



faculty of social
sciences, arts
and humanities

46/2025

Research Journal
Studies about Languages

pp. 5–16

ISSN 1648-2824 (print)

ISSN 2029-7203 (online)

DOI 10.5755/j01.sal.1.46.38345

TRANSLATION / VERTIMAS

Media accessibility through audiovisual representation of culture-specific references in regard to their subtitled translation

Received 08/2024

Accepted 04/2025

How to cite: Motiejūnienė, J., & Danilavičienė, G. (2025). Media accessibility through audiovisual representation of culture-specific references in regard to their subtitled translation. *Studies about Languages / Kalbų studijos*, 46, 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.1.46.38345>

Media accessibility through audiovisual representation of culture-specific references in regard to their subtitled translation

Medijų prieinamumas verstais subtitrais perteikiant
audiovizualaus pobūdžio kultūrinės realijas

JURGITA MOTIEJŪNIENĖ, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania

GRETA DANILAVIČIENĖ, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania

Abstract

The audiovisual market has rapidly grown in recent decades, driven by innovative technologies and rising consumer demands, transforming the way we consume and interact with media content. Adapting audiovisual products for diverse audiences poses significant challenges for translators who have to navigate technical limitations, understand audience needs, and accurately translate culture-specific references (CSRs). These efforts are crucial for media accessibility, particularly for the D/deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences who rely on subtitles to comprehend audiovisual content. When subtitles successfully convey CSRs, viewer satisfaction increases, i.e., audiences are more likely to enjoy the content when they can fully grasp cultural nuances. This paper aims to evaluate translation of CSRs from English into Lithuanian in the subtitles of a popular culinary documentary. It also explores how subtitles contribute to media accessibility for the D/deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers, focusing on subtitle legibility and readability, particularly when on-screen text obscured subtitles and hinders comprehension. This paper focuses exclusively on the final subtitled product, excluding any discussion of translators' working conditions or reception analysis with D/deaf individuals. The findings indicated that the categories of Proper names and Food and beverages were dominant, with direct translation and retention serving as the main translation strategies. Beyond translation of CSRs, the research highlighted the critical role of subtitle legibility and readability in enhancing media accessibility for all viewers, especially the D/deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences. While translation of CSRs can help effectively bridge cultural gaps, improvements in subtitling practices are necessary to enhance media accessibility.

KEYWORDS: culture-specific references (CSRs), subtitles, media accessibility, D/deaf and hard-of-hearing, legibility, readability.

Introduction

The audiovisual market has experienced significant growth in the 21st century. Audiovisual material encompasses a wide range of media content, such as feature films, animated films, television shows, documentaries, music videos, concerts, theatre productions, sports broadcasts, advertisements, video games, live performances, virtual reality and augmented reality experiences, art installations, virtual tours, online videos, podcasts and audiobooks, tutorials, etc. According to the data gathered by the European Audiovisual Observatory, the audiovisual sector represents about 180 billion EUR in the USA, 120 billion EUR in Europe (excluding Russia) and 35 billion EUR in Japan (2021 data). Iyuno, one of the main leaders of subtitling services, dubbing and translation, has spread throughout 35 different countries, covering more than 100 languages, hiring 20 000 expert linguists and providing 500,000 hours of subtitling per year. It is essential to make audiovisual content accessible to as many people as possible, including audiences who need accessibility features, such as subtitles in different languages for second language learners, interlingual and intralingual subtitles for the D/deaf and hard-of-hearing, and audio description for the blind.

In addition, audiovisual content offers “unique scope for getting acquainted with other cultures” (Nedergaard-Larsen, 1993, p. 207). Translators and subtitlers, trying to meet the requirements of audiovisual accessibility, need a delicate approach when dealing with culture-specific references (CSRs). It is important to convey the richness of a particular culture and ensure that the translated text accurately represents the intended meaning and cultural significance of the source material and at the same time remains accessible and comprehensible to individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In addition, audiovisual professionals have to deal with specific requirements and constraints of subtitles. The current study aims at assessing translation of CSRs from English into Lithuanian in the subtitles of a recently broadcasted documentary “What Am I Eating? with Zooey Deschanel” (2023), while also exploring how subtitles enhance media accessibility for the D/deaf and hard-of-hearing. In order to reach the aim, the following objectives have been set: to review the typologies of CSRs, analyse translation strategies used to render CSRs from English into Lithuanian in subtitles, and discuss aspects of media accessibility, such as legibility and readability of subtitles.

When it comes to translation of CSRs, the process has been recognized as troublesome by many researchers from different cultures in the world (Antonini, 2007 (Italian–English); Blažytė and Liubinienė, 2016 (Lithuanian–English); Horbačiauskienė et al., 2016 (Lithuanian–English); Debbas, & Haider, 2020 (Arabic–English); Slavova & Borysenko, 2021 (English–Ukrainian); Sümbül, 2021 (Turkish–English); Bielska, 2022 (Polish–English); Meunier, 2022 (French–English); Sun, 2022 (Chinese–English); Soxibovna, 2023 (Uzbek–English)), with very few exceptions, such as Tobin (2021), who claims that the translation of CSRs did not cause any major problems for translators. Thus, the research on translation of CSRs is crucial for ensuring accurate and culturally appropriate communication across languages. Moreover, research on the translation of CSRs in subtitles is scarce in Lithuania, with most studies focussing on literary texts (Venskūnienė, 2011; Brasienė, 2013; Leonavičienė & Inokaitytė, 2023) and only a few on audiovisual translation (Huber & Kairys, 2021; Astrauskienė & Satkauskaitė, 2022; Vilimienė & Astrauskienė, 2023). With media consumption shifting towards greater inclusivity, these aspects are critical for ensuring that content is accessible to diverse audiences, especially regarding the D/deaf and hard of hearing audience who rely on subtitles for understanding audiovisual content.

