

“I’ll be there, same time, same place!” A decade in translating Hungarian realia into English in audiovisual translation

Nóra ESTÉLYI-TALA¹, Ildikó HORTOBÁGYI²

Audiovisual translation (AVT), albeit originated back in the early 20th century, only started gaining in popularity in the past decades, and poses unique challenges compared to traditional translation. Not only does the translator have to face the limitation placed by the time and length constraints and the lip movement of the characters, but beside verbal elements, also non-verbal ones (sounds, music, images, etc.) define the target-language text. This characteristic of movies makes the task of translating realia, or culture-specific notions, rather hard. The translator can - and has to - choose from a wide range of translation methods that can be placed somewhere on a spectrum between two main trends: domestication or foreignisation, opting for either bringing the target language (TL) text closer to the target culture (TC), or preserve it to some extent in the source culture (SC). The goals of the present paper are twofold. On the one hand, it intends to support the validity of a taxonomy adjusted specifically for the translation of realia in AVT in a previous study, which allows the measure of domestication or foreignisation to be expressed in numbers. On the other hand, it provides a case study of a Hungarian film trilogy and its English subtitles with the aim of discovering a shift in trends towards foreignisation over time.

Keywords: *audiovisual translation, subtitling, realia, domestication, foreignisation*

1. Introduction

Thanks to the easy access to movies in various languages, a natural bi- or multilingual background is available to most of us, even if our natural language environment is monolingual. In the pandemic lockdowns of the recent years, the popularity of the film, info- and edutainment industry, “the dominant forms of culture in modern age” (Tuhjtarova et al. 2021, 50) has been soaring, hence,

¹ University of Pannonia, Multilingualism Doctoral School, Hungary, estelyi-tala.nora@mftk.uni-pannon.hu

² University of Pannonia, Hungary, hortobagy.ildiko@mftk.uni-pannon.hu

audiovisual translation - be it dubbing, voice-over, or subtitling - has gained prominence. Even though the origins of AVT date back as far as the beginnings of the film industry, the area has only become a focal interest of translation studies in the past decades.

The term AVT involves a wide range of subtypes:

[L]inguistic and semiotic transfers like dubbing, subtitling, surtitling, respeaking, audiosubtitling, voice-over, simultaneous interpreting at film festivals, free-commentary and goblin translation, subtitling for the deaf and the hard of hearing, audiodescription, fansubbing and fandubbing. (Chaume 2013, 105)

However, most of these subgenres fit into either of the two categories described by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2021, 7): “either the original dialogue soundtrack is substituted with a newly recorded or live soundtrack in the TL (i.e. revoicing) or it is converted into a written text that appears on the screen (timed text)”.

AVT poses unique challenges compared to traditional translation: strict time constraints, limitation of the number of characters (the maximum number of lines is 2; the maximum number of characters per line is between 37 and 42, and the maximum number of characters per second is usually between 17 and 21), or lip movement, when it comes to lip-synching; yet the most conspicuous difference between AVT and traditional translation is the fact that in addition to verbal, also non-verbal elements (sounds, music, images, etc.) define the target-language text (Chaume 2009).

Since [AVT] brings cultures into contact with one another, translation for the cinema in particular, and the audiovisual world in general, raises considerable cross-cultural issues. Disregarding them may lead to a translated programme which is unintelligible for the target viewers. (Ramière 2006, 152-153).

In the multilingual environment provided by movies, realia, or culture-specific items, culture-bound notions/terms, “lexis without equivalence” (Klaudy 2007), culture bumps, or references (Espindola and Matielo 2011; Ranzato 2016) are a frequent challenge to overcome. Realia are usually objects or notions that are typical and unique to a particular language community, and they “tie the text to a specific culture, period or location, and present translators with challenges related to the domesticating and foreignizing effects of the translation process” (Loponen 2009,

166). They include among many others geographical proper nouns, names of famous people, politicians, bands, foods, drinks, institutions, historical references, etc.

