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ENGLISH–POLISH AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION ON NETFLIX: STRATEGY DISTRIBUTION AND QUALITY ASSESSMENT ACROSS SUBTITLING, VOICE-OVER, AND DUBBING

Audiovisual translation has become one of the most important areas of applied translation studies in the age of streaming platforms. Services such as Netflix distribute multilingual and multicultural content to global audiences, while localisation makes this content accessible to viewers who do not use the source language. In this context, English–Polish audiovisual translation is not limited to rendering dialogue into another language. It involves multimodal decision-making shaped by image, sound, timing, platform guidelines, genre conventions, audience expectations, and the technical limitations of each modality.

The present paper examines English–Polish dialogue translation on Netflix across three audiovisual translation modalities: subtitling, voice-over, and dubbing. The study focuses on the distribution of strategies and the quality of translation assessment in selected Netflix productions. The analysed corpus includes examples from *The Witcher*, *The Office*, *1899*, *Big Mouth*, *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*, and *Stranger Things*. These productions were selected because they represent different genres and translation challenges: fantasy, comedy, drama, animated adult comedy, documentary, and science fiction.

The main aim of the paper is to identify which translation strategies are most frequently used in English–Polish Netflix dialogue translation and how these strategies differ across subtitling, voice-over, and dubbing. The study also seeks to assess how well each modality preserves meaning, register, humour, cultural references, proper names, profanity, specialised terminology, and overall viewer accessibility. The analysis is based on aligned English–Polish dialogue pairs and combines qualitative strategy analysis with selected quantitative quality-assessment tools.

The theoretical framework draws on audiovisual translation studies and translation strategy typologies. Subtitling is understood as a written translation mode in which the original soundtrack remains available to the viewer. It is technically constrained by line length, reading speed, segmentation, timing, and screen space. Voice-over is treated as a revoicing modality in which a Polish version is heard over a lowered original soundtrack. Dubbing is understood as a re-recorded target-language version that attempts to recreate dialogue in synchrony with image, timing, and character performance. These modalities do not merely differ technically; they create distinct viewing experiences.

Translation strategies are identified using selected categories from Vinay and Darbelnet, Gottlieb, Pedersen, and Venuti. The analysed strategies include borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, adaptation, paraphrase, condensation, deletion, retention, substitution, generalisation, specification, official equivalent, domestication, and foreignisation. These categories make it possible to describe translation behaviour in a

structured way, rather than relying on vague labels such as “good translation” or “bad translation”.

The methodology consists of two main stages. The first stage is qualitative and illustrative. It involves analysing aligned English–Polish dialogue pairs across the selected productions. The analysis focuses on seven categories: culture-specific items, humour preservation, register shifts, profanity, proper names, specialised terminology, and textual transparency. Each example is classified according to the strategy used and the audiovisual modality in which it appears.

The second stage introduces quality assessment. The FAR model is used for subtitles because it evaluates three core dimensions of subtitling quality: functional equivalence, acceptability, and readability. Functional equivalence concerns whether subtitles convey the intended meaning. Acceptability concerns whether the target text is grammatically, idiomatically, and stylistically acceptable in Polish. Readability concerns technical aspects such as segmentation, timing, punctuation, line length, and reading fluency. The WER model is used diagnostically for comparing spoken modalities, especially voice-over and dubbing. However, it must be treated cautiously because word-level similarity does not always reflect semantic or pragmatic quality in translation.

The analysis shows that modality strongly influences translation strategy. Subtitling is the most technically restricted modality. It frequently requires condensation, omission, paraphrase, and segmentation. These strategies are often necessary because subtitles must be readable in real time. However, excessive condensation may lead to the loss of humour, register, repetition, interpersonal nuance, or character-specific speech. Subtitles may preserve the original audio and cultural atmosphere, but they often reduce verbal density.

Voice-over offers more verbal space than subtitles, but it also changes the viewer’s relation to the character’s voice. In a Polish voice-over, one speaker frequently mediates different characters, which may flatten emotional and performative differences. At the same time, voice-over can sometimes preserve more semantic content than subtitles, especially in documentary or dialogue-heavy material. Its main challenge lies in synchronisation, naturalness, and the risk that the spoken translation may feel detached from the character’s original performance.

Dubbing offers the strongest illusion of direct character speech in the target language. It is especially effective in animation, fantasy, and genres where character voice and emotional immediacy matter. Dubbing may allow greater adaptation of humour, profanity, and register. However, it is constrained by rhythm, synchronisation, performance, and, in some cases, lip movement. A dubbing solution may be semantically effective but still fail if it sounds unnatural or does not match the visual performance.

