

SITUATIONAL STRATEGIES OF SUBTITLING FILMS WHILE BYPASSING TECHNICAL ISSUES AT VARIOUS UKRAINIAN FILM FESTIVALS

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Анотація: Ця стаття висвітлює деякі перекладацькі стратегії, націлені на створення субтитрів, які – в умовах технічних проблем на українських кінофестивалях – були б не лише сухим стислим текстовим відображенням суті реплік актора, а також адекватно відображали б певні емоційні риси мовця.

Ключові слова: субтитрування, технічні проблеми, ситуативні стратегії, кінофестиваль, мовленнєві затримки, звуконаслідування

It is highly unfair that subtitling in Ukraine is considered as a second-rate way of film translation. And it is, because the majority of the foreign movies in Ukraine are dubbed, and subtitles are thought to be deflecting attention of a viewer and deprived of any emotional component of the original speech because of the space restrictions. To put it plainly, they are “uninteresting” to read. Thus, subtitles in Ukraine are predominantly used at different arthouse film festivals that are of a very high quality in terms of movies demonstrated there, that are very popular, but always short of budget, thus unable to afford dubbing for the movies they show.

Some of the major drawbacks of the festivals mentioned above, can reach beyond the translator’s competence. These are technical issues with the equipment used to show films, unexpected problems with the film reels etc. Such issues are as well covered in this article, along with the ways of making good subtitles in spite of all the technical difficulties.

First of all, in order to distinguish the nature of the technical issues at the festivals, it would be appropriate to describe the specifics of some PC software for subtitling, used at the most popular film festivals in Ukraine. We will dwell upon two programs, mainly Subtiter and Subtitle Workshop.

It is important to differentiate these programs, for these two have different purposes, even though in the long run it may look like the aim is one for both of them, the creation of subtitles. There are nuances, though. Subtitle Workshop is designed to “sew” the subtitles into a film so that they are automatically synchronized with the manually set time-code of the movie. Apart from the fact that usually the translator has to set the time-code him/herself, the subtitles created with Subtitle Workshop do not require any further translator’s work during the movie’s cinema show. Nevertheless, a translator’s chance to rest during the movie’s cinema show, granted by Subtitle Workshop, does not at all mean any ease in his/her creation of the subtitles. Given the fact

that the translator has to set the time-code him/herself, in the process of subtitling he/she has to pay special attention to the required length of every translated subtitle, to avoid the necessity of dividing a too long subtitle into two or three shorter ones, thus shifting the time-code of the translated subtitle compared to the time-code of the original subtitle, which is strictly unacceptable and disastrous for an impression of a viewer during the movie's cinema show. But it is true that after a long hard work on translation of subtitles in Subtitle Workshop the translator can calmly relish his/her work in a cinema during the movie's show.

Subtitle Workshop is generally used at "Docudays UA", the international documentary human rights film festival, as well as it is used to subtitle "long nights of short films" at the IMF Molodist, at the Odessa IMF and at the vast majority of "weeks of foreign movies" in Ukraine.

In order to sew subtitles in a film it is necessary that the file with subtitles contains time-code. Now, Subtitler does not work with time-codes and is not designed to sew subtitles into a film (for you can only sew your subtitles into a film if the file with subtitles contains their time-codes). Thus this PC program does require further translator's work with subtitles during the movie's cinema show. In the film translators' slang this further work is called "clicking", meaning that the translator has to sit in a cinema hall during the whole show, holding a laptop with previously installed subtitle .txt file, and manually switch between every subtitle projected onto a screen, focusing on the original actor's words or on the time allotted for a foreign language subtitle to emerge, to be read by viewers and to disappear from the screen. In case foreign language subtitles are previously sewed in the film, of course. Thus, during the translation of subtitles in Subtitler it is also important to avoid division of one long subtitle into two or three, sometimes this perplexes the translator during the clicking. Subtitler is the main subtitling instrument used at the IMF Molodist, at the Odessa IMF and at the vast majority of "weeks of foreign movies" in Ukraine.

Let us list the major requirements for a translator of subtitles at the IMF Molodist to see more obstacles on the way of making good subtitles in Subtitler:

The translation is made in Windows Notepad (.txt file), where each line has no more than 60 characters. This file is demonstrated during a cinema show through Subtitler program. You should first check if the file opens in Subtitler properly (test font is Tahoma 40).