Typology and Translation Issues of CSRs

There is an intricate relationship between language, culture, and translation. “Language is an expression of culture and culture is expressed through language” (Petit, 2009, p. 44). Translators are often described as mediators between cultures, which according to Hatim and Mason (1990) means that, in addition to bilingual knowledge, they need bicultural competence as well. An even more specific description of intercultural mediation is given by Liddicoat (2016) who claims that it is not enough to have knowledge of different cultures, but it is necessary to be able “to provide to members of one culture the interpretative resources needed to comprehend a text written for another” (Liddicoat, 2016, p. 362). People connect with each other and become fully immersed in their culture through language: “Language is the cord that ties the individual to their community, and it is by means of language that human beings become fully immersed into their culture and active participants and constructors of its subsequent development” (Silva Sinha et al., 2020, p. 2). Language, culture and identity are intricately intertwined, influencing and shaping each other.

It is important to note that there is a plethora of terms with regard to cultural references, e.g., culture specific concepts (Baker, 1992), culture-bound problems (Nedergaard-Larsen, 1993), culture-specific items (Aixelà, 1996), culture bumps (Leppihalme, 1997), realia (Leppihalme, 2001), cultural concepts (Davies, 2003), culture specific references (Chiaro 2009), extralinguistic cultural references (Pedersen, 2008), extralinguistic culture-bound references (Pedersen, 2005, 2011), etc. For the purposes of this paper, the term ‘culture specific references’, or CSRs, is used to refer to concepts that have cultural connotations in the source culture. In audio-visual translation, CSRs have been comprehensively studied by Nedergaard-Larsen (1993), Pedersen (2011), and other researchers (in different language combinations), some of whom have provided classifications of CSRs in subtitles. The differences in typologies can be attributed to the complexity of linguistic and cultural features, contextual considerations, and individual perspectives. Leppihalme (2011, p. 127) claims that “typologies of realia differ in detail but are in general agreement that exhaustive classification is not feasible”. Subsequent to Leppihalme’s assertion on the impracticability of achieving exhaustive classification with CSRs, numerous researchers have proposed varying typological frameworks. Nedergaard-Larsen (1993, p. 211) offers a comprehensive classification of CSRs, highlighting their complexity across four key areas: geography (including meteorology, biology, cultural geography), history (including aspects related to buildings, events, and historical figures), society (including economy, politics, customs), and culture (including religion, education, media). Antonini and Chiaro (2005) provide a more detailed classification of CSRs, focussing on various social institutions (judiciary, police, military), educational and academic institutions, place names (geographic locations), units of measurement, monetary systems, sports, cuisines, holidays and festivities, books, films, TV programs, and popular culture. Considering the above-mentioned taxonomies, one should note that the boundaries of domains are somewhat fuzzy, or in other words, there are many approaches to constructing a taxonomy where concepts may cross linguistic and cultural borders. These intersections in domains reveal the dynamic interplay between language, culture and conceptual frameworks. Different perspectives and interpretations reflect unique cultural nuances and linguistic expressions as well as the intricate interrelationships within and across domains.

The translation of CSRs reveals a wide array of strategies employed by translators and a considerable variation of taxonomies offered by scholars in the field of Translation Studies (Aixelà, 1996; Leppihalme, 2001; Davies, 2003). In general, the translation of CSRs requires determining whether the meaning should be preserved by maintaining its nature or, on the contrary, adapted it to make it more familiar to the target audience. Pedersen’s (2011) classification of translation strategies for CSRs in subtitling has been adopted by many scholars for the analysis of translation of CSRs in different languages (Salumahaleh and Mirzayi, 2014; Horbačauskienė et al., 2016; Abdelaal, 2019; Chen et al., 2021; Alaa & Al Sawi, 2023). According to this classification, retention is applied when the original CSR is preserved in the target text either unchanged or with slight adaptation with reference to the requirements of the target language (sometimes provided using quotation marks or italics). Specification is the strategy when a CSR is retained untranslated in target text and at the same time some information is added. Direct translation means that no semantic change is applied (suitable for proper names). Generalisation is applied when the specific CSR is replaced with the general one, i.e., the source text CSR becomes less specific in the target text. Substitution is applied when the source text CSR is replaced by another CSR from the source text or target text, or by using a different CSR. Substitution could be cultural and situational. Cultural substitution means that the CSR is replaced in the target text, maintaining some links between the source text and the target text, while situational substitution is applied when a different CSR is used with no link between the source text and the target text. And finally, omission might be applied due to different reasons, either some circumstances or translator’s laziness. Retention, specification and direct translation are considered to be source-oriented translation strategies, while generalisation, substitution and omission are considered to be target-oriented (Pedersen, 2011, p. 75). Pedersen’s empirical study of a substantial audiovisual corpus offers significant insights into how translators navigate cultural references in subtitles and what parameters influence the choice of translation strategies, such as transculturality (cultural accessibility, referring to how accessible or familiar a cultural reference is to the target audience), extratextuality (fictional versus real-world references), polysemiotics (interaction of textual and visual elements), and media-specific constraints (technical constraints of subtitles). Pedersen points out that subtitlers need to balance between respecting cultural nuances, ensuring that the audience grasps the meaning, and navigating the technical constraints inherent in subtitling.

Media Accessibility and Issues in Subtitle Translation

Translation of CSRs plays a crucial role in media accessibility, particularly for audiences, such as the D/deaf and hard-of-hearing, who rely on subtitles for understanding audiovisual content. Media accessibility is often emphasised as the most critical aspect of audiovisual translation (Gambier, 2003). As a distinct concept within the audiovisual translation, media accessibility encompasses not only translation of audiovisual content but also the development of technologies and services that make media accessible. Semiotic codes are very closely interrelated to create an inseparable whole, and these features often shape the translator's approach (Gambier, 2013). Subtitling diminishes certain characteristics of written language as subtitles usually cannot be re-read, which creates a double layer of separation: first, it detaches the text from its audiovisual context, and second, it introduces a shift because reading is a visual, linear process (left to right), while experiencing audiovisual content is multi-sensory, involving sounds, expressions, words, and actions simultaneously (Gambier, 2013). Thus, non-linguistic elements have also to be taken into consideration in the translation process (Chiaro, 2009; Sokoli, 2009). Acoustic elements include verbal monologues and dialogues, music, sounds and sound effects, noise, background voices, while visual elements encompass moving images, colours, gestures, postures, facial expressions, superimposed titles, and so on. The translation of subtitles is more complex than other types of translation as coherence in films arises "from links within and across different modes of expression" used simultaneously (Brown, 2011, p. 645). When watching subtitled programmes, viewers have to simultaneously deal with visual (images and subtitles) and auditory (oral language and background sounds) stimuli (Cambra et al., 2014).

