

## **FROM SPEECH TO SCREEN: TEXT COMPRESSION STRATEGIES IN UKRAINIAN SUBTITLES (BASED ON *JUMANJI*)**

Audiovisual translation (AVT) refers to a mode of translation that involves the transfer of verbal content in audiovisual products across languages while preserving its interaction with visual and acoustic elements. Unlike traditional written translation, audiovisual translation operates within a multimodal environment where meaning is constructed through the simultaneous combination of speech, image, sound, and on-screen text. As a result, the translator must consider not only linguistic equivalence but also temporal synchronization, spatial limitations, and audience readability. Audiovisual translation encompasses several modalities, including dubbing, voice-over, subtitling, and audio description, each characterized by specific technical and communicative constraints. Among these, subtitling is particularly shaped by restrictions on text length and exposure time, which often necessitate linguistic reduction and reformulation. Consequently, AVT requires translators to balance semantic accuracy with multimodal coherence and viewer comprehension, making it a distinct and complex field within contemporary translation studies.

### Subtitling as a mode of audiovisual translation

Subtitling represents one of the most widespread forms of audiovisual translation, involving the presentation of written text on screen that renders spoken dialogue and relevant auditory information in another language. Unlike dubbing or voice-over, subtitling preserves the original audio track, allowing viewers to simultaneously access the source speech and its translation. This dual-channel processing requires viewers to divide their attention between reading subtitles and following visual action, which significantly influences translation strategies. Subtitling is therefore characterized by a unique communicative situation in which written language functions as a condensed representation of spontaneous spoken discourse. As a result, subtitles rarely constitute direct linguistic equivalents of the original dialogue but rather optimized reformulations adapted to the viewing conditions and audience processing capacities.

### Constraints in subtitling

The process of subtitling is governed by a set of technical and cognitive constraints that distinguish it from other translation modes. The most significant limitations include restricted screen space, limited subtitle duration, and viewers' average reading speed. Typically, subtitles must fit within a fixed number of characters per line and remain on screen long enough to be comfortably read without distracting from the visual narrative. These constraints prevent the translator from reproducing the full extent of spoken dialogue, which is often characterized by repetitions, hesitations, discourse markers, and redundant elements. Furthermore, synchronization with speech timing and scene changes requires translators to make rapid decisions regarding information prioritization. Consequently, subtitling involves not only linguistic transfer but also careful management of textual economy and audience comprehension.

### Text compression in subtitling

Due to the spatial and temporal restrictions inherent in subtitling, text compression becomes a central translation strategy. Compression refers to the reduction of linguistic

material while preserving the essential semantic and pragmatic content of the original utterance. Rather than representing loss, compression functions as an adaptive mechanism that enables subtitles to remain readable and synchronized with the audiovisual flow. Translators achieve compression through various techniques, including lexical simplification, omission of redundant elements, syntactic restructuring, and the reduction of discourse markers. The effectiveness of subtitles largely depends on the translator's ability to balance informational completeness with brevity, ensuring that viewers receive coherent and accessible content without cognitive overload. Therefore, the study of compression strategies provides valuable insight into the decision-making processes underlying audiovisual translation practice.

To illustrate the practical application of these subtitling strategies, selected excerpts from the film *Jumanji* (2017) have been analyzed. The focus of this study is on the translation of spoken dialogue into Ukrainian subtitles, with particular attention to text compression, reduction of redundancy, and adaptation to audiovisual constraints. These examples demonstrate how theoretical principles of audiovisual translation are implemented in practice to ensure readability, synchronization, and preservation of narrative and pragmatic meaning.

*Play a game like this, there's gonna be levels. In order to finish the game, you gotta complete all the levels. Levels are gonna get harder as we go along.*

Subtitle translation:

*У таких іграх є рівні — щоб перемогти, треба пройти їх усі, і що далі, то складніше.*

Three explanatory sentences are merged into one subtitle unit spread over two frames. The translation applies information packaging, combining logically connected propositions into a single syntactic structure. Spoken fillers are removed, and causal relations are made explicit, improving processing speed for viewers who must simultaneously follow visual action.

Compression of metagame explanation

*The characters we chose, we all have certain skills.*

Subtitle translation:

*У наших персонажів є особливі навички.*

The clause “we chose” is omitted because it is visually obvious from the narrative context. This constitutes context-driven omission, a frequent subtitling strategy relying on shared audiovisual information.

Cultural and lexical adaptation

*Dance fighting? Is that even a... thing?*

Subtitle translation:

*Бойові танці? Таке взагалі існує?*

Analysis

Elliptical spoken phrasing is normalized into a concise interrogative structure. The translation preserves humor while reducing processing effort, demonstrating syntactic normalization typical for subtitling.

Strategic condensation of comic monologue

*Why would I need to be fast when I'm being chased by an enormous killer zebra or some sh\*t in this dumb-ass hat?*

Subtitle translation:

*Навіщо мені швидкість, якщо за мною женеться гігантська зебра в цій безглуздій шапці?*

## Analysis

Colloquial filler “or some sh\*t” has been omitted to reduce reading load and avoid excessive subtitle length while maintaining comedic exaggeration. This reflects register moderation combined with compression, a frequent strategy in commercial subtitling.

### Information prioritization

*The map, it's changing.*

Subtitle translation:

*Карта змінюється!*

The reformulation removes the topic-comment repetition typical of spoken English. The subtitle delivers the key narrative information immediately, illustrating maximum informational density, essential during dynamic scenes.

The analysis of selected dialogue excerpts from *Jumanji* demonstrates that text compression constitutes a fundamental strategy in film subtitling, directly shaped by the spatial, temporal, and cognitive constraints inherent in audiovisual translation. The findings indicate that subtitles do not aim at full linguistic equivalence with the source dialogue but rather at the efficient transmission of essential semantic and pragmatic information within limited screen space and reading time.

The examined examples reveal several recurrent compression strategies, including lexical reduction, syntactic condensation, omission of repetitions and discourse markers, elimination of disfluencies, and context-based information reduction supported by visual cues. These strategies allow translators to transform spontaneous spoken language into concise written text while maintaining coherence and narrative clarity. In many cases, multimodal elements such as facial expressions, gestures, and situational context compensate for linguistic omissions, enabling substantial reduction without significant loss of meaning.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that successful subtitling requires prioritization of communicative function over formal accuracy. Humor, character dynamics, and narrative progression are preserved through functional reformulation rather than literal translation, highlighting the adaptive nature of audiovisual translation. Compression therefore emerges not as a loss of information but as an optimization process that enhances readability and viewer comprehension.

Overall, the study confirms that effective subtitle translation relies on the translator’s ability to balance brevity and informativeness while considering multimodal interaction. The investigation of compression strategies contributes to a deeper understanding of decision-making processes in audiovisual translation and underscores the importance of audience-oriented translation practices in contemporary media localization.

## REFERENCES

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