TRANSLATION OF IDIOMS IN TV SUBTITLING

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Abstract

This paper reports on an empirical study of idiom translation in subtitling for television. The research was conducted on a corpus comprising TV series from three Croatian TV channels – HRT1, HRT2 and RTL. A total of 205 idioms were extracted and analysed in order to explore the distribution of the strategies used. In addition, this paper aims to show how often translation shifts take place in the translation of idioms in TV subtitling, and whether these shifts are obligatory or optional.

1. Introduction

Let us start the ball rolling by asking a very simple question: How many foreign television programs is it possible to watch without subtitles on Croatian television channels? If we leave out cartoons and documentaries, which are generally dubbed, as well as some programs that are broadcast live and simultaneously interpreted, the answer to the above question is – none. There should not be any raised eyebrows since Croatia belongs to the group of countries where subtitling has had a very long tradition and where people are used to listening to foreign language on the one hand and reading subtitles in their own language on the other.

There is something that might strike the reader of the present text as interesting: In the three sentences which make up the previous paragraph there are as many as five expressions that could be considered idiomatic. If we had wanted to exaggerate, there could have been far more, but the point was to demonstrate that idiomatic expressions are a natural part of the English language and that they are very frequent. The density of language displaying idiomatic characteristics will vary according to the type of text but, generally speaking, idioms can be found everywhere.

This is especially true of programs such as TV series and feature films where script writers often rely on many creative devices that help make the dialogue more natural-sounding and interesting, idiomatic expressions being only one of them. As Gibbs

(1994: 265) points out, "California is one of the best living laboratories for studying the idioms, clichés and colloquialisms that make up the poetry of everyday speech". California also happens to be one of the biggest TV-program production laboratories in the world, and it is only logical that television programs will be permeated by language displaying idiomatic characteristics. This poses a challenge in translation, especially in subtitling with its inherent spatial and temporal constraints. The aim of this research paper is therefore to examine how subtitlers deal with this problem, in particular which strategies they frequently use when translating idioms in TV subtitles. Some of the possible reasons for such choices will be discussed.

The paper starts with a brief overview of the field of subtitling, which is followed by some general features of idioms and their understanding. The section that follows provides an account of Baker's (1992) classification of strategies for translating idioms. Section 5 explains what translation shifts are, while the aims of the paper are described in Section 6. What follows is a section presenting the methodology applied in the research. The findings, including the statistical analysis of the translation strategies used in the examples from the corpus, can be found in Section 8. Finally, some general conclusions are drawn. Some examples of idioms and their translations are presented within the body of the paper, while the complete list of examples used in this study is available from the author on request.

2. Subtitling

"I could have done this better." Does this sound familiar? Of course it does; it is a sentence often heard from television viewers. They are, of course, referring to the text at the bottom of the screen and to the way the subtitler translated a particular utterance. Very often when people watch subtitled television programs, they comment on the translator's supposed lack of skill or knowledge, on the fact that "half the text is missing" or on certain stylistic choices. Little do they realize how much thought, time and effort is usually put into creating subtitles for a certain program, how many steps subtitling involves or what kind of competences are necessary for a person to be a successful subtitler. As Gambier (2003: 184) points out:

> Screen translators have to master the full range of competences required of any other kind of translator (excellent command of their working languages and their mother tongue; ability to translate; skills in terminology and documentation retrieval). However they also have to be able to work under intense time pressure and cope with stress; they have to develop special competence in writing for the media; they have to be competent in

analysis, rewriting, condensing, post-editing (within time and space constraints); they must be able to work with other experts and negotiate with them [...]; they have to adapt to new technology and have a strong capacity for self-evaluation in order to make fast decisions and to take responsibility for the quality of their input [...].

All of this comes into play in the subtitling process, and subtitlers must indeed work within a rather complex framework in order to produce high-quality subtitles.

Subtitling has lately become one of the most thriving areas of research within the discipline of Translation Studies. The reason for this rise in interest lies in the fact that in our daily lives we are becoming increasingly surrounded by audio-visual material. Ever since the 1930s and the expansion of *talkies* – movies incorporating synchronized dialogue – the picture on the screen has been accompanied by words. And when there are words, there is often a need for translation. According to Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 8) some scholars "differentiate up to 10 different ways of translating audiovisual programs, although there are three main ones: dubbing (also known as lip-sync), subtitling and voice-over". The main aim of this chapter is to give a brief overview of subtitling. In order to show what subtitling is and what subtitlers have to bear in mind while working, the following section will give some details on the specificities connected to the practice of subtitling as well as definitions of some key concepts. For the purposes of this research, the scope of the description will be limited to the linguistic aspect of subtitling and to clarifications of the technical side of the job where necessary.

2.1   Subtitling – definition and types

As we have already mentioned, subtitling is a translation practice which belongs to the domain of audio-visual translation (AVT). But what exactly is subtitling? According to Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 8),

> subtitling may be defined as a translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that endeavors to recount the original dialogue of the speakers as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image (letters, inserts, graffiti, inscriptions, placards and the like) and the information that is contained on the soundtrack (songs, voices off).

In some countries such as Japan, however, the text does not appear at the bottom of the screen, but rather on the right-hand side.

Since the film sign has a specific semiotic nature, it is necessary to emphasize that "film establishes a multi-channel and multi-code type of communication" (Delabastita 1989: 196) because "both the visual channel (light waves) and the acoustic channel (air vibrations) are simultaneously utilized" (ibid.). When we add subtitles to the two above mentioned channels of communication, it will be clear that every subtitled program is composed of three main elements: the spoken word, the image and the subtitles. Successful interaction of these three elements is required in order for the viewers to be able to follow the program without difficulties. Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 9) explain that "subtitles must appear in synchrony with the image and the dialogue, provide a systematically adequate account of the SL dialogue and remain displayed on screen long enough for the viewers to be able to read them".

How this will be achieved depends on the type of subtitles that are used and on the targeted audience. There are a number of different typologies which are used for classifying subtitles. One of the most traditional is the typology relying on the linguistic dimension of subtitles. Thus we can divide subtitles into intralingual, interlingual and bilingual.

Intralingual subtitling is that which does not involve a change of language, which is the reason why some scholars are opposed to its being called 'translation'. Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 16) further divide intralingual subtitling into subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, subtitling for language learning purposes, subtitling for karaoke effect, subtitling for dialects of the same language and subtitling for notices and announcements.

Interlingual subtitling, on the other hand, involves not only a change of mode (from spoken to written), but also a change from source language to target language. According to the same classification mentioned above, interlingual subtitles can be subdivided into those for hearers and those for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. Interlingual subtitles will be the focal point of this paper and they will be further analyzed in the sections to follow.

Finally, there is another category of subtitles, bilingual subtitles. As the name itself implies, such subtitles are written in two languages. They can be found in countries such as Belgium, where films are translated both into French and into Flemish. In order to save space, bilingual subtitles are usually two-liners, i.e. subtitles written in two lines, but sometimes they can extend to up to four lines. Since subtitlers have an extremely small number of characters at their disposal, the creation of bilingual

subtitles is a practice which is subjected to even more constraints than interlingual subtitling and it requires significant reduction and modification.