Subtitle legibility and readability are of an utmost importance, having in mind that certain audiences mainly rely on subtitles for comprehension, such as D/deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences, people with limited language proficiency, foreign language learners, people with dyslexia and others. Legibility refers to the ability to distinguish characters in a subtitle, while readability refers to how easily the text can be read and comprehended. If subtitles are partially or fully covered by on-screen text, their legibility and readability decrease because viewers cannot follow the dialogue, which in turn decreases viewing experience and causes frustration for viewers. On-screen text is any written content that appears directly within a video but is separate from subtitles. This text is often designed to provide context or highlight key points and is typically part of the visual elements. Some examples include titles and headings, character names and locations, time and date stamps, explanatory text, etc. In addition to clarification and emphasis, one of the purposes of on-screen text is accessibility for viewers who may have difficulty following audio or visual cues. Subtitles should be carefully designed and executed to ensure they enhance the viewer's experience without detracting from the film's storytelling and visual elements as well as provide an inclusive and enjoyable viewing experience for all audiences. Assessment of whether subtitles are legible and readable, involves evaluation of whether they are not obscured by on-screen text, blend into the background, or cover the faces of speakers. Several other factors also contribute to subtitle legibility and readability, such as font style and size, colour contrast, duration and speed, language and grammar, placement of subtitles, quality of translation, cultural adaptation and so on.

In addition to technical constraints in subtitling, Chen (2006) also mentions the narrative flow and cultural gaps. When dealing with CSRs in subtitles, an apparent paradox presents itself: the subtitles sometimes have to be condensed while the translation of CSRs might require more space. Therefore, subtitlers face the challenge when conveying cultural nuances and trying to preserve the essence of a CSR within the constraints of limited screen space. In audiovisual translation, subtitlers, in attempts to bridge gaps between cultures, have to deal with more issues than translators of literary texts (Kabara, 2023).

In Lithuania, subtitles for the D/deaf and hard-of-hearing are still relatively uncommon, which may stem from the belief that standard subtitles are sufficient for this audience – an assumption reflected in foreign films shown in their original language accompanied by Lithuanian standard subtitles. Other reasons may include limited research, a small community of the D/deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, and a preference for sign language, which is used for news and announcements. However, many television programmes and shows are still broadcasted without any subtitles, which poses challenges for many viewers who rely on subtitles for comprehension. For instance, only one 90-minute subtitled cartoon airs weekly on a single television channel,

and subscription-based streaming services rarely provide subtitles in Lithuanian, with some relying on machine translations that appear to have minimal postediting. Thus, research in the field of subtitling is especially relevant and could contribute to a higher level of media accessibility.

Methodology

The current study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyse CSRs in the English language and their rendering in the Lithuanian subtitles of six episodes of the 2023 documentary series “What Am I Eating? with Zooey Deschanel”, which was broadcasted on a commercial television network. This paper focuses exclusively on the final subtitled product, excluding any discussion of translators’ working conditions or reception analysis with D/deaf individuals.

The duration of the six analysed episodes altogether is 133 minutes in total (or 2 hours and 13 minutes). Both authors of the current study watched all episodes in their entirety for the identification of CSRs in the original English dialogue and selection of their renderings in the Lithuanian subtitles. In total, 199 CSRs were identified, then classified into the domains and analysed in the light of translation strategies based on Pedersen’s (2011) theory of CSRs. Pedersen’s taxonomy was chosen for this study because it provides a comprehensive and structured framework, specifically designed for analysing CSRs in subtitling.

In addition to assessing the translation of CSRs, the study also explored broader issues related to media accessibility, particularly regarding legibility and readability of subtitles. This aspect of the research aimed to evaluate the extent to which on-screen text, such as names, locations, or additional comments, obscured the subtitles, thereby affecting viewers’ ability to follow both visual and textual information. In total, the six episodes of the series contained 2 340 subtitles. By assessing the extent to which on-screen text overlapped with subtitles, valuable insights were gained to improve subtitle display for optimal comprehension.

The subtitles obscured by the on-screen images are used in this research as screenshots from the television network featuring the analysed documentary series. These screenshots are minimal excerpts, limited solely to what was necessary for the research. They are used only for academic, non-commercial purposes to support the analysis of audiovisual content.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the empirical study aims to categorise the CSRs under analysis into different domains based on Pedersen’s classification (2011). Additionally, the assessment of translation strategies provides insights as to how meaning is conveyed across different cultures. Finally, the subtitles are evaluated from the perspective of their accessibility, specifically focussing on the legibility and readability.

Fig. 1 demonstrates the prevalence of CSRs used in the English subtitles of the analysed TV series and their distribution across different domains.

The categories of Proper names and Food and beverages were the dominant ones, each constituting 36% of the identified CSRs. For instance, *New York Times*, *Harvard*, *Flash* and *hummus*, *dijon*, *spelt* represent Proper names and Food and beverage, respectively. The category of Weight and measurements, e.g., *two thousand pounds*, *four gallons*, *86 acres*, comprised 6% of all the CSRs identified. Governmental CSRs, including *USDA*, *Congress*, *FDA*, constituted 5%;