At first sight, it might seem rather easy to decide what counts as realia, but when analysing movies, we have encountered several categories that were not obvious whether to count among realia or not. Such were general nicknames (*Sweetheart, Junior*), contemptuous addressing (*asshole*), loaded nicknames (with meaning, wordplay), objects/notions that exist in the target culture, but have no equivalent in the target language (*ünneplő* - elegant clothing worn for official events, usually by school children), expressions unique to the language deriving from its structure (*csókolom* - “hello” or “bye” used with elderly persons, *bácsi* - “uncle”, when addressing an elderly person), idiomatic phrases, or puns.

When it comes to the translation of realia, the translator can choose from a wide range of translation methods that can be placed somewhere on a spectrum between two main trends: domestication or foreignisation. The former refers to “the adaptation of the cultural context or of culture-specific terms”, that is, bringing the TL text closer to the target audience, while the latter is used for “the preserving of the original cultural context, in terms of settings, names, etcetera” (Paloposki 2011, 40).

“The Netflix recommendations for translation [...] are considered ‘the strictest on the marketplace’ (European Parliament 2017, 15). Culture and domestication or foreignization strategies are not mentioned directly in the Netflix Style Guide (Netflix 2018). The issue is covered indirectly regarding the treatment of historical or mythical characters, plot relevant nicknames, titles of published books and movies, foreign words, and brand names (Netflix 2018). Moreover, Netflix recommends matching the tone of the “original” content to the equivalent in the “target” audience and language (Netflix 2020)” (Yonamine 2022, 199).

As we can see, the translator is to some extent left with their own choice of preference when it comes to the translation of realia; however, due to the spreading of online available international audiovisual and media contents, a shift in trends toward foreignisation may be expected.

The present paper is a follow-up of a previous study by Estélyi-Tala and Hortobágyi (2022), which formulated a taxonomy based on relevant literature and personal experience specifically adjusted to the translation of realia in AVT. Therefore, it will attempt to support the validity of the abovementioned taxonomy, and provide a case study of the English subtitles of a Hungarian movie trilogy that spans over a decade and a half, thus serving as an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the possible shifts in trends between domestication and foreignisation in Hungarian AVT into English.

2. Taxonomy

A combination of three taxonomies already existing in translation studies served as the basis for the taxonomy designed for our purposes, and some modification was also applied (Estélyi-Tala and Hortobágyi 2022).

Ramière’s spectrum illustrates well how the continuum between the two poles works; however, several frequent operations are missing from the scale (Table 1).

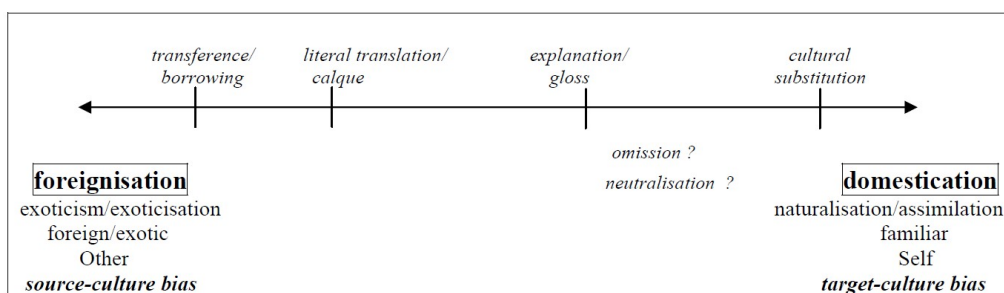


Table 1. Typical progression of procedures found in the literature (Ramière 2006, 156)

Mujzer-Varga (2009) provides a more detailed list of translation methods with a concrete order (Table 2). She sometimes uses different names for the same strategy as Ramière, but they are clearly identifiable, and she even includes operations that were neglected by Ramière: “transliteration with minor changes (in spelling), partial equivalent (where some part of the realia is kept in its original form, but another part is translated literally, e.g.: Rákóczi út - Rákóczi Road), elimination (or omission in other relevant literature), and generalisation” (Estélyi-Tala and Hortobágyi 2022). However, the problem here is that although the shift to either direction can be seen, the neutral line between the two trends is not marked in any way.