2.2   Translation or adaptation

There are some scholars who think that subtitling does not qualify as translation, but rather as adaptation. In order to support this claim, they emphasize the constraints imposed by the image itself (what the subtitles say must be in accordance with what characters do on the screen) and by the available time and space. They also consider that the omission of lexical items occurring in the source text is another argument in favour of the claim that audiovisual translation is adaptation (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 9).

However, there are also scholars who have completely opposing views. Jakobson (1959) was the first one whose classification of translation types has the capacity to accommodate audio-visual translation. He divides translations into three types: intralingual (rewording), interlingual (translation proper) and intersemiotic (transmutation). There have been other scholars such as Delabastita (1989: 214) who have also adopted a rather flexible notion of translation in order to accommodate the changing reality. He stresses that "if translation is defined as a process of linguistic recoding that should aim at a maximal transfer of source text syntax and semantics into the target language, then clearly film translation is emphatically not a form of genuine translation". However, he goes on to explain that there are thousands of texts, such as poetry, plays, tourist brochures, which we consider to be translations and which also do not conform to normative definitions of translation. They are rather translations of "texts into texts" and in that respect they are

> quite similar to the manifold operations that occur in film translation and which defy any static definition: reductions, additions, stylistic or ideological shifts, adaptation of sociocultural data, changes in the visual (graphic) presentation of the text and so forth. The conclusion seems to be that a narrow, normative definition of translation is in danger of being applicable to only very few, well-selected cases, and for being unsuitable for a description of most actual cases. (Delabastita 1989: 214)

It seems that the traditional notion of fidelity has been challenged and the definitions of translation have become more flexible. This is especially true for audiovisual translation. As Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 11) note: "The one-to-one translation approach loses all validity in [...] the field [of audio-visual translation] and

the concept of formal equivalence must be understood from a much more flexible perspective than in other spheres of translation".

2.3   Constraints

As we have already mentioned, there are some constraints which make subtitling different from other types of translation. For the purposes of this paper, a summary of the main constraints characteristic of subtitling will be sufficient.

In the first place, subtitlers have to deal with the shift in mode from speech to writing and subtitling is unique in this respect. As Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 61) note, "there are two basic types of speech in film: scripted and spontaneous speech". Scripted speech is usually more structured and thus easier to translate, whereas spontaneous speech which occurs in documentaries and live interviews is much more challenging in this respect. The change in mode entails the disappearance of some features of spoken language, regardless of the subgenre the dialogue belongs to. Hesitations and repetitions are avoided, grammar errors are usually corrected and lexis is standard and often simplified. Sometimes, the translator has to recur to rewriting and interpretation in order to produce coherent and logical subtitles.

Another reason why interpretation and rewording are necessary has to do with the constraints of time and space. As Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 82) explain,

> in the world of digital video any picture is made up of individual dots known as pixels. [...] Written text and graphics shown on screen may get distorted if they appear too close to the edges because TV manufacturers deal with screen edges differently. This is why all text must be centrally positioned within a safe area and this safe area is usually 10% with each frame edge.

This means that translators will have from 33 up to 40 keyboard spaces per line at their disposal, depending on the software they use. On HRT1, HRT2 and RTL Televizija – the Croatian TV channels which have been included in the research – the maximum number of characters per line is 35.

The number of characters and lines is directly related to the notion of reading speed. It is considered that "the average viewer is able to read 70 to 74 characters in 6 seconds and from this main rule we can then calculate the amount of text we can write in shorter subtitles" (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 23). This is known as 'the six-second rule'. Thus on HRT the maximum number of characters per second is 15, whereas on RTL it is 12. On all the three channels the minimum duration that the

subtitle remains on-screen is two seconds and the maximum duration is seven seconds.

As a result, the source text is routinely reduced. If the translator is to convey the intended meaning respecting all the limitations related to time and space, rewording and reductions are inevitable. This leads to concise utterances that are stripped of many features of spoken language, such as repetitions and redundancy. However, if the characters on screen speak very quickly and/or simultaneously, sometimes even significant elements are cut out, such as in Example 2.1 from the corpus.

Example 2.1

If you don't mind, I'd like to ask **our Communications Officer** to give me a hand.
Smijem li dovesti pomoć? [May I get help?]

Here the translator has eliminated quite a few meaning components from the source text and retained only the essential information – seeking permission to ask for help.

As we have already stated, every subtitled program consists of three elements: the image, the spoken word and the text at the bottom of the screen. It is precisely the co-occurrence of these three elements that can pose quite a few problems for the translator. Firstly, there is a need for the visual image to be consistent with the translation, i.e. the words must match what is happening on the screen. Usually this is even helpful since the image component can help the translator to understand more easily what the intended meaning is. However, in case of certain plays on words which rely on the visual component, this can be a major constraint. Secondly and even more importantly, the co-occurrence of the original is a feature which sets subtitling apart from other types of translation. Rarely do you see or hear the source text simultaneously with the target text. Some scholars say that this makes subtitles 'vulnerable' because it makes them easy to criticize. Viewers can be very critical towards omissions, reduction ad paraphrasing. This is especially true of omissions of internationalisms and proper names, as they are easily recognized.

2.4   Guidelines

In order to reduce the number of errors and to ensure uniformity of their subtitled programs, subtitling companies and TV channels often produce guidelines which their subtitlers should adhere to. These guidelines mostly relate to the technical aspects of

subtitling (position of subtitles, number of characters, reading speed, raising subtitles, etc.) but they also define certain language norms that should be respected.

One of the most widespread documents of this type is Carroll and Ivarsson's (1998) 'Code of Good Subtitling Practice'. In their thirty two recommendations, the authors outline what high-quality subtitles should be like. Among other things, they state that:

- Translation quality must be high with due consideration of all idiomatic and cultural nuances;

- Straightforward semantic units must be used;

- As far as possible, each subtitle should be semantically self-contained;

- The language register must be appropriate and correspond with the spoken word;

- The language should be (grammatically) 'correct' since subtitles serve as a model for literacy.

Apart from such general advice, many companies and TV channels also give specific guidelines as to the language register which should be used. Some TV channels are renowned for being rather purist in their translations, allowing only grammatically correct and lexically standard language, whereas others are known to allow for some variation in register, depending on the genre a certain program belongs to. In this respect the Croatian national television HRT is seen as rather conservative, whereas the commercial channels Nova TV and RTL Televizija are more tolerant towards changes in register and style.