Why is the restricted line length and standardized font a problem for a translator? The issue is that Subtitler is organized in such a way that only a small place for subtitles is projected onto a cinema screen for least possible picture overlapping, and longer lines will simply be chopped, leaving parts beyond the allotted place on the screen in a very unaesthetic way – every next short subtitle will contain chops of the previous long subtitle.

A lot of embarrassments happen at a range of film festivals, when (often just in the nick before the cinema show) a movie in a language other than English arrives without the English subtitles previously sewed into it. In that case, the translator has to do it so that the two typical subtitle lines, each 60-character long, contain two languages (as required at the majority of Ukrainian film festivals, the upper line must be in English and the lower in Ukrainian). Such a task demands much more efforts from a translator, for it is a lot easier to make a long phrase from a dialogue list into a 120-character long monolingual subtitle than it is to make it into a 120-character long bilingual subtitle. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to shorten the phrase without skipping anything contextually important. Let us look at possible solutions of this problem with the help of an example from our subtitling of “The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975” documentary (directed by Göran Olsson, 2011):

STOKELY CARMICHAEL: He presumed that if you are non-violent, your opponent will see your suffering and will be moved to change his hearth.

СТОКЛІ КАРМАЙКЛ: Він думав, що якщо ти мирний страждалець, то ворога це зворушить і він віддасть тобі нагріте місце.

(back transl.: He presumed that if you are a peaceful sufferer, your opponent will be moved to change his hearth.)

This is an extract describing Martin Luther King`s ideology. We tried to shorten the phrase as much as possible, having rendered “your opponent will see your suffering and will be moved” as «ворога це зворушить» (“the opponent will be moved”). Moreover, we keep the “suffering” thing by rendering “non-violent” using the “adj+noun” structure as “мирний страждалець” (“peaceful sufferer”).

A lot of Ukrainian film festivals anticipate subtitling from languages other than the original language. Here is an example from our own experience: “Papusza” (directed by Krzysztof Krauze, Joanna Kos-Krauze, 2013) a biopic about a gypsy poetess, traveling with her gypsy camp within the communist Poland, is filmed half in Polish and half in Romani. Taking into account that not all film translators in Ukraine read Polish and very few read Romani, the translation service of a festival provided the translator (me) with the English subtitles, previously made, presumably, in the country of production for international distribution. Thus, while translating a film in half Polish and half Romani, the Ukrainian translator has to rely on the English subtitles, which sometimes lack some nuances that can be perceived solely by native speakers. This

turned out to be especially absurd after we discovered in the process of translation that the Ukrainian language has a lot more in common with Polish and even Romani, than the English language – at least phonetically.

For example: two children (a boy and a girl) find a masterfully decorated and good-looking knife in a hollow of a tree trunk in a forest. The boy tells the girl in Romani a phrase that sounds like “Ale shikar!”, which is rendered in the English subtitles as “Beautiful, isn’t it?”. In such a case we would strongly recommend every Ukrainian translator not to rely on the given English subtitles, for every Ukrainian with good ear can catch here a phonetic proximity to the Ukrainian “Але й шикарний!” (back transl.: “Isn’t it chic!”) This equivalent does not only sound very close to its Romani counterpart, but is also much more emotionally potent than the English “Beautiful, isn’t it?” Thus, our next prompt for a film translator faced with such a challenge will be to listen attentively to the original dialogues and to search for all the language proximities possible; in most cases such a phonetic proximity will as well turn out to be semantic.

Apart from compliance with the abovementioned technical software requirements and avoiding the translator's embarrassments caused by different factors at film festivals, we should not forget about our aim to make subtitles as aesthetically attractive as possible – especially under our conditions of the long and deliberate marginalization of the Ukrainian language, which needs to be resurrected in the eye of the beholder of Ukrainian-subtitled movies as a product for mass consumption.

As a means to reach this aim, we would like to offer a risky method of translation of subtitles. It is risky in the part that it may easily be buried by critics, because they can strongly criticize it for an excessive attention to unnecessary details. We would like to illustrate this method with an example from our subtitling of “Exit Through the Gift Shop” (directed by Banksy, 2010) a documentary about street art. Its main protagonist, Terry Guetta builds himself an image of a street arter. Terry is a Frenchman and his English is really bad, abounding with grammatical errors and with a strong French accent. He speaks very slowly, considering every word before he utters it. Taking into account his language problems and the comic character of this documentary, we have tried to render the slow speech of the main protagonist and the slow way he builds up his utterances – by keeping his ubiquitous “stutters” in the subtitles. We call these stutters “linguistic hobble”. Let us look at this episode, where Terry tells us about how he used to secretly paint houses at night with his street-art friend Shepard Fairey.