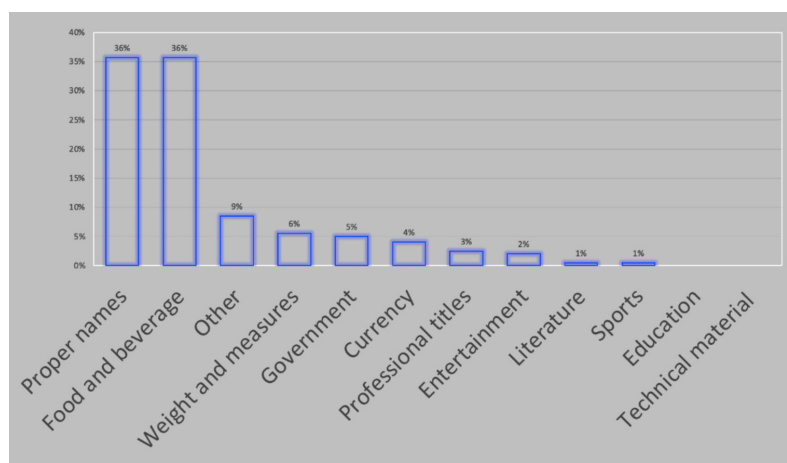


Fig. 1 CSRs in subtitles by frequency

while Currency-related CSRs, e.g., *393 million dollars*, *70 bucks*, made up 4%. Professional titles, e.g., *chef*, *chocolatier*, and Entertainment, e.g., *Matrix*, *the Beatles*, constituted 3% and 2%, respectively. Literature and Sports, each represented 1%, e.g., *rabbit hole*, *Big Game*. Notably, no examples representing Educational and Technical material were identified across the episodes of the TV show. Additionally, 9% of all CSRs did not fit into any predefined category; therefore, they were classified as Other, e.g., *parka* (a type of clothing), *prairies* (a geographical CSR but could not fall under the category of proper names), and *Seventh-day Adventists* (related to religious beliefs and practices). The distribution of translation strategies applied in the translation of CSRs from English into Lithuanian in the subtitles of the analysed TV series is provided in Fig. 2 below.

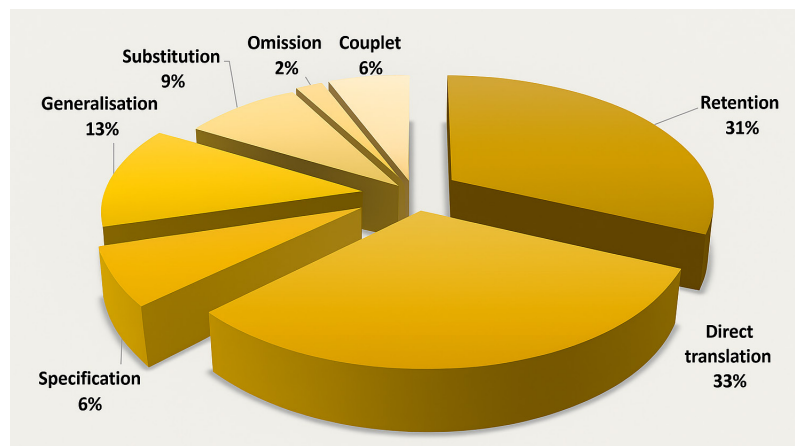


Fig. 2 Translation strategies applied in the translation of CSRs in subtitles

Direct translation was the most frequently used strategy for translating CSRs in the show, accounting for 33% of the instances, e.g., *New Jersey* (ST) was translated as *Naujame Džersyje* (TT), *Heritage Tehachapi rye* (ST) became *Tehačiapio paveldo rugiai* (TT), and *bagels* (ST) was rendered as *riestainiai* (TT). This finding aligns with the conclusions drawn by Saragih and Manullang (2022) in their research on transferring CSRs in film subtitles where direct translation was also a prevalent strategy, followed by generalisation and substitution.

The direct translation was also the most frequently used procedure in the study carried out by Leksananda and Manus (2023) who determined that literal translation was used 45 times in translation of 156 CSRs, constituting 28.48% of all identified translation procedures, followed by transference (25.95%) and neutralization (18.99%). Direct translation was found as the most commonly employed strategy for rendering of geographical names in Lin's study (2021). Some inaccuracies were observed in the translation of subtitles from English into Lithuanian, e.g., the term *smoothie* (ST) translated as *švelnutį* (TT), even though the more accurate official term is *glotnutis* (TT). Another mistake is observed in the translation of *red oak leaf lettuce* (ST) as *raudonojo klevo lapų salotų* (TT), resulting in the replacement of the entire term (the back-translation is *red maple leaf lettuce*). Additionally, *Northern Europe* (ST) was translated as *šiaurės Europoje* (TT), but since 'š' is the first letter of a proper noun, it should be capitalised.

The second most frequently applied strategy is Retention, accounting for 31% of the cases. A significant portion of these instances involves proper names. In some cases, proper names are left entirely unchanged, which is particularly true for women's names, e.g., *Zooey* (ST) – *Zooey* (TT). In contrast, men's names have been adapted to fit the target language by adding a typical Lithuanian ending *-as* or *-is*, e.g., *Will Keith* (ST) – *Willas Keithas* (TT). It is important to note that due to the constraints of subtitling, the text should be as short as possible. Consequently, in some cases, instead of spelling the full name and surname of a character, a condensed version is applied, providing only the initial of the first name followed by a surname, e.g., *John Harvey Kellogg* (ST) – *J. H. Kellogg* (TT), *Daniel Peter* (ST) – *D. Peteris* (TT). This approach likely helps to ensure that understanding is preserved. Nevertheless, a few mistakes occurred in the subtitles in terms of proper names and their rendering into TT, e.g., *Jon* (ST) – *Johnai* (TT), *Paola Valez* (ST) – *P. Velez* (TT). The original proper names appeared on the screen when these people were shown, suggesting that insufficient attention was given to their transcription. Regarding geographical names, almost all titles of countries, states, and cities were transcribed into their target language forms, e.g., *Oxnard, California* (ST) – *Okšnarde, Kalifornijoje* (TT). All company titles or brand names were rendered by applying complete retention, e.g., *Tcho* (ST) – *Tcho* (TT), *Pop's Bagels* (ST) – *Pop's Bagels*

(TT). According to Lithuanian spelling rules, brand names and company names should be enclosed in quotation marks. However, no instances of quotation mark usage for these names have been identified in the subtitles.

Generalisation, which accounted for 13% of all cases, was applied when a more general CSR was used instead of something specific. On the one hand, this approach might be necessary when the original CSR is either unknown or less familiar to the target culture, e.g., *morrels* (ST) generalised to *grybai* (TT) (back translation – *mushrooms*) or *Allepo pepper* (ST) rendered as *aitriųjų pipirų* (TT) (back translation – *hot pepper*). Neither of these items, morrels nor Allepo peppers, is a typical food product in Lithuania. On the other hand, generalisation can lead to vagueness and impact the audience's understanding. It is important to find the right balance between generalisation and specificity as it enables the audience to engage with the content in a meaningful way without reducing it to oversimplification.