3. Idioms

When one is not familiar with the meaning of a word or phrase, a common starting point for research is a good dictionary. Let us suppose we had no idea what the word *idiom* meant. If we looked it up in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, we would find the following definition: "3 [C] a phrase or sentence whose meaning is not clear from the meaning of its individual words and which must be learnt as a whole unit" (OALD 1995: 589). This definition is meant to account for a wide array of word combinations: metaphors (e.g. *spill the beans*), metonymies (e.g. *sit on one's hands*), pairs of words (e.g. *out and about*), idioms with it (e.g. *live it up*), similes (e.g. *as easy as ABC*), sayings and proverbs (e.g. *Every cloud has a silver lining*), phrasal

verbs (e.g. *take up – He took up sailing last year*), grammatical idioms (e.g. *let alone*) and others. However, for the purposes of this paper, the notion of idiom will be used in a slightly more restricted sense, referring to the following (Gibbs 1994: 269):

a) tournure idioms (e.g. *to kick the bucket, to fly off the handle, to crack the whip*);

b) sayings (e.g. *take the bull by the horns, let the cat out of the bag*);

c) proverbs (e.g. *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*);

d) binominals (e.g. *spick and span, hammer and tongs*);

e) frozen similes (e.g. *as white as snow, as cool as a cucumber*);

f) phrasal compounds (e.g. *a red herring, a cold fish*);

g) formulaic expressions (e.g. *How do you do?*).

This means that even though we have accepted the notion of idiom in a rather broad sense, phrasal verbs will be excluded from the scope of the definition and will not be taken into account during the analysis of data collected in the corpus.

Generally speaking, there are two opposing views on idioms: the traditional one and the more contemporary, cognitive-linguistic approach. We shall briefly outline both in the next section.

3.1   *The traditional view of idioms*

The idea of 'idiom as a unit' which might be inferred from the OALD definition displays the traditional belief that idioms are "noncompositional because their figurative meanings are not functions of the meanings of their individual parts" (Gibbs 1994: 270). This noncompositional view is rather conservative and it has received little attention from contemporary scholars. As Kövecses (2002: 199) points out "most traditional views agree that idioms consist of two or more words and that the overall meaning of these words cannot be predicted from the meanings of individual words." Thus, if we were to adopt the traditional point of view, this would mean that, unlike the comprehension of literal language, we understand idioms:

a) Through the retrieval of their stipulated meanings from the lexicon after their literal meanings have been rejected as inappropriate;
b) In parallel to processing of their literal meanings;
c) Directly, without analysis of their literal meanings; or

d) When input causes a configuration to be recognized as an idiom. (Gibbs 1994: 271)

In a nutshell, according to this view, learning the meaning of an idiom would require the speakers to form arbitrary links between idioms and their nonliteral meanings. Kövecses (2002: 199) explains that,

> in the traditional view, idioms are regarded as a special set of the larger category of words. They are assumed to be a matter of language alone; that is, they are taken to be items of the lexicon (i.e. the mental dictionary) that are independent of any conceptual system.

For example, it is just a matter of convention that we use the word *desk* to describe a piece of furniture we write on and the word *table* to describe a piece of furniture we eat on. It might as well be the other way round. According to the traditional view of idioms the exact same principle applies to idioms – we comprehend them in the same way as we know the meanings of individual words. It is just a matter of convention.

Thus, according to the traditional view, all there is to idioms is that they are clusters of words which have a special meaning that cannot be deduced from the meanings of their constituent parts. In addition to this, idioms are considered to be separate, i.e. they are believed to be independent of each other and not to stand in any meaningful relationships.

3.2   The cognitive linguistic view of idioms

The cognitive linguistic view of idioms has something in common with the traditional view of idioms – they both say that the meanings of idioms are not entirely predictable. However, they differ in one important respect: the cognitive linguistic view suggests that a significant part of the meaning of an idiom *is* motivated. According to this view, idioms are not merely parts of the lexicon which have a meaning arbitrarily connected to the form. Quite the contrary, the meaning of idiomatic expressions "arises from our more general knowledge of the world embodied in our conceptual system. In other words, idioms (or at least the majority of them) are conceptual and not linguistic in nature" (Kövecses 2002: 201).

It follows from the above that we can rely on our knowledge of the world in order to be able to understand the meanings of idioms. Thus, the meanings of idioms can be said to be motivated and not arbitrary. This explains why, in certain cases, it is

possible to understand the meaning of an idiom even if we encounter it for the very first time.

The cognitive linguistic approach to idioms says that "there are at least three mechanisms that make the meanings of idioms motivated: metaphor, metonymy and conventional knowledge" (Kövecses 2002: 211). Thus, the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS FIRE allows us to understand the idiom *spit fire*, the metonymy stating that THE HAND STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY allows the understanding of the idiom *to sit on one's hands* and the shared, common sense knowledge, i.e. conventional knowledge helps us grasp the meaning of idioms such as *to have one's hands full.*

4. Translating idioms

As any other translation, the translation of idioms involves interpretation of a stretch of source-text language and its recreation in the target language. Even though this may sound straightforward, the process of translating idioms is a rather complex one and it requires a lot of knowledge and skill on the part of the translator. This means that translators must have an excellent command of their working languages, including among other things the ability to actively use idiomatically appropriate language. In addition to that, when it comes to skills, translators must have an ability to recognize, interpret and recreate an idiom using appropriate strategies.

Firstly, the translator must be able to recognize that they are dealing with an idiomatic expression. Sometimes this task will be rather simple, whereas at other times it may create difficulties for the translator. As Baker (1992: 65) points out, idioms which are easier to recognize usually fall into three categories:

a) Expressions which violate truth conditions, e.g. *have a sweet tooth, keep an open mind*;

b) Expressions which seem ill-formed because they do not follow the grammatical rules of the language, e.g. *explain yourself, in the know*;

c) Expressions which start with *like* (and simile-like structures), e.g. *cold like a fish, have eyes like a hawk.*

It follows from the above that the more difficult an expression is to understand and the less sense it makes at first sight, the easier the translator will recognize that they are faced with an idiom. In other words, the fact that the translator cannot wrap

their mind around a particular expression easily will often be an indicator of the presence of an idiom.

However, not all idioms fall into the above mentioned categories and some of them may be rather misleading. Baker (ibid.) distinguishes between two types of idioms which can lead to misinterpretation:

a) Idioms which seem transparent because they offer a reasonable literal interpretation. For instance, the idiom *go out of your way* means 'to make an effort', but it is possible for a translator to interpret it literally and translate it as 'go astray'.

b) Idioms in the source language having a close counterpart in the target language which looks similar on the surface, but has a completely or partially different meaning.

With regard to the latter situation, Baker explains that if an English speaker asks: *Has the cat got your tongue?* they are urging someone to answer a question or simply to say something. On the other hand, the French expression *donner sa langue au chat* ('to give one's tongue to the cat') is similar in form, but it has a different meaning, i.e. 'to give up', especially when you cannot answer a riddle. It is interesting to note that Croatian has a similar expression to the English one 'Je li ti maca papala jezik?' (Has the kitten eaten your tongue?), but it should be used with caution because even though the meaning is the same, it is normally used only when addressing children. Using this idiom in an adult conversation would probably have a humorous effect, or perhaps even cause offence. It follows from the above that translators should be alert and try to avoid simply imposing target-language interpretations to source-text idioms.

