-1P-PRES)*. The procedure of content preservation was used when the meaning of the target aspect was maintained by its translation into the source language. Therefore, these examples demonstrate that sentence builders when translated from English to Lithuanian preserved their content as all the elements were transferred from the source to the target language.

Omission of sentence builders was used 7 times in the voice-over version and 6 times in subtitles. Usually omission is invoked

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when substitution of cultural aspects is hard to find in the target language (Davies 2003, 79, 80). However, sentence builders have their equivalents. In the analysed subtitles and the voice-over version of the film, they were omitted because their meaning in the target language is of low importance, e.g. *I've been led to believe, I'm afraid*. As these are long parts of the sentence containing 60 and 58 characters with spaces, the phrases were omitted in order to make the sentences in the target language shorter.

Translation of Situational Utterances, Meta-Messages and Verbatim Texts.

In this study, 256 examples of situational utterances, meta-messages and verbatim texts were found and analysed. The three types of elements of formulaic language were investigated as one large category as these categories to a certain extent overlap making the elements hard to classify. Several different procedures were applied to translate these elements of formulaic language. First of all, the most common translation procedure used was preservation of content. It was applied 105 times in the voice-over version and 109 times in subtitles, e.g., *last chance – paskutinė proga (EN. last-SG-NOM-FEM chance-SG-NOM-FEM), Wanted. Dead or alive – Ieškomas. Miręs arba gyvas (EN. look-for-PRESPTCP-SG-MSC die-PASTPTCP-MSC-SG or alive-SG-NOM-MSC).* In consideration of these examples, not only the context, but also all the words were preserved in the target language. However, sometimes some parts of situational utterances, meta-messages and verbatim texts can be expressed by an idiom or any other vivid expression, e.g., *got off on the wrong boot* is an idiom, but the translator chose literal translation *pradėjome ne tuo batu (EN. start-PL-1P-PAST- not that-INSTR-MSC boot-SG-INSTR-MSC)* without looking for an equivalent in the target language.

Another procedure applied in the voice-over version (71 times) and subtitles (73 times) of the film was transformation, e.g., *when the snow melts – kai ateis pavasaris (EN. when come-FUT-3P spring-SG-NOM-MSC), fair enough – Mintis teisinga (EN. idea-SG-NOM-FEM correct-SG-NOM-FEM).* It is common knowledge that under natural circumstances it snows in winter and the snow melts in spring; therefore, it is obvious that the procedure of transformation is applied. The second example also demonstrates transformation, as one of the characters speaking gives an approval to another.

Localisation was applied 22 times in the voice-over version and 23 times in subtitles, e.g.*, what the hell you doing – kokį velnią čia išdarinėjate (EN. what-ACC-SG-MSC devil-ACC-SG-MSC here PREF-do-PL-PRES-2P), God damn it – po velnių (under devil-GEN-PL-MSC).* In the first case, the word *hell* is translated as *velnią*

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(accusative form of devil), which may also be an expletive in Lithuanian.

Omission was applied 5 times in the voice-over version and 12 times in subtitles, e.g., *Oh, God, Keep movin', Keep moving* were omitted. Most omissions were most probably made because the utterances are of low importance or due to repetition. In regard to omissions used more frequently in subtitles in comparison with the voice-over version, it is worth mentioning that subtitles are limited by various constraints. One of the constraints is that subtitles should constitute up to 75% of the spoken dialogues. Thus, the omitted phrases do not put the viewers into a disadvantage.

Table 4. Translation procedures applied in elements of formulaic language in voice-over and subtitled versions of the film

Translation procedure	Instances in voice-over (in percent)	Instances in subtitles (in percent)
Preservation of content	48.6%	49.1%
Transformation	39.8%	40.1%
Omission	5%	5%
Localisation	6.6%	6.7%

Various constraints make it even more difficult to render elements of formulaic language into the target language as a translator must find not only the best solution to convey it into the target language but also has to fit into a special framework: in voice-over, translation is limited by time, and in subtitling, both time and space limits prevail.

Conclusions

In the translation of the elements of formulaic language in this case, the most common translation procedure was the preservation of content in both the voice-over and subtitled versions of the film constituting almost half of all the procedures used. Transformation and localisation procedures were also frequently used, accounting for almost half of the procedures. Omission was scarce in both the subtitled and the voice-over versions. Analysis shows that differences in the procedure applied to the translation of formulaic language between the voice-over and subtitled versions of the film are insignificant. This may imply that the translation of the elements of formulaic language is equally complex in any AVT category.

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The results of this research are in compliance with those achieved by other researchers, and reveal similar drawbacks in both subtitling and voice-over work, namely grammar mistakes and a discrepancy of lexical items. In addition, our analysis also shows that there are some segments in which the style of the target language is different from that of the source language.

As there is no substantial AVT tradition, the translation of cultural aspects is based solely upon the proficiency of the translator. It is ultimately the translator's decision which determines the use of the strategy.

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List of Abbreviations

ADV- adverb
ACC – accusative
COLL – colloquialism
FEM – feminine
FUT – future
GEN – genitive
IMP – imperative
INF – infinitive
INSTR – instrumental
INT - interjection
MSC – masculine
N – noun
MOD – modal word
NOM – nominative
P – person

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