Also, neither taxonomies mention specification or the case of paraphrase (Klaudy and Heltai 2020), where the original expression is omitted, and an explanatory fragment is inserted instead. “As it may have the effect of making the audience oblivious of the omitted realia, it will be considered an operation closer to the domestication/adaptation end of the spectrum” (Estélyi-Tala and Hortobágyi 2022). Thus, these translation methods were included in our taxonomy.

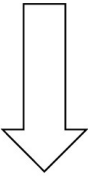
translation strategy	translation method
foreignization  adaptation	Transliteration
	Transliteration with some assimilation
	Addition
	Partial equivalent
	Direct translation
	Elimination
	Generalization
	Adapting

Table 2. The connection between translation strategies and translation methods (Mujzer-Varga 2009, 6)

The third taxonomy, provided by Van Poucke (2012), is a step ahead of the previous ones. He does not only try to render strength levels of either domestication or foreignisation to the operations, but also attempts to provide “a quantitative model for assessing translations on a foreignization-domestication scale, based on the different existing taxonomies of translation shifts” (p. 139). He categorises the translation methods into 5 categories: Strong Foreignization (F), which he assigns value 5, Moderate Foreignization (f) with value 2, Neutral Translation (0) with value 0, logically; Moderate Domestication (d) being -2, and Strong Domestication (D), which is allocated value -5 (see Table 3).

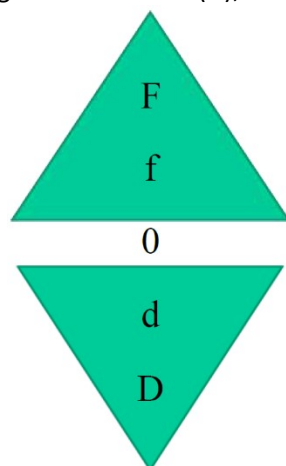


Table 3. Van Poucke’s (2012) categorisation of translation methods

In the final taxonomy (see Table 4), **F** includes borrowing, **f** includes “deliberate” literal translation, specification, explicitation (which is equivalent to our paraphrase), and addition, with our complementation of formal focus. **0** refers to the cases

“whenever the translation remains unmarked, i.e. those cases where the translator did not really meet a translation problem and was able to use the most obvious choice of words” (p. 146). We also included cases where a potential wordplay or formal characteristics were overlooked and the content gained more focus. The category **d** involves the translation methods of generalisation, paraphrase, and specification, while **D** contains omission and cultural substitution.

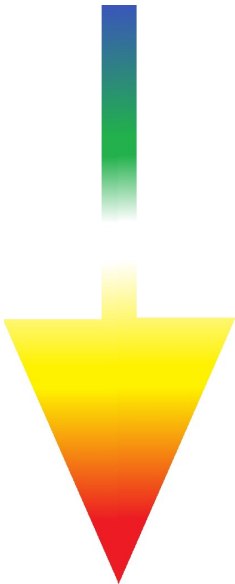
<p>FOREIGNISATION</p>  <p>DOMESTICATION</p>	BORROWING (5)
	BORROWING WITH MODIFICATION (5)
	ADDITION (2)
	PARTIAL TRANSLATION (2)
	FORMAL FOCUS (2)
	“DELIBERATE” LITERAL TRANSLATION (2)
	NEUTRAL TRANSLATION (0)
	PARAPHRASE (-2)
	GENERALISATION (-2)
	SPECIFICATION (-2)
	OMISSION (-5)
	CULTURAL SUBSTITUTION (-5)

Table 4. Taxonomy applied with the numbers assigned to the strategies (Estélyi-Tala and Hortobágyi 2022)

3. The Films: Some kind of America trilogy

The Hungarian comedy trilogy, directed by Gábor Herendi, embraces a long period in AVT history, as the first movie was released in 2001, the second in 2008, and the third in 2018. Owing to the fact that the three parts share the same stylistic

elements, goals and genre, possible stylistic differences can be overlooked. For the analysis, the official English subtitles were analysed.