Once an idiom has been recognized as such and interpreted correctly, the translator is faced with another challenge: finding an appropriate strategy for its translation into the target-language. The difficulties that lie in this step of the idiom-translating process are very different than those in the previous stage. Here the main question is not whether an idiom is transparent, opaque or misleading – an opaque idiom might be much easier to translate than a transparent one firstly because it draws attention to itself and secondly because its meaning might be straightforward. Baker (1992: 68-71) summarizes the main difficulties involved in translating idioms as follows:

a) An idiom or fixed expression may have no equivalent in the target language. Languages organize reality in different ways. Thus one language might have an idiom for something that another language describes with a single word. Moreover, an idiom may be culture-specific and therefore difficult to translate. For instance, the idiom *the usual suspects* means 'the people you would expect to be somewhere or doing a particular thing' and it is a quote from the 1942 U.S film *Casablanca*. It would be difficult to find an expression with a similar meaning or impact on the target audience in Croatian. Thus when the 1995 movie *The Usual Suspects* was translated into Croatian, the title in Croatian was *Privedite osumnjičene* (round up the suspects).

b) An idiom may have a similar counterpart in the target language, but its context of use or connotations may be different. For instance, the English idiom *bang your head against a brick wall* means 'to continually try the impossible', whereas a Croatian idiom similar in form *lupati/udarati glavom o zid* (hit your head against a wall) has a different meaning, i.e. 'be disappointed' or 'regret something that has been done'. However, there is another idiom *ići glavom kroz zid* (go with your head through the wall) which is slightly different in form, but has a very similar meaning to the English one.

c) An idiom may be used in the source text in both its literal and idiomatic senses at the same time. This is the case which is the most difficult to translate unless the target-language idiom corresponds both in form and meaning to the source-text idiom. Take for instance the situation from the 2007 feature film *Garfield Gets Real* in which a character says: 'I was run over by a milk truck. That was the first time ever the drinks were on me.' Since there is no idiom in Croatian which could convey both the humorous effect and meaning of 'paying for the drinks', the translator opted for retaining the element of *drink* and translated the expression as *Prvi put da sam imao gomilu cuge* ('First time that I had loads of booze.')

d) The source and target languages may differ in the way they use idioms, i.e. in the conventions of using them in written discourse, the contexts in which they can be used and their frequency of use. In English it is quite common to find idioms in many types of texts, including quality-press reports. Consider this example form *the Wall Street Journal* which contains as many as three idioms in a single sentence: 'Many older tech investors, eager not to miss out, are going to great lengths to shed fuddy-duddy images and ingratiate themselves with the

younger generation.' This frequency of idiomatic language would be rather unusual in Croatian where in such publications idioms tend to be used sparingly, if at all. It is also necessary to mention that the use of idioms reflects a stylistic choice and this is something translators have to bear in mind when they encounter idiomatic expressions.

Now that we have seen which difficulties may arise in the process of translating idioms, it is time to say which strategies translators have at their disposal when they are faced with the task of translating an idiom. The way in which an idiom can be translated depends on many variables, some of which have already been discussed (the existence of a similar idiom in the target language and the (in)appropriateness of using idiomatic expressions in a given context). It cannot be overemphasized that translators should keep in mind questions of style, register and rhetorical effect.

According to Baker's (ibid.) classification, there are four strategies which can be employed for translating idioms:

a) Using an idiom of similar meaning and form

This strategy involves using an idiom in the target text which conveys a similar meaning to the one conveyed by the source-text idiom and which in addition to that uses similar lexical components (Examples 4.1 and 4.2).

Example 4.1

What am I supposed to do? **Make a scene** and act like some pathetic, scorned wife?
Što? Da **napravim scenu** i ponašam se kao kakva jadna, prezrena žena?   [What? To make a scene and act like some pathetic, scorned wife?]

Example 4.2

I thought that, if I brought them **under the same roof**, things will go back to where they were.
Mislila sam, ako budu **pod istim krovom**, sve će se vratiti na staro.   [I thought: if they are under the same roof, everything will go back the way it was.]

Many translators strive to find equivalent target-text idioms because finding an idiom similar both in meaning and in form might sound like the perfect solution. However, this is not always the case and a translator should always consider whether the use of an idiom is appropriate in the target-culture context.

b) Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form

This strategy involves translating the source-text idiom by using an idiom from the target language which conveys roughly the same meaning, but uses different lexical components (Examples 4.3 and 4.4). Even though a shift occurs, if carefully employed, this strategy enables the translator to retain the stylistic impact of the source-text in the translation. This strategy requires an excellent command of the target language and in order to use it efficiently it is useful to have a good bilingual dictionary of idioms on hand.

Example 4.3

| At some point, you'll **come to your senses**. |
| Jednoga ćeš dana **doći k sebi**. [One day, you'll come to yourself.] |

Example 4.4

| Is that the translation? –**Give or take** an adverb. |
| To je prijevod? –Prilog **manje ili više**. |
| [That is the translation? –An adverb more or less.] |

c) Translation by paraphrase

This is by far the most common strategy used when there is no equivalent in the target language. It is also rather time-saving because in case the translator is not familiar with the expression, it is enough to check the meaning of an idiom in a good monolingual dictionary and use the explanation as the basis for the translation. Another reason for its frequency is the fact that it is stylistically neutral so it comes in handy when an idiom would not be suitable due to questions of style and/or register (Examples 4.5 and 4.6).

Example 4.5

| You know me. I can't help **putting it out there**. |
| Znaš ti mene. Uvijek **pokažem što mislim**. [You know me. I always show what I think.] |

Example 4.6

| Let's hope I **get this right**. |
| Nadajmo se da **neću pogriješiti**. |
| [Let's hope I won't make a mistake.] |

d) Translation by omission

Even though some might not agree with omission being called a translation strategy, it can sometimes prove as the only applicable solution. Baker (ibid.) explains that this is the case if there is no close match in the target text, if it is difficult to

paraphrase or if there are certain stylistic reasons for omitting the idiom altogether. In the context of audio-visual translation, this strategy is often employed due to time and space constraints, especially if the omission does not greatly affect the meaning of an utterance (Examples 4.7 and 4.8).

Example 4.7

If **it's all the same to you**, I'd rather take my chances in open space.
Radije bih pokušao u svemiru.
[I'd rather try it in space.]

Example 4.8

Why don't you just buy him a new outfit for Cedric and **call it a day**?
Kupi mu novu robicu za Cedrica.
[Buy him a new outfit for Cedric.]

For the purposes of this paper and based on the data found in the corpus, I have added another idiom translation strategy to Baker's classification, namely direct transfer or *calque*. What I understand under this term is a direct transfer of lexical units from the source language into the target language (Example 4.9). This procedure results in an expression which does not exist as such or is not conventionalized in the target language, but which might be understandable to target-text readers because of the context or because they are familiar with the meaning of the equivalent source-text idiom. The reason why a translator might opt for direct transfer may be either an insufficient command of the target language (in which case the direct transfer might be used even unconsciously or because the translator failed to check if the expression exists in the target language) or a conscious decision which the translator has made based on constraints imposed by the context or on certain stylistic choices.