Substitution, applied in 9% of all strategies, might be invoked either due to cultural or situational reasons. The source text, originating from the USA, uses measurement systems that differ from those commonly used in Europe. This leads to instances of cultural substitution, e.g., *two thousand pounds* (ST) – *beveik vienos tonos* (TT) (back translation – *almost one tonne*) or *86 acres* (ST) – *18 ha* (TT) (back translation – *18 hectares*). In these cases, the translator applied substitution to render CSRs and calculated the equivalencies to ensure they match and are familiar to European viewers. Additionally, situational substitution can be used when a CSR appears illogical in the ST, e.g., *queen* (TT) was translated as *karalius* (ST) (back translation – *king*). While this translation may seem inaccurate and surprising, it is contextually accurate. The original sentence is “*Kale is the queen green*”. In Lithuanian, the word *kale* is of the masculine gender, which makes it grammatically impossible to translate it as *queen*. Consequently, substitution is needed, i.e., “*Kopūstas yra žalumynų karalius*” (back translation – *Kale is the king green*).

Specification accounted for 6% of the strategies employed. It was often used to make a CSR more specific by adding some extra information, e.g., *Sesamese oil* (ST) translated as *sezamų sėklų aliejum* (TT) (back translation – *sesamese seed oil*) or *Romaine* (ST) translated as *romaninės salotos* (TT) (back translation – *romaine salad*). However, some cases of CSRs contained mistakes either in translation or in the accuracy of the term, e.g., shallots in the translation erroneously became garlic: *shallots* (ST) – *askaloniai česnakai* (back translation – *shallot garlic*). In another case, almond milk (ST) was translated as *migdolų riešutų pienas* (back translation – *almond nut milk*). Even though the translator added the word *nut* in order to clarify the CSR, it is worth mentioning, that according to the Case C-422/16 by Court of Justice of the European Union Judgment, it should be marked as *milk drink* because only dairy products can have title *milk*.

Couplets, which combine two different translation strategies, are typically used when a single strategy falls short in accurately conveying CSRs. In this research, couplets were invoked in 6% of all the strategies used. For instance, to avoid repetition and keep the subtitles concise, some words were omitted, e.g., *grape seed oil* (ST) was rendered as *vynuogių sėklų* (TT) (back translation – *grape seed*), and *coconut oil* (ST) was translated as *kokosų* (TT) (back translation – *coconut*). This illustrates that the use of a couplet when one part of the CSR is translated while another is omitted.

The least used strategy was omission, accounting for only 2% of all the cases. According to Pedersen (2005), one of the cases when a CSR is omitted is the translator's negligence, which might have been observed in some cases in this study. Meanwhile, Pettit (2009) claims that the omission of CSRs allows subtitlers to condense the text. For example, the fragment “*here in LA*” was omitted in the translation of the longer fragment “[...] and then after five days they'll be ready to go to the farmer's market, local restaurants *here in LA* [...]” although no prior reference to the location had been given in the series, and knowing where the action takes place is crucial for the viewers. Another example of omission involved the term *dollars*. In this instance, the meaning remained clear to the viewer due to the context of the dialogue, which focused on prices and money; thus, repeating the currency was not necessary.

Furthermore, this study assessed the analysed subtitles in terms of their legibility and readability to determine how effectively these elements were implemented and whether they contributed to media accessibility. Subtitles should not obscure on-screen text as they serve as crucial visual cues that facilitate comprehension and

enhance viewers' overall experience. However, in the analysed TV series, a notable proportion of subtitles was difficult or impossible to read due to being either fully or partially covered by on-screen text, significantly impacting accessibility (see Fig. 3).

The percentage of covered subtitles ranged between 5.1% and 14.5% in an episode. Notably, in episode 3, the issue reached its highest point, with 14.4% of subtitles rendered unreadable by overlapping on-screen text. Episodes 1, 4 and 5 had a relatively low percentage of unreadable subtitles, i.e., 6%, 5.6%, and 5.1%, respectively. In episodes 2 and 6, meanwhile, the unreadable subtitles constituted about 10% (11.4% and 9%, respectively).

In the six episodes of the show, the total number of subtitles was 2 340, ranging from 351 to 404 subtitles in an episode. The show contains multimodal elements that have to be considered when positioning subtitles on the screen. However, this critical aspect was often overlooked, leading to recurring legibility and readability issues throughout all episodes. A notable proportion of subtitles was either fully or partially legible because they were covered by on-screen text (see Fig. 4).

So, in terms of media accessibility, the proportion of subtitles with low legibility and readability was quite high. It is imperative to address this issue in order to ensure a better viewing experience for the audience as illegible and unreadable subtitles can significantly impede comprehension of the broadcasted content. The authors of this study reached out to the local network provider, regarding issues in subtitling. They responded by explaining that they receive content pre-packaged with subtitles and, therefore, have no control over the quality or making any improvements. Following this, the authors contacted the commercial television network and the translation company, raising concerns about the quality of the subtitles, but unfortunately, neither company responded to these requests.

The findings of our study align with those of Chai et al. (2022), which identified the primary challenges in subtitle translation as technical, cultural and linguistic. These factors create significant obstacles that often compromise the effectiveness and accessibility of subtitles. In this study, technical issues included subtitles obscured by on-screen text, cultural challenges involved difficulties in translating CSRs, and linguistic challenges stemmed

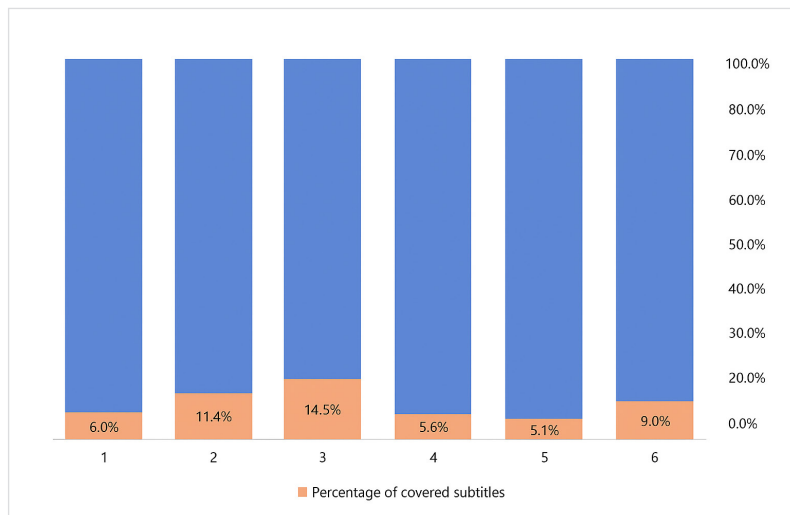


Fig. 3 The proportion of subtitles covered by on-screen text in each of the six episodes