4. Hypothesis

With the rapid spread and great popularity of English-language contents on the internet and the role of English as a lingua franca, small languages, including Hungarian, tend to be relegated to the background. Thus, after consulting relevant literature, we hypothesised that *there will be a shift of tendency toward domestication*, that is, the Hungarian culture will appear less prominently in the English subtitles than in the original.

5. Method

1. All realia were collected and listed, then assigned into 3 main categories: proper nouns, common nouns, and other, and altogether into 13 subcategories.
2. Translation methods were categorised.
3. The values defined above were assigned to each realia translation.
4. The averages of the different categories were summarised for each movie, then compared. Thus, the frequency of the realia in the given category could be overlooked, only the tendencies were highlighted.

6. Categorisation

The realia were assigned into 3 main categories and 13 subcategories:

- 1) proper nouns
 - a. brands, titles literary allusions
 - b. fictional proper nouns
 - c. real persons, brands, names of institutions
 - d. actual fictive nicknames
- 2) common nouns
 - a. food/drink
 - b. institutes, history- and politics-related words
 - c. general objects, notions
 - d. general nicknames
- 3) other
 - a. contemptuous addressing
 - b. language-specific expressions
 - c. idioms
 - d. words with additional connotations, puns

7. Discussion and Results

After collecting and categorising our data, we allocated the values of translation methods defined in our taxonomy to each realia (see Tables 5-7), and then displayed the average values per each category in a table (see Table 8). The table demonstrates the number of realia found in each film, and the average value of the translation methods applied in them next to it.

SL	TL	Translation method	value
a francba	bloody hell	cultural substitution	-5
ami jár az jár	I am entitled	neutral translation	0
anyád!	fuck you!	cultural substitution	-5
Art Hotel	Art Hotel	borrowing	5
Bem rakpart	.---	omission	-5
bicska	"bicska"	borrowing	5
Brünhilda	battle-axe	cultural substitution	-5
Bűnös Város	Guilty City	neutral translation	0
Bűzös város	Giddy City	formal equivalence	2

Table 5. Excerpt from the list of realia, the translation methods, and their values from the 1st movie

SL	TL	Translation method	value
diót lehet törni	you could crack nuts	neutral translation	0
drágám	my dear	neutral translation	0
édes	honey	cultural substitution	-5
él és virul	lives like a lord	cultural substitution	-5
furkókám	you bum	cultural substitution	-5
fűvel-fával	hanky-panky	cultural substitution	-5
genya	you scum	cultural substitution	-5
habzsi-dőzsi	hunky-dory	formal focus	2
Hol volt, hol nem volt, az Óperenciás tengeren is túl	Once upon a time	cultural substitution	-5
Hová mész te, kisnyulacska	.---	omission	-5

Table 6. Excerpt from the list of realia, the translation methods, and their values from the 2nd movie

SL	TL	Translation method	value
Hová mész te kisnyulacska?	Where're you going, little bunny?	neutral translation	0
játsz -ok/-om	on/in	cultural substitution	-5
jobb belátásra bír	show him what the life is like	cultural substitution	-5
kedves neje	your kind wife	deliberate literal translation	2
Kokó	Kokó	borrowing	5
korongozás	ceramics	generalisation	-2
köcsög	handjob	formal focus	2
Kúr Tamás	Willy the Screw	cultural substitution	-5
Lolka és Bolka	Lolka and Bolka	borrowing	5
Lopom én a pénzt?	You think I steal the money?	neutral translation	0
lottyadt sarkú kurvapepecér	you wanker	cultural substitution	-5
magyar	---	omission	-5
minden pénzt megért	it was worth every penny	cultural substitution	-5

Table 7. Excerpt from the list of realia, the translation methods, and their values from the 3rd movie

In total, the first movie contained 64 items, with the result of an average value of **-2.16**. The second movie contained 56 items, their average value was **-3.25**. The third movie showcased 54 items, their average value was **-2.75**.