Example 4.9

Well, when I met you, I actually thought you were a little mean. –Tottally mean. –Very mean. **And cold. –Like a fish. A cold arrogant fish.**
Kad smo te upoznali mislili smo da si malo zao. –Totalno. –Veoma zao. **I hladan. –Poput ribe. Hladne, arogantne ribe**.
[When we met you, we thought you were a little mean. –Totally. –Very mean. –And cold. –Like a fish. A cold, arrogant fish.]

4.2   Cognitive processing in idiom translation

The translation of idioms involves special difficulties and is thus more demanding than translation of language which does not display idiomatic features. Jensen (2007: 35) explains that

> the translation of idioms requires additional knowledge of the source and target languages. In addition to the languages' lexical inventory and their rules of composition, the translator must be able to identify and reproduce idioms in a manner faithful to the meaning intended by the source text author. [...] These elements of the idiom-translation process result in increased cognitive effort being applied to the translation of idioms compared to the translation of non-idiomatic text.

Jensen's study has shown that the increased cognitive efforts required for the translation of idioms result in more time being dedicated to the translation of idioms than to the translation of other parts of the text. The translators who participated in the research favoured the strategy of similar meaning and form which proved to be the least time consuming (translation of idiom-carrying segments took 16.86 seconds on average), followed by paraphrasing (23.20 seconds), strategy of similar meaning but dissimilar form (42.35 seconds) and direct transfer (23.20 seconds). His research shows that "the higher the strategy realization percentage is, the shorter the production time" (Jensen 2007: 68).

It follows that:

> translators, as the initial method of translation, seek to translate the idiom word-by-word – employing the method of direct transfer. Successful employment of this method is possible only if a twin idiom (viz. employment of the strategy of similar meaning and form) exists in the target language. If no such idiom is found, the translator will have to explore other translation strategies, unless s/he wrongfully accepts a product of direct transfer as being linguistically acceptable. Direct transfer, as an initial method of translation, seems ideal form a translator's perspective, as it is the least time-consuming approach, and thus requires less cognitive effort. (Jensen 2007: 69)

In other words, translators have the tendency to opt for fast and-ready solutions based on formal resemblance. However, as Jakobsen et al. (2007: 224) point out, "the check whether or not such a fast solution is also contextually valid must of necessity be based on an assessment of *sense* and target-language acceptability", i.e. formal resemblance should not be the only criterion on which the translator should base the decision of choosing one strategy over another.

5. Translation shifts

Listing all the possible definitions of translation falls beyond the scope of this paper. However, a very general definition must be given: to translate is to express a spoken or written stretch of language in another language. Thus translation involves a process of understanding and interpreting the source text and reformulating it in the target language. This means that a translator has to deal with two languages, i.e. with two different systems and in the process they have to bear in mind that "the relation between any two systems confronted in the process of translation is asymmetric and the way the transfer [from one language to another] is carried out is not determined *a priori*" (Bakker et al. 2001: 226).

It is clear that translation inevitably leads to transformation. Bakker et al. (2001: 227) states that "the transformation which is occasioned by the translation process can be specified in terms of changes with respect to the original, changes which are termed *shifts".* The term itself presupposes the existence of at least a certain degree of equivalence between the two systems involved.

Catford (1974) was the first to discuss shifts within his framework of a linguistic theory of translation. He proposed very broad types of translation in terms of three criteria:

a) The extent of translation (*full translation* vs. *partial translation*);

b) The grammatical rank at which the translation equivalence is established (*rank-bound translation* vs. *unbounded translation*);

c) The levels of language involved in translation (*total translation* vs. *restricted translation*).

I will refer only to the second type of translation, since this is the one that concerns the concept of equivalence. Following Catford's classification, in rank-bound translation an equivalent is sought in the TL for each word or for each morpheme encountered in the ST; i.e. equivalence is deliberately limited to ranks below the sentence. In normal, unbounded translation equivalences are not tied to a particular rank, and "they may occur between sentences, clauses, groups, words and (though rarely) morphemes" (Catford 1974: 76).

As far as translation shifts are concerned, Catford (1974: 73) defines them as "departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL to the TL". He argues that there are two main types of translation shifts, namely level shifts,

where the SL item at one linguistic level (e.g. grammar) has a TL equivalent at a different level (e.g. lexis), and category shifts which are divided into four types:

a) Structure-shifts, which involve a grammatical change between the structure of the ST and that of the TT (a subject-predicate-object structure may be translated as a predicate-subject-object structure);

b) Class-shifts, which involve a translation of a SL item with a TL item which belongs to a different grammatical class (a verb may be translated with a noun);

c) Unit-shifts, which involve changes in rank (a word may be translated as a morpheme or a group by a clause);

d) Intra-system shifts, which occur when "SL and TL possess systems which approximately correspond formally as to their constitution, but when translation involves selection of a non-corresponding term in the TL system" (1974: 80). For instance, when the SL singular becomes a TL plural.

Another scholar who dealt with the concept of shifts was Popovič (1970: 79, cited in Koster 2000: 128), who confirms that "transfer is not performed directly and is not without its difficulties". This means that the act of translation can be analyzed along a range of possibilities, which brings about a number of shifts in the linguistic, aesthetic and intellectual values of the source text. These possibilities offer a palette of choices which translators can choose from. In this respect shifts are all the mandatory actions of the translator (those which are dictated by the structural differences between the two language systems) and the optional ones (those which are a result of the translator's personal stylistic preferences) to which the translator resorts consciously so as to produce a natural and coherent target-language text. These are what Van Leuven-Zwart (1984: 20, cited in Koster 2000: 129) calls *obligatory* and *optional* shifts – obligatory shifts being those that are language-bound and optional ones being the translator's choice.

For the purposes of this paper, I will consider all departures from formal resemblance as shifts. They will be further categorized into obligatory and optional shifts by using the following criteria: when for an ST idiom there exists an idiom similar in meaning and form in the target language and the translator has nevertheless opted either for an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, a paraphrase, an omission or direct transfer, the shift will be considered as optional

(Example 5.1). If, on the other hand, for an ST idiom there is no idiom in the target language that is similar both in meaning and in form, and the translator has opted for one of the above mentioned strategies, the shift will be considered as obligatory (Example 5.2). If the translator has used either an idiom of similar meaning and form or the strategy of direct transfer this situation will be marked as 'no shift' (Example 5.3).

Example 5.1 – Optional shift

Since your dad's gone… Paperwork alone **is eating me alive.**
Otkad je tvoj otac otišao… I papiri **me guše**.
[Since your dad's gone… The papers are choking me too.]

Example 5.2 – Obligatory shift

My wife Mona thinks I'm **busting her chops**.
Moja žena Mona misli da je **zafrkavam**.
[My wife Mona thinks I'm kidding her.]

Example 5.3 – No shift

It was hard for me too as I grew up **in the shadow of** my father.
I meni je bilo teško jer sam odrastao **u sjeni** svoga oca.
[It was hard for me too because I grew up in the shadow of my father.]

6. Aims of the research

The aim of the present research is to examine possible strategies for translating idiomatic expressions appearing in television subtitles, their frequency and distribution. The study also examines the shifts which occur in the process of translating idioms from the source text into the target text, in particular whether those shifts are obligatory, i.e. imposed by the language system itself, or optional, i.e. chosen according to the translator's preferences.