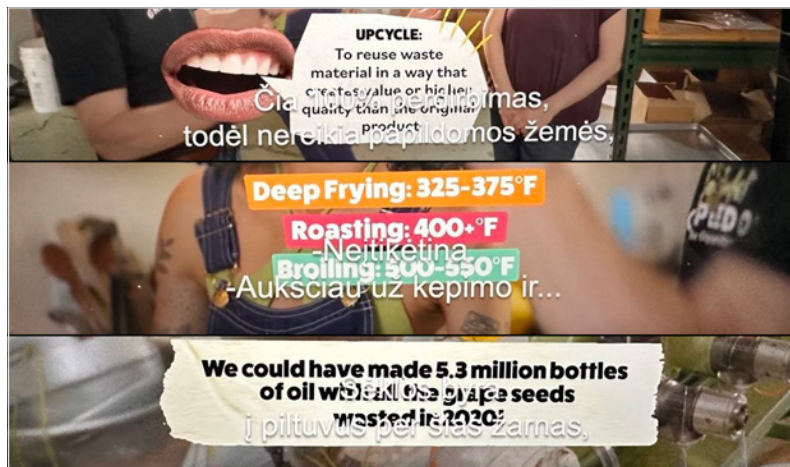


Fig. 4 Subtitles obscured by on-screen text

from adapting content to the Lithuanian language. This highlights the need for greater attention to these issues by audiovisual content providers, translation companies, subtitlers, and researchers. Without improvements, subtitles will continue to fall short in their role as a bridge between cultures, limiting the overall accessibility of audiovisual content. The failure to respond from key stakeholders highlights a gap between consumer expectations and industry practices, emphasising the need for greater accountability and a proactive approach to addressing these issues.

Conclusions

The transfer of CSRs in audiovisual translation is complex because cultural concepts often lack direct equivalents in the target culture. The detailed analysis of CSRs and their translations from English into Lithuanian in the subtitles of a popular culinary documentary revealed that Proper names and Food and beverages were the dominant categories, and the prevailing translation strategies were direct translation and retention. Direct translation and retention were observed to be appropriate translation strategies in the contexts of cultural familiarity. However, while direct translation and retention may work well for certain CSRs, translators and subtitlers should remain flexible and adapt their methods according to the content and the preferences of the target audience. In some cases, alternative translation techniques, such as cultural adaptation or explanation, may be necessary to ensure clarity and comprehension. These findings offer valuable information for translators and subtitlers seeking to enhance audiovisual accessibility in similar contexts. By understanding the most common types of CSRs, the translation strategies typically used, and the challenges they pose, translators and subtitlers can enhance media accessibility for diverse audiences.

The study also assessed subtitle legibility and readability, particularly examining the percentage of subtitles covered by on-screen text. Across all episodes, the portion of unreadable subtitles varied from around 5% to nearly 15%, indicating that overlapping on-screen text can significantly affect clarity. Well-designed subtitles should enhance viewers' experience without detracting from the film's storytelling and visual elements, while also providing enjoyable viewing experience for all audiences. Collaboration between translators, subtitlers, content creators and broadcasting networks is crucial to ensuring that subtitles are not only accurate but also create positive viewing experience for all audiences.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

References

- 1 Abdelaal, N. (2019). Subtitling of culture-bound terms: Strategies and quality assessment. *Heliyon*, 5(4), 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e01411>
- 2 Aixelá, J. F. (1996). Culture-specific items in translation. In R. Alvarez & C. A. Vidal (Eds.) *Translation, Power, Subversion*, 8, 52-78, *Multilingual Matters*. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800417915-005>
- 3 Alaa, A. M., & Al Sawi, I. (2023). The analysis and quality assessment of translation strategies in subtitling culturally specific references: Feathers. *Heliyon*, 9(8). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e19095>
- 4 Antonini, R. & Chiaro, D. (2005). The quality of dubbed television programmes in Italy: The experimental design of an empirical study. In *Cross-Cultural Encounters: Linguistic Perspectives*, 33-44, *Officina Edizioni*. Retrieved July 5, 2024, from <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/22410>
- 5 Antonini, R. (2007). SAT, BLT, Spirit Biscuits, and the Third Amendment: What Italians make of cultural references in dubbed texts. In Y. Gambier, M. Shlesinger, & R. Stolze (Eds.), *Doubts and Directions in Translation Studies*, 153-167, *John Benjamins Publishing Company*. <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.72.17ant>
- 6 Astrauskienė, J., & Satkauskaitė, D. (2022). Kultūrinių realiųjų pavadinimų vertimas dubliažui: analizės modelis. *Respectus Philologicus*, 41, 193-206. <https://doi.org/10.15388/RESPECTUS.2022.41.46.119>
- 7 Baker, M. (1992). In *Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203133590>

