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FROM VERBAL CODE TO AUDIOVISUAL SIGN: INTERSEMIOTIC SHIFTS IN THE POLISH TRANSLATION AND FILM ADAPTATION OF DAN BROWN'S *THE DA VINCI CODE*

The movement of a literary text from one language into another and from a novel into film is never a neutral act of transfer. It involves selection, interpretation, restructuring, and the redistribution of meaning across different semiotic systems. This problem is especially visible in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, a novel built around codes, symbols, religious references, artworks, cryptographic clues, architectural spaces, and acts of decoding. The text does not merely tell a story; it creates a chain of signs that characters and readers must interpret. For this reason, *The Da Vinci Code* is a productive object for analysing interlingual and intersemiotic shifts.

The present paper examines selected intersemiotic shifts in the Polish translation *Kod Leonarda da Vinci* and the film adaptation *The Da Vinci Code*, directed by Ron Howard. The study focuses on how verbal codes in the English novel are transformed into Polish verbal forms and, in turn, into audiovisual signs in film. The analysis is limited to one corpus: Dan Brown's English novel, its Polish translation by Krzysztof Mazurek, and the 2006 film adaptation. This limitation is necessary because the symbolic density of *The Da Vinci Code* is sufficient for a focused qualitative study. Expanding the corpus to several Dan Brown novels would make the analysis too broad and methodologically unstable.

The theoretical framework draws on Roman Jakobson's distinction between intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic translation. Jakobson defines intersemiotic translation as the interpretation of verbal signs through nonverbal sign systems [8]. In this sense, the Polish translation of the novel represents interlingual translation, whereas the film adaptation represents intersemiotic translation. The Polish translator remains within the verbal system, transferring English narrative, terminology, and symbolic structures into Polish. The filmmaker, by contrast, transfers the novel into a multimodal system that includes image, sound, music, space, gesture, acting, lighting, editing, and camera movement.

The paper also uses adaptation theory. Hutcheon argues that adaptation is repetition without replication [7]. This idea is central to the analysis because the film adaptation of *The Da Vinci Code* repeats the novel's major plot structure, characters, and symbolic framework. Still, it cannot replicate the novel's verbal mode. It must transform long explanations, inner thoughts, symbolic commentary, and narrative suspense into audiovisual devices. Stam's critique of the fidelity model is also relevant: a film should not be judged only by whether it is "faithful" to the source text, but by how it reconstructs meaning in another medium [12].

In the English novel, many signs function as verbal codes. The reader receives descriptions of Saunière's body, the pentacle, the Fibonacci sequence, the Mona Lisa, the cryptex, *The Last Supper*, and the Holy Grail through narration and dialogue. In the Polish translation, these elements remain verbal, but they are repositioned within the Polish linguistic and cultural system. For example, *The Vitruvian Man* becomes *Człowiek witruwiański*, an

established art-historical equivalent. The term *cryptex* becomes *krypteks*, a borrowing or neologism supported by explanation. The English *pentacle* is rendered as a *pentagram*, a term that is recognisable in Polish but may carry stronger occult associations.

This example shows that translation shifts are not always errors or losses. They may be functional solutions. In a popular thriller based on codes, the translator must preserve not only lexical meaning but also narrative function. A particularly strong example is the anagrammatic clue. The English phrase “O, Draconian devil! / Oh, lame saint!” cannot be translated literally because its function is to be decoded into “Leonardo da Vinci! / The Mona Lisa!”. The Polish translation, therefore, uses a functional replacement that preserves the puzzle mechanism. This is not literal equivalence; it is functional equivalence at the level of code, clue, and reader effect.

The film adaptation introduces another layer of transformation. A written clue becomes a visual or audiovisual event. In the novel, Saunière’s body is described in words: its position, blood, the star drawn on the body, the circle, and its connection to Leonardo da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man*. In the film, the same material becomes a visual composition. The viewer sees the body, the museum space, the symbol, the lighting, and the characters’ investigative gaze. What the novel explains through narration, the film presents through image, camera framing, and spatial arrangement.

This process may be described as a verbal-to-visual shift. It occurs when a verbal description is transformed into a screen image. The body of Saunière, the pentacle, the Mona Lisa, the Louvre, and the cryptex all undergo this type of shift. In the novel and the Polish translation, these elements are mediated through words. In the film, they become visual signs. The viewer no longer imagines the symbolic object only through language; they are confronted with it immediately as an image.

A second type of shift is condensation. Dan Brown’s novel contains long explanations of religious symbolism, art history, sacred femininity, the Fibonacci sequence, Opus Dei, the Holy Grail, and Leonardo da Vinci’s works. These explanations are central to the novel’s intellectual thriller effect. Film, however, cannot reproduce all this exposition without slowing the narrative rhythm. Therefore, the film condenses many explanatory passages into short dialogues, visual clues, or dramatic scenes. The sacred feminine, for instance, is extensively explained in the novel, whereas the film presents the concept through a limited number of key scenes and statements.

A third type of shift is omission. Some details from the novel are omitted in the film because they are too expository, too secondary, or too difficult to integrate into the cinematic pacing. This is not automatically a defect. Omission is a normal adaptive strategy. The more important question is whether omitted material is compensated for elsewhere. In many cases, the film compensates through image, music, acting, and setting. A long explanation may be reduced, but a visual atmosphere may reinforce suspense or symbolic importance.

A fourth type of shift is multimodal compensation. For example, when the film condenses Langdon’s explanation of a symbol, it may compensate with close-up shots, dramatic lighting, music, or the characters’ reactions. The Louvre scenes are especially important in this respect. The novel describes the Louvre through language and cultural references. The film transforms the museum into a spatial and visual experience: long corridors, glass architecture, darkness, artificial light, silence, alarms, and movement create suspense and semiotic density. In this way, setting becomes a sign.

The cryptex is another strong example of intersemiotic transformation. In the novel, it is explained as a coded device for protecting secret information. In the Polish translation, the term *krypteks* preserves its foreign, technical, and mysterious character. In the film, however, the cryptex becomes a visible prop. Its shape, mechanism, rotating letters, hidden message, and destructive potential create physical suspense. The object no longer needs only verbal explanation; it becomes a tactile and visual centre of action.

The transformation of suspense is also significant. In the novel, suspense is produced through delayed revelation, internal thought, and sequential decoding. The reader receives information gradually and participates in the process of interpretation. In the film, suspense is generated through editing, sound, movement, music, camera angles, and visual rhythm. Textual suspense becomes audiovisual suspense. The spectator not only reads a clue; they see it, hear it, and experience it within cinematic time.

Religious and cultural meanings are also transformed. The novel presents complex and controversial material concerning Opus Dei