One of the most visible findings concerns domestication and foreignisation. Netflix translations often use domestication when dealing with humour, idioms, and culture-specific references. For example, culture-bound references in comedy may be replaced with Polish equivalents or locally recognisable references to preserve comic effect. This strategy is useful when the original reference would be inaccessible to Polish viewers. However, domestication can also distort the source-cultural setting if it introduces a strongly local Polish element into a clearly American or British context. Foreignisation, by contrast, preserves the source culture’s identity but may reduce accessibility.

Humour is one of the most difficult areas for translation. In comedy series such as *The Office* and *Big Mouth*, humour is often built on wordplay, cultural references, register mismatch, repetition, taboo language, visual context, and fast-paced interaction. Literal translation is rarely sufficient. Translators frequently use adaptation, substitution, paraphrase, and modulation. In some cases, the target version preserves the humorous function more successfully than the literal meaning. In other cases, calque or excessive compression weakens the joke.

Profanity also shows strong modality and genre dependence. In adult animation such as *Big Mouth*, strong profanity can be preserved or creatively adapted because vulgarity is part of the series's comic identity. In *Stranger Things*, profanity is often moderated because the show has a different genre profile and target reception. Therefore, the translator's task is not merely to find a dictionary equivalent for a swear word. The translator must calibrate intensity, genre, characters' ages, tone, and audience expectations.

Proper names reveal another important tendency. Many names are retained, especially globally recognisable names, real people, and names belonging to fictional worlds. In fantasy and science fiction productions, names may be crucial for world-building. However, the analysis also shows inconsistency across modalities. Some fictional names are translated differently in dubbing and subtitles, which may reduce coherence for viewers. This is especially problematic in platform environments where viewers can switch between modalities.

Register shifts are among the strongest aspects of the analysed translations. In *The Witcher*, archaic and poetic forms help recreate a fantasy register. In *1899*, formal address and elevated vocabulary helped mark class differences and social hierarchy. In *Big Mouth*, colloquial and vulgar expressions maintain the energy of adult animated comedy. In *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*, the legal and documentary registers require precision and official equivalents. These examples show that register is not ornamental. It is part of characterisation, genre, and narrative credibility.

Technical constraints affect subtitles especially strongly. Line segmentation, line joining, reading speed, punctuation, subtitle duration, and synchronisation influence viewer comprehension. A subtitle may be semantically accurate but poorly segmented; it may be concise but unnatural; it may be readable but incomplete. Therefore, quality assessment in subtitling cannot focus only on lexical accuracy. Functional equivalence, acceptability, and readability must be evaluated together.

The results suggest that spoken modalities tend to score higher than subtitles on content preservation and naturalness, mainly because they offer greater flexibility. However, this does not mean that dubbing and voice-over are universally better. Subtitles preserve the source audio and may support exposure to foreign languages. Dubbing gives emotional immediacy but may domesticate too much. Voice-over may preserve content but weaken the character's voice. Each modality involves a different balance of access, loss, and compensation.

The strongest translation solutions in the analysed corpus are those based on a hybrid strategy selection. Official equivalents work well in legal or institutional contexts. Domestication works well in humour when the source reference would not function for the Polish audience. Foreignisation works well for globally recognisable names and fantasy world-building. Paraphrase and modulation are effective when literal translation would sound unnatural in Polish. Condensation is necessary in subtitling, but it becomes problematic when it removes humour, register, or narrative cues.

The weakest solutions are often characterised by excessive calque, overly literal renderings of idioms, inconsistent treatment of proper names, and excessive omission. English structures copied too directly into Polish may sound unnatural, especially in subtitles. This is visible in cases where Polish syntax requires restructuring, theme–rheme adjustment, or idiomatic reformulation. The analysis confirms that English–Polish AVT requires not only lexical transfer but also grammatical, pragmatic, and multimodal adaptation.

The paper argues that Netflix audiovisual translation should be understood as a platform-based localisation practice shaped by both linguistic and technical systems. The translator works under constraints imposed by modality, genre, platform style guides, reading speed, synchronisation, and audience reception. This makes AVT a highly complex field of applied linguistics. It combines translation studies, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, multimodality, digital media studies, and quality assessment.

The practical implication of the study is that translator training should include a systematic comparison of subtitling, voice-over, and dubbing. Students should not analyse AVT as one unified process. They should compare how the same source dialogue changes across modalities and why different strategies become necessary. Training should include humour, profanity, proper names, register, legal terminology, fantasy lexis, subtitle segmentation, and synchronisation. It should also include quality assessment through models such as FAR, while recognising the limitations of purely numerical measures.

In conclusion, English–Polish audiovisual translation on Netflix demonstrates that translation strategy is modality-dependent. Subtitling, voice-over, and dubbing preserve meaning differently and create different forms of viewer access. The analysis shows that successful AVT requires strategic flexibility, cultural competence, target-language naturalness, genre awareness, and technical precision. Strategy distribution and quality assessment, therefore, provide a useful framework for understanding how streaming platforms mediate multilingual audiovisual content for Polish audiences.

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