- 8 Bielska, A. (2022). (Un) translatability of culture-bound elements in AVT. *Językoznawstwo*, 15, 93-103. https://doi.org/10.25312/2391-5137.15/2021_07ab
- 9 Blažytė, D., & Liubinienė, V. (2016). Culture-specific items (CSI) and their translation strategies in Martin Lindstrom's Brand sense. *Studies about languages*, 29, 42-57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.0.29.15129>
- 10 Brasienė, B. (2013). Literary translation of culture-specific items in Lithuanian translation of Orwell's "Down and Out in Paris and London". Retrieved July 1, 2024, from <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12259/123868>
- 11 Brown, S. (2011). Creating Coherence in Audio Description. *Meta* 56(3), 645-662. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1008338ar>
- 12 Cambra, C., Penacchio, O., Silvestre, N., & Leal, A. (2014). Visual attention to subtitles when viewing a cartoon by deaf and hearing children: an eye-tracking pilot study. *Perspectives*, 22(4), 607-617. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2014.923477>
- 13 Chai, W., Ong, H. Y., Amini, M., & Ravindran, L. (2022). The art of paper cutting: Strategies and challenges in Chinese to English subtitle translation of cultural items. *Journal of Modern Languages*, 32(1), 84-103. <https://doi.org/10.22452/jml.vol32no1.5>
- 14 Chen, Y. (2006) *Translating Film Subtitles into Chinese. A multimodal study*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-6108-1>
- 15 Chen, W., Nakamoto, T., & Zhang, J. (2021). The translation of extralinguistic cultural references in subtitling: An investigation of translation fidelity in Chinese films. *Target*. <https://doi.org/10.1075/target.20011.che>
- 16 Chiaro, D. (2009). Issues in audiovisual translation. *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies*, 141, 165. ISBN9780203879450
- 17 Court of Justice of the European Union. (2017). Press release No. 63/17, Judgment in Case C-422/16, *Verband Sozialer Wettbewerb eV v TofuTown.com GmbH* [Press release]. <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2017-06/cp170063en.pdf>
- 18 Davies, E. E. (2003). A goblin or a dirty nose? The treatment of culture-specific references in translations of the Harry Potter books. *The translator*, 9(1), 65-100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2003.10799146>
- 19 Debbas, M., & Haider, A. S. (2020). Overcoming cultural constraints in translating English series: a case study of subtitling family guy into Arabic. *3L, Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2020-2601-01>
- 20 European Audiovisual Observatory. 2022/2023. *European Audiovisual Observatory Yearbook 2022/2023 key trends: Television, cinema, video and on-demand audiovisual services - the pan-European picture*. Retrieved June 26, 2023, from <https://rm.coe.int/yearbook-key-trends-2022-2023-en/1680aa9f02>
- 21 Gambier, Y. (2003). Screen transadaptation: Perception and reception. *The Translator*, 9(2), 171-189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2003.10799152>
- 22 Gambier, Y. (2013). Moves towards multimodality and language representation in movies. In E. Montagna (Ed.) *Readings in Intersemiosis and Multimedia*, 1(11), ISBN 978-88-71644-32-5.
- 23 Hatim, B., & Mason, I. (1990). *Discourse and the translator*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315846583>
- 24 Horbačiauskienė, J., Kasperavičienė, R., & Petronienė, S. (2016). Issues of culture specific item translation in subtitling. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 231, 223-228. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.09.095>
- 25 Huber, L., & Kairys, A. (2021). Culture specific items in audiovisual translation: Issues of synchrony and cultural equivalence in the Lithuanian dub of "Shrek the Third". *Studies about Languages / Kalbų studijos*, 38, 5-16. <https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.1.38.24743>
- 26 Iyuno, translation company (n.d.). Retrieved July 11, 2023, from <https://iyuno-sdi.com/about/about>
- 27 Kabara, T. (2023). *Jewelry Boxes and Referential Chunks in the Japanese Subtitles for The Post*. [Doctoral dissertation, Bulletin of Aichi Shukutoku University], 48, 139-154.
- 28 Leksananda, F. A., & Manusu, B. P. G. (2023). Translating Cultural Words in a Movie Subtitle: A Study on Translation Procedures. *Journal of English Language and Language Teaching*, 7(1), 33-46. <https://doi.org/10.36597/jellt.v7i1.14340>
- 29 Leonavičienė, A., & Inokaitytė, G. (2023). Ričardo Gavelio "Vilniaus pokerio" kultūrinų realių vartojimas ir vertimas į anglų ir prancūzų kalbas. *Sustainable Multilingualism*, 22, 212-257. <https://doi.org/10.2478/sm-2023-0009>
- 30 Leppihalme, R. (1997). Culture bumps: An empirical approach to the translation of