Table 8 demonstrates the detailed results per categories and movies.

		1 st movie		2 nd movie		3 rd movie	
		Items	Avg. value	Items	Avg. value	Items	Avg. value
proper nouns	geographical proper names	2	-1.5	3	5	4	-0.25
	brands, titles, literary allusions	2	1.5	3	-3.3	6	0.5
	fictional proper nouns	3	-0.67	3	-1.67	1	0
	real persons, bands, names of institutions	3	1.5	2	-2	2	0
	actual fictive nicknames	0	--	0	--	4	1.25
	TOTAL	10	0.39	11	-0.49	17	0.3

		1 st movie		2 nd movie		3 rd movie	
		Items	Avg. value	Items	Avg. value	Items	Avg. value
common nouns	institutes, politics-related words	2	-3.5	0	--	1	-5
	food/drink	6	-2.33	0	--	0	--
	general objects, notions	5	1	2	-1	5	-2.4
	general nicknames	4	-5	5	-5	3	-2.67
	TOTAL	17	-2.5	7	-3	8	-3.36
other	contemptuous addressing	3	-5	9	-5	5	-5
	language-specific expressions	3	-4	3	-5	6	-3.13
	idioms	21	-3.45	16	-4.2	12	-4.33
	words with additional connotations, puns	6	-0.2	4	-0.25	1	5
	TOTAL	33	-3.16	32	-3.6	24	-1.86

Table 8. Values summarised according to movies and categories

Although the totals do not seem to support our original hypotheses of a shift in tendency toward foreignisation, this does appear in certain categories. Both in **common nouns** in general, where the values were -2.5, -3 and 3.36 in the three movies respectively, and in **idioms** within our “other” category with the values -3.45, -4.2, and -4.33, a **clear trend** can be noticed, namely a shift **towards domestication**.

As their combined number (81 out of 174 items, altogether 46.6%) makes up a substantial part of all the realia found in the movies, the hypothesis seems to be partly confirmed.

When examining the total results, this stronger trend toward domestication can also be identified in the case of the second movie in all categories, as well as the total of all realia, and it is only the third movie that has a slight inclination towards the foreignisation end of the spectrum. This might be due to the subjective preferences of the translator (as the subtitles were created by different translators).

As for the other goal of the study, namely, to justify the taxonomy set for the particular problematics of translating realia in AVT, the study seems to have achieved its aim.

8. Limitations

As the case study is very limited, no generalisation should be made based on it. The categorisation, however promising the results of the present paper and the study it is based on are, the numbers rendered to the translation operations for the measurability of domesticating and foreignising methods still require quantitative research. Furthermore, as Van Poucke (2011) points out, the actual choices in the particular items are not sufficient by themselves: in addition, the reasons behind the translator's decisions should be equally considered. However, as this would be in most cases impossible, as well as immensely tedious (probably impossible to execute on a large scale), this has to be neglected. For the taxonomy, modifications for specific cases may be necessary; however, for our purpose, it seems to fulfil its duty.

9. Scope for future research

Quantitative research is necessary to support the validity of our categorisation. In the long run, setting a number marking the borders between significant and insignificant deviation from the neutral would be ideal, but again, for that, extensive research is required. Investigation of trends from low resource languages to high resource languages and vice versa could broaden our perception on how the spreading of a language influences domesticating or foreignising tendencies in AVT. Similarly, potential change in tendencies over time in general could be a fruitful area for investigation, and a comparison of potentially different tendencies in the subgenres of AVT, in particular, subtitling and dubbing.

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