TERRY: You know it was not like I’m downstairs and you upstairs doing your thing and I’m filming. No, I would go upstairs and I would go even up, up more to have the shot

that is uh, is uh great.

ТЕРПІ: Це ж не те, що я, типу, внизу знімаю, а ти нагорі своє робиш. Не, я вилізу нагору, аж до неба, і зловлю такий момент, знаєте, е-е-е, класний.

like I'm downstairs – я, типу, внизу знімаю (the word “типу” is colloquial for the English “like”, it necessarily underlines both Terry's slow speech, his trouble with uttering thoughts in English, and the informal character of his narrative)

the shot that is uh, is uh great – такий момент, ну, знаєте, е-е-е... класний (Terry is not a native speaker, thus he fails to find a better word than “great” to describe the beauty of the shot he took with his camera, but we can see that his stutters “the shot that is uh, is uh...” demonstrate his endeavors to find a better word – nevertheless in the long run all his efforts collapse. In Ukrainian subtitles we made our best to render Terry's intense endeavors to find the appropriate word; the translation «такий момент, ну, знаєте, е-е-е...» (back transl.: such a moment, well, you know, um...) clearly demonstrate all the above mentioned shades of speech needed to be rendered in the translation. The words «ну, знаєте...» (“well, you know...”) and the stutters (“e-e-e...”) clearly demonstrate ambiguity of Terry's “foreigner speech”, creating a certain comic effect, caused by reading in subtitles something you did not expect to read there, because usually subtitles do not contain such a linguistic hobble.)

A very complicated case is the translation of onomatopoeia and including it into subtitles.

The following dialogue contains the whole range of onomatopoeia of functioning of an electronic device – a camera. Being not only film translators but also beholders of other film translations into Ukrainian, we know that the Ukrainians are often impervious to neologisms. Nevertheless, the active vocabulary of widely used onomatopoeia is not that wide in Ukrainian, especially concerning the functioning sounds of modern devices.

The factor of linguistic hobble is also present here, forcing the foreigner to opt for various onomatopoeia while speaking foreign language, in order to substitute verbs designating the camera's functioning.

TERRY: «He's like, okay show me the pictures. I take the camera, I take it and I said look. I put it on, I go. I go in menu right away, I go in delete and I go ffffft. And the thing goes vvvvvzzzzzz and I go BAM and I put it down and I said, I don't have any picture on him and I don't have any proof on you.

ТЕРПІ: «Ну і той каже, типу, покажи фотографії. Я беру камеру і кажу, ось,

дивіться. Вмикаю, зразу йду в меню і видаляю все одним махом, ффффіть! І воно так вввзззз. І я зразу бам, гепаю камерою по столу і так, дивіться, кажу, нема тут жодної фотки, нема вам на що дивитися.»

In this extract we strived to deliberately preserve Terry's jammed speech caused by excessive onomatopoeia. The onomatopoeia in this extract is hard to explain without seeing the video with Terry's gestures while uttering sounds. For instance, while uttering “fffft”, Terry moves his hand horizontally as if showing the “running” line, the graphical icon showing progress in deleting pictures from a camera. Thus, it was important for us to translate this “fffft” sound with a sound that would hint to a Ukrainian viewer at an abrupt movement. One of the meanings of the Ukrainian word «фіть» is “a predicate designating speed, momentariness of an action or of a movement”. Thus, we rendered fast movement of the line on the camera's graphical icon for deleting pictures as «ффффіть!», adding some “F”s to reach maximal phonetic proximity to its English equivalent.

Now, we simply transliterate the “BAM” onomatopoeia as existing in Ukrainian, and the “vvvvvzzzzz” onomatopoeia reminds us of some movement, apparently because of the Ukrainian word «віз» (“a cart”) which is definitely associated with movement.

Having reviewed the most frequent problems that can happen during subtitling movies at different Ukrainian film festivals, we clarified some means of avoiding the influence of these solely technical issues on the quality of the Ukrainian subtitles owing to the impossibility to eradicate appearance of these issues.

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