- allusions. *Multilingual Matters*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800417908>
- 31 Leppihalme, R. (2001). Translation strategies for realia. In P. Kukkonen, & R. Hartama-Heinonen (Eds.), *Mission, Vision, Strategies, and Values. A Celebration of Translator Training and Translation Studies in Kouvola*, 139-148. ISBN 951-570-504-5.
 - 32 Leppihalme, R. (2011). Realia. In Y. Gambier & L. van Doorslaer (Eds.), *Handbook of Translation Studies*, 2, 126-130. John Benjamins Publishing Company. ISBN 9789027203328. <https://doi.org/10.1075/hts.2.real>
 - 33 Liddicoat, A. J. (2016). Intercultural mediation, intercultural communication and translation. *Perspectives*, 24(3), 354-364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2014.980279>
 - 34 Lin, C. L. (2021). A comparative study of cultural references between the Spanish and Chinese versions of Seville's travel guidebook as a case study. *Journal of Translation and Interpretation*, 14(2), 36-61. Retrieved July 16, 2024, from http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTI21/pdf_doc/03.pdf
 - 35 Meunier, J. C. (2022). Domesticating Otherness: Culture-Specific References in French Covers of Bob Dylan's Songs. In *Abstract Book of the XXIII Congress of the ICLA*, 23. <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.60.2.0197>
 - 36 Nedergaard-Larsen, B. (1993). Culture-bound problems in subtitling, *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, 1(2), 207-240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.1993.9961214>
 - 37 Pedersen, J. (2005). How is culture rendered in subtitles, *Challenges of Multidimensional Translation*, 1-18. Retrieved July 1, 2024, from <https://online.anyflip.com/kjki/ytht/mobile/index.html#p=1>
 - 38 Pedersen, J. (2008). Highly felicity: a speech act approach to quality assessment in subtitling. In D. Chiaro, C. Heiss & C. Bucaria (Eds.), *Between Text and Image: Updating Research in Screen Translation*, Benjamins, 101-16. <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.78.11ped>
 - 39 Pedersen, J. (2011). Subtitling norms for television: An exploration focussing on extralinguistic cultural references, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 98, 1-260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2012.660305>
 - 40 Pettit, Z. (2009). 3: Connecting Cultures: Cultural Transfer in Subtitling and Dubbing. In J. Díaz Cintas (Ed.), *New Trends in Audiovisual Translation* (pp. 44-57). Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691552-005>
 - 41 Salumahaleh, A., & Mirzayi, K. (2014). Translation of culture-bound elements in Persian movies subtitled into English: A case study of the Oscar winner 'A Segregation'. *International Journal of English and Education*, 3(2), 221-236. ISSN: 2278-4012.
 - 42 Saragih, W. R., & Manullang, E. B. (2022). The Subtitle Strategy of Cultural Translation in "Murder on The Orient Express" Movie. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 11(3), 173-184. <https://doi.org/10.24114/tj.v11i3.44035>
 - 43 Silva Sinha, V., Tian, Z., & Moreno-Núñez, A. (2020). Language, Culture and Identity: Signs of Life. *Language, Culture and Identity*, 1-327. ISBN 9789027205483. <https://doi.org/10.1075/clsc.13.int>
 - 44 Slavova, L., & Borysenko, N. (2021). Culture-specific information encoded in lacunae: The author's and translators' strategies of representation. *Studies about Languages / Kalbų studijos*, 38, 17-28. <https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.1.38.27396>
 - 45 Sokoli, S. (2009). Subtitling norms in Greece and Spain. In J. Díaz Cintas, & Anderman, G. (Eds.) *Audiovisual Translation, Language Transfer on Screen*, 36-48. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230234581_3
 - 46 Soxibovna, M. G. (2023). Problems of Translation of Cultural Specific Terms and Realias Existing in the Uzbek Language. *Best Journal of Innovation in Science, Research and Development*, 2(5), 333-337. Retrieved July 12, 2024, from <https://www.bjisrd.com/index.php/bjisrd/article/view/247>
 - 47 Sümbül, F. (2021). Translation of culture-specific references in the Turkish translation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. *International Journal of Language and Translation Studies*, 1(2), 16-28. Retrieved June 25, 2024, from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/lotus/issue/72330/1167254>
 - 48 Sun, X. (2022). Neutralising Tendency in Subtitling Chinese Culture-Specific References into English. *International Journal of Chinese and English Translation & Interpreting*, 2, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.56395/ijceti.v2i2.45>
 - 49 Tobin, A. (2021). Audiovisual Translation of Regional English: A Case Study on the Japanese Subtitles of a Northern Irish Television Series. *The Tsuda Review*, 66, 49-71. Retrieved July 1, 2024, from <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1050291768561113856?lang=en>

- 50 Venskūnienė, A. (2011). Translation Strategies for Culture-specific Items in the Lithuanian Versions of Four British and Canadian Novels for Young People. [Doctoral dissertation, Vytautas Magnus University]. <https://doi.org/20.500.12259/105472>
- 51 Vilimienė, A., & Astrauskienė, J. (2023). "The cuisine is not an old, tired marriage. It is a passionate affair of the heart": translation of gastronomical references in the film "The Hundred-Foot Journey". *Styles of Communication*, 15(2), 44-64. <https://doi.org/10.31178/SC.14.2.01>

Santrauka

Jurgita Motiejūnienė, Greta Danilavičienė.

Medijų prieinamumas verstais subtitrais perteikiant audiovizualaus pobūdžio kultūrinės realijas

Pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais audiovizualinių produktų rinka sparčiai augo dėl naujų technologijų ir didėjančių vartotojų poreikių. Taip pat keitėsi žmogaus sąveika su medijų turiniu. Audiovizualinius produktus pritaikant įvairioms auditorijoms, vertėjams tenka nemažai iššūkių, nes jie turi atsižvelgti į techninius subtitrų apribojimus, suprasti žiūrovų poreikius ir tiksliai išversti kultūrinės realijas. Visa tai prisideda prie medijų prieinamumo, ypač kurtiesiems ir neprisigirdintiesiems žiūrovams, kuriems subtitrai būtini, norint suprasti audiovizualinį turinį. Kai subtitrai sėkmingai perteikia kultūrinės realijas, didėja žiūrovų pasitenkinimas, nes visiškai suprasdami kultūrinius niuansus, žiūrovai labiau linkę mėgautis audiovizualiniu turiniu. Šio straipsnio tikslas – įvertinti kultūrinių realiųjų vertimą iš anglų kalbos į lietuvių kalbą populiaraus kulinarinio dokumentinio filmo subtitruose ir ištirti, kaip subtitrai prisideda prie medijų prieinamumo kurtiesiems ir neprisigirdintiesiems. Taip pat analizuojamas subtitrų įskaitomumas, vertinant, ar subtitrai yra užgožiami ir neįskaitomi arba iš dalies įskaitomi ekrane. Šiame darbe daugiausia dėmesio skiriama galutiniam subtitruotam produktui, t. y. neaptariamoms vertėjų darbo sąlygoms ar kurčiųjų ir neprisigirdinčiųjų receptijos analizei. Rezultatai atskleidė, kad dominuoja tikrinių daiktavardžių bei maisto ir gėrimų pavadinimų kategorijos, o vyraujančios vertimo strategijos – tiesioginis vertimas ir originalo išlaikymas. Tyrime pabrėžiamas itin svarbus subtitrų vaidmuo didinant medijų prieinamumą kurtiesiems ir neprisigirdintiesiems žiūrovams. Rezultatai atskleidė, kad kultūrinių realiųjų vertimas gali tiksliai ir suprantamai perteikti kultūrinės sąvokas, tačiau būtina tobulinti subtitrų įskaitomumą, siekiant padidinti medijų prieinamumą.

About the Authors

JURGITA MOTIEJŪNIENĖ

Lecturer, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania

Research interests

Linguistics, audiovisual translation, media accessibility, machine translation, eye tracking

Address

Kaunas University of Technology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, A. Mickevičiaus g. 37, Kaunas, Lithuania

E-mail

jurgita.motiejuniene@ktu.lt

Orcid

0000-0002-4104-1592

GRETA DANILAVIČIENĖ

Lecturer, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania

Research interests

Linguistics, multimodal translation, machine translation

Address

Kaunas University of Technology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, A. Mickevičiaus g. 37, Kaunas, Lithuania

E-mail

greta.danilaviciene@ktu.lt

Orcid

0009-0005-6533-4946