The first hypothesis is that, due to constraints imposed by the medium itself, there are necessary reductions and translators opt for solutions which are more economical in terms of the use of on-screen space, i.e. the number of characters. This is expected lead to omissions in translations.

Secondly, since there is often a great deal of pressure deriving from the very short deadlines imposed on translators, they opt for solutions which require less cognitive processing and less time. For this reason we expect to find a large number of idioms translated using idioms of similar meaning and form in situations when the target language offers such equivalents. On the other hand, in situations when such equivalents are lacking, i.e. in cases where a shift must occur, it is reasonable to

expect a high number of paraphrases, as they are rather economical in terms of time use.

7. Methodology

The first step in this research was to collect a corpus of subtitled TV material from which samples of idiom translation were extracted, which would later serve as a basis for data analysis. I chose several TV series broadcast on three different TV channels in Croatia which are available in virtually every Croatian household that has a television set (HRT1, HRT2 and RTL Televizija). Two of those (HRT1 and HRT2) are Croatian national television channels that subcontract individual translators, whereas RTL Televizija is a private commercial TV channel that broadcasts material translated by a subcontracted translation agency. Translations broadcast on HRT1 and HRT2 have to follow strict prescriptive language guidelines, while those shown on RTL have more freedom in using colloquialisms, swearwords and slang.

The chosen series belong to different TV genres such as drama, comedy, mystery, action, adventure, science fiction and romance. This is important since different genres tend to use different registers and this has an impact on the density of language displaying idiomatic features. So in order to have a balanced corpus, it is necessary to use material which belongs to different genres.

Table 1

English title	Croatian title	Channel	Genre
Dirty Sexy Money	Prljavi seksi novac	HRT1	drama
Monk	Monk	HRT1	comedy, drama, mystery
Back to You	Povratak na novo	HRT2	comedy
My Wife and Kids	Moja žena i djeca	HRT1	comedy
Star Trek: Enterprise 2	Zvjezdane staze: Enterpise 2	HRT1	action, adventure, science fiction
Happy Hour	Happy Hour	HRT2	comedy
Gossip Girl	Tračerica	HRT1	drama, romance
House M.D.	Dr. House	HRT1	drama, mystery
The Ruth Rendell Mysteries	Priče Ruth Rendell	HRT1	crime, drama, mystery
The King of Queens	Kralj Queensa	RTL	comedy

Family Matters	Pod istim krovom	RTL	comedy, drama, family
Everybody Loves Raymond	Svi vole Raymonda	RTL	comedy
CSI: NY	CSI: New York	RTL	action, crime, drama
The Mentalist	Mentalist	RTL	crime, drama, mystery

The chosen TV series were recorded for easier analysis and then every occurrence of language displaying idiomatic characteristics was noted, together with the translation of the selected stretch of language into Croatian (a single subtitle or more, if necessary) and the time code for the subtitle in question. In this way 205 idioms and their translations were collected.

Next, all the translations were categorized using Baker's (1992: 71-78) classification of strategies for translating idioms: translation using an idiom of similar meaning and form, translation using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, paraphrase, translation by omission. Since there were also some examples which did not make use of any of the strategies mentioned above, another category had to be introduced, namely the category of direct transfer (see Section 4, Example 4.9). In order to determine to which of these categories a certain translation belongs, it was necessary to check all the translations against various dictionaries. Translations were accepted as idioms only if they were listed in one of the Croatian language dictionaries used for the purposes of this research (see the References section). Those which were not found in the dictionaries were then categorized either as paraphrases or as direct transfer. Data connected to the distribution of strategies in the corpus can be found in Table 2 in Section 8.

The next step was to establish whether a shift had taken place in the course of the translation process. If an idiom was translated by using an idiom of similar meaning and form or by direct transfer, the translation was labelled as 'no shift'. If, on the other hand, an idiom was translated by using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, by paraphrase or by omission, the translation was labelled as 'shift'.

The final step in the creation of the corpus was to categorize the translations in which a shift had occurred into optional and obligatory shifts. The criterion for deciding whether a shift was optional or obligatory was the existence of an idiom with similar meaning and similar form in the target language which would be the equivalent of the idiom from the source text. If such an idiom exists, then the shift was marked as optional. If, on the other hand, such an idiom does not exist, then the

shift was considered to be obligatory. Data related to the number of optional and obligatory shifts can be found in Table 3 in Section 8.

For easier analysis and a clearer perspective, all the collected data were organized into a table containing the following information: the title of the series, time-in of the subtitle in which the translation appears, source text, target text, type of strategy used and whether or not a shift had occurred.

8. Findings

This section presents the findings of a detailed analysis of different strategies translators whose work makes up the corpus used in dealing with the translation of idioms. The categorization of possible solutions to translating idioms can be found in Section 4 above, and the explanation of shifts in translation in Section 5. All the examples listed are taken from the corpus. The corpus itself is available from the author on request.

8.1   Distribution of idiom translation strategies

The results of the research confirm the initial hypothesis that the largest number of idioms are translated either by the use of an idiom of similar meaning and form or by paraphrase. Paraphrase has proved to be the most frequent strategy by far, with 67% of the examples from the corpus translated using this strategy. It is followed by the strategy of using an idiom of similar meaning and form which has been used in 18% of the cases.

Table 2

Strategies for translating idioms	Number of occurrences	Percent
Translation by paraphrase	137	67%
Using an idiom of similar meaning and form	36	18%
Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	15	7%
Translation by omission	10	5%
Direct transfer	7	3%
TOTAL:	205	100%

These findings are to some extent similar to those obtained by Jensen (2007) and Jakobsen et al. (2007). In both those studies it was shown that, when translating idioms, translators tend to opt for solutions which are similar in form to the source text idioms, i.e. that they seek formal resemblance first. If there is no target text equivalent, they look for "the next best thing" in the sense that they search for solutions economical in terms of time use.

However, it is interesting to note the significant predominance of paraphrasing, as it is more frequent than all the other strategies taken together.

8.2 Distribution of shifts

Having analyzed the strategies used for translating idioms, it was interesting to see in what percentage of cases a translation shift had taken place (Table 3). As it might be expected, due to the differences between the two systems involved in the translating process and to the restraints imposed by the medium, translation shifts occurred very often and accounted for 77% (158 of the 205) of the examples in the corpus. The remainder of the examples in the corpus (47 of the 205, or 23%) were translated without shifts in translation.

Of the 158 examples in which translation shifts occurred, 130 (82%) were obligatory shifts and 28 (18%) were optional.

Table 3

Shift		No shift	Total
158 (77%)		47 (23%)	205
Obligatory	Optional	/	/
130 (82%)	28 (18%)	158	/

Table 4 shows the distribution of translation strategies used in the examples in which a shift has taken place. A more detailed analysis of examples in which no shifts, obligatory shifts and optional shifts occur is given in the sections that follow.

Table 4

SHIFTS		
Strategy	**Number of occurrences**	**Percent**
Translation by paraphrase	137	87%
Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	11	7%
Translation by omission	10	6%
TOTAL:	158	100%

8.3   No shift

As described in Section 5, situations that were marked as 'no shift' were either those in which an idiom was translated by an idiom of similar meaning and form, or those in which the translator recurred to the use of direct transfer. The latter situation is distinguished from the former in that the idiom resulting from direct transfer has not been documented in any of the target language dictionaries and is therefore not considered, for the purposes of this paper, to have become part of the target language repertoire (yet).

As shown in Table 2, the translation strategy in which the translator uses an idiom of similar meaning and form was found to be the second most frequently used strategy as it accounts for 18% of the occurrences, i.e. 36 of the examples in the corpus. This is a rather straightforward translation strategy and it seems to be quite popular with subtitlers as it is quick, it allows for plays on words and/or the coherence of the image on the screen and the dialogue and it also enables the subtitler to retain quite a lot of source text syntax which is often considered to be beneficial for the viewers' easier comprehension of the program.

Let me demonstrate what I mean when I say that the method is straightforward and quick. Supposing that the translator has an excellent command of the language s/he is working into, s/he should be confident in the use of idioms and familiar with their form and use. Let us consider Example 8.1.

Example 8.1

Speak out, **I'm all ears**.
Reci, **pretvorio sam se u uho**. [Tell me, I have turned into an ear]

The lexical components in the translated idiom are similar and translation does not require a lot of mental effort on the part of the subtitler, assuming that s/he is familiar with the target text equivalent.

Another reason why this strategy is rather convenient for the subtitler is the fact that it allows for plays on words and for retaining the coherence between the image that the viewer can see and the text that can be read at the bottom of the screen.

Example 8.2

I'm gonna **put my nuts on the table**.
Stavit ću i **muda na stol**.
[I'm gonna put my nuts on the table too.]

Example 8.2 is taken from the pilot episode of the television series *Dirty Sexy Money*. The scene takes place during negotiations and the character uttering this particular sentence makes a gesture with both his hands as if he were really putting something on the table. The translation of the idiom by using an idiom of similar meaning and form allows for his gesture to make sense and to be a logical part of the whole which is comprised of the image and text. If the translator had used a different strategy, the meaning would still be retained, but the coherence of the character's gestures and his words would have been lost.

It is often said that subtitlers should strive to retain as much of the source text syntax as they can without compromising the natural flow of the target text. The translation strategy which involves no shifts is very convenient for this purpose as the source text idiom is almost identical with the target text idiom both in respect with the lexical units used and in their sequence. Take into consideration Examples 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5, in which the target text is very close to the source text without sounding unnatural in Croatian.

Example 8.3

And then he gets this incredible house just **drop in his lap**!
A ta super kuća **padne mu u krilo**!
[And that great house just drops in his lap!]

Example 8.4

I **have** one specific look **in mind**.
Imam jedan određeni tip **na umu**.
[I have one specific type in mind.]

Example 8.5

He **has the eyes of a hawk** and he takes his job very seriously.
Ima oko sokolovo i ozbiljno shvaća svoj posao.
[He has the eye of a hawk and he takes his job seriously.]

So far we have discussed the strategy of using an idiom of similar meaning and form, but there are also several examples of direct transfer in the corpus. As the resulting target text idioms are not part of the target language repertoire documented in dictionaries, the number of occurrences is small: there are seven examples in the corpus, or 3%.

It is interesting to consider Example 8.6, in which the subtitler opted for this technique.

Example 8.6

Don't **turn into a pumpkin**.
Nemoj se **pretvoriti u bundevu**.
[Don't turn into a pumpkin.]

This particular example might stir a debate among native speakers of Croatian because some might feel that 'pretvoriti se u bundevu' is a Croatian idiom. However, this expression has not yet been documented in any of the Croatian dictionaries and as such is not considered to be a 'proper' idiom for the purposes of this paper. On the other hand, it is true that the expression *is* used in Croatian, and it is widely understood as a reference to *Cinderella*. In other words, Example 8.6 may in fact be considered a strategy of using an idiom with similar meaning and similar form and not a direct transfer at all.

Example 8.7

Is she **more of a man** than you?
Zar je ona **više muškarac** od tebe?
[Is she more a man than you?]

In Example 8.7, the translator recurred to the use of direct transfer even though in the Croatian language there is an idiom 'biti muško' [be a man, be manly] which could have been used in its place. Moreover, even if we consider the alternative from a time-space restriction perspective, the idiomatic expression has fewer characters that the direct transfer one so it remains unclear why the translator opted for direct transfer.

Example 8.8

Go home, Steve. –Ah, yes! **Music to my ears**.
Idi kući, Steve. –**Glazba za moje uši**!
[Go home, Steve. –Music to my ears!]

In Example 8.8, the situation is similar because the Croatian language has the idiom 'praznik za uši' [a holiday for your ears] at its disposal, but the translator nevertheless opted for direct transfer. In this case however, the word 'praznik' has one character more than the word 'glazba' so the choice might have been the result of the effort to save space (other reductions are evident in the subtitle as well). However insignificant one character may sound, in the context of subtitling it often happens that a single character turns the scale in favour of less common phrasing.

Example 8.9

Well, when I met you, I actually thought you were a little mean. –Totally mean. –Very mean. / **And cold. –Like a fish. A cold arrogant fish**.
Kad smo te upozali mislili smo da si malo zao. –Totalno. –Veoma zao. / **I hladan. –Poput ribe. Hladne, arogantne ribe.**
[When we met you, we thought you were a little mean. –Totally. –Very mean. / And cold. –Like a fish. A cold arrogant fish.]

Example 8.9 is slightly different than the previous ones in that even though in the target language there is an idiom similar in form ('hladan kao špricer', 'as cold as a spritzer') to the one from the source text, its meaning and the connotations related to it are somewhat different. They would correspond more to the English idiom 'as cool as a cucumber'. The overtone in the source text was negative and that meaning component would have been lost had the translator opted for a less literal solution.

To sum it up, the 'no shift' option is quite convenient in solving many subtitling issues. It saves the translator's time, it is a useful device for preserving the integrity of the film as a complex semiotic sign and it allows the translator to retain much of the source text syntax, which is considered to be helpful for the viewers' pleasurable watching experience. These features are the reason why translators opt for this solution whenever it is possible, i.e. when time and space restrictions allow it and most importantly, when they have an appropriate target text idiom at their disposal, or can easily create one that will be understood by the target audience. That is why the 'no shift' option can also be the result of direct transfer, which is sometimes used because a certain expression does not 'sound foreign' and is possibly on its way to being recognized as an idiom.

On the other hand, sometimes it is not clear why translators opt for direct transfer. In some of the examples above, the target language has an idiom which corresponds in meaning and connotations to the meaning and connotations of the source text idiom, but the translator still chose the direct transfer option over the idiomatic one. This may be the result of many factors, including time and space restrictions, an intentional stylistic choice, a lack of language competence on the part of the translator or a failure to recognize the source text item as an idiom.

8.4 Shifts

8.4.1 Obligatory shifts

A thorough explanation of what obligatory shifts are can be found in Section 5, but for reasons of clarity let us just briefly repeat that obligatory shifts are those shifts which cannot be avoided due to differences between the two systems involved in the process of translation, i.e. the source language and the target language. This type of shift is very frequent and it is present in 130 occurrences in the corpus, i.e. in 63% of the total of 205 examples. All the examples in which the translators used idioms of similar meaning, but dissimilar form or a paraphrase because there was no idiom similar both in meaning and in form were labelled as obligatory shifts, as was translation by omission in the same situation (Table 5).

Table 5

OBLIGATORY SHIFTS		
Strategy	**Number of occurrences**	**Percent**
Translation by paraphrase	113	87%
Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	9	7%
Translation by omission	8	6%
TOTAL:	130	100%

Let us consider a few examples for both strategies, starting with the use of idioms of similar meaning, but dissimilar form.

Example 8.10

If you ask me, the job is **yours to lose.**
Ako mene pitaš, posao ti je **u džepu**.
[If you ask me, the job is in your pocket.]

Example 8.11

Is that the translation? –**Give or take** an adverb.
To je prijevod? –Prilog **manje ili više**.
[That is the translation? –An adverb more or less.]

Example 8.12

I can't talk right now. I'm late and I… -You **have a** huge **sweet tooth**?
Ne mogu sad razgovarati. Kasnim i… -**Luda si za slatkišima**?
[I can't talk now. I am late and… -You are crazy about sweets?]

In Examples 8.10, 8.11 and 8.12, translators used idioms of similar meaning but dissimilar form, thus retaining the tenor of the source text and at the same time respecting the norms of the target language. These are all examples of informal speech, and in that respect they are representative of the rest of the examples from the corpus.

The examples that follow are those in which translators opted for the paraphrasing strategy because the target language does not provide an equivalent idiom of similar meaning and form.

Example 8.13

Out with it! You're the last civilian to have seen it.
Gukni! Ti si posljednji civil koji je to vidio.
[Speak! You are the last civilian who saw it.]

Example 8.14

My date planner **begs to differ.**
Moj rokovnik **ne bi se složio**.
[My date planner doesn't agree.]

Example 8.15

Let me know if you **change your mind**.
Javite ako se **predomislite**.
[Let me know if you change your opinion.]

Example 8.16

I am so sorry. I guess that we all **saw this coming**.
Žao mi je. Ali svi smo to očekivali.
[I am sorry. But we all **expected that**.]

In Examples 8.13-8.16, translators paraphrased the meaning of the source text idioms and thus produced a clear translation. It might be argued that some of the connotations were lost in the process, but the choice of vocabulary items used in paraphrasing in some instances (Examples 8.13 and 8.14) made up for the omission of idioms. The word *gukni* in Example 8.13 is not stylistically neutral, but rather a

slang word for 'speak' ('spit it out'). On the other hand, Examples 8.15 and 8.16 are rather neutral to begin with, as the source text has no special connotations or humoristic effects, so not much was lost by employing the paraphrasing strategy.

8.4.2 Optional shifts

Perhaps the most interesting cases of translation shifts are the optional ones because they depend on the translator's stylistic choices and, in the case of subtitling, possibly on time and space constraints. Optional shifts are those shifts which are not the result of differences between the two systems involved in the translation process, but rather a result of the decisions the translator makes. For the purposes of this research, all instances in which translators had at their disposal an idiom of similar meaning and form, but instead used a paraphrase, an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form or omitted the idiom altogether are considered to be optional shifts.

The underlying reasons for the use of optional shifts may be of different kinds. It might have been easier for translators to paraphrase the meaning of an idiom than to look up the idiom in various dictionaries. Since subtitlers are often faced with very tight deadlines, this reason is not to be disregarded. Also connected to the specificities of subtitling is the tendency to reduce the text, which results in omissions of certain parts of utterances, including idioms.

The distribution of translation strategies in this category is very much in favour of paraphrasing, as was the case for the whole corpus (Table 2). Of the 28 idioms which *could have been* translated by using an idiom of similar meaning and form, two were omitted altogether, two were translated by an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form and the remaining 24 idioms were paraphrased. The data concerning the distribution of translation strategies in the examples in which optional shifts occur are presented in Table 6*.*

Table 6

OPTIONAL SHIFTS		
Strategy	**Number of occurrences**	**Percent**
Translation by paraphrase	24	86%
Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	2	7%
Translation by omission	2	7%
TOTAL:	28	100%

The most striking figure in Table 6 is that referring to the use of paraphrase in situations where an idiom of similar meaning and form existed in the target language. If we assume that translators were familiar with the equivalent target language idioms, it seems that paraphrasing was used mostly for two reasons: time and space constraints, and differences in the context of use between the source language and target language idioms.

In many cases an idiom of similar meaning and form would have exceeded the maximum number of characters per second. We can assume that the translator recurred to paraphrasing in order to retain as much other information as possible.

As we have mentioned before (see Section 4), the mere fact that an idiom of similar meaning and form exists in the target language does not necessarily mean that its use would be appropriate in a certain context. In the majority of such examples from our corpus the corresponding target text idiom is more colloquial than the source text idiom. Having in mind that subtitles often have to follow certain guidelines when it comes to the use of colloquialisms and slang, this choice of strategy seems logical. However, without interviewing the translators, these tentative explanations remain on the level of speculation.

9. Conclusion

The present study deals with the translation of idioms in subtitling. The research was conducted on a corpus comprising 205 examples taken from TV series from three Croatian TV channels – HRT1, HRT2 and RTL Televizija – and these served to explore which strategies are most often used and why. In addition to discovering the most frequently used strategies, this paper aims to show how often translation shifts take place and whether these shifts are obligatory or optional. Notwithstanding the limited size of the corpus, the paper supports the findings from previous research that the most frequently used strategies for translating idioms are paraphrase and the use of idioms of similar meaning and form.

Since paraphrase is the least time-consuming strategy of all because it involves recognizing and understanding an idiom and omits the step of looking for an idiom of similar meaning in the target language, it is not surprising that this strategy is by far the most frequent in the corpus. In addition to this, translators often have to recur to condensation and text reduction so they tend to opt for solutions which have a smaller number of characters.

This entails a large number of translation shifts. A vast majority of those shifts are obligatory, i.e. they are the result of differences between languages, but some of them are optional and as such, they reflect the choices made by the translator. The data from the corpus demonstrate, as was expected, that translators often recur to condensation and reduction of text in order to be able to convey the intended meaning of the ST while at the same time respecting the imposed restrictions of time and space. These limitations also seem to have an impact on the choice of strategies, in particular when it comes to optional shifts.

Future studies of this topic could compare the translation of idioms in different audio-visual media (TV, cinema, DVD...), or in different genres (comedy, drama, documentary...). Another possible avenue of research would be to conduct interviews with translators in order to find out about their motivation for choosing a particular strategy in a particular situation. Reception studies investigating the viewers' attitudes towards the translation of idioms would provide additional insights into this interesting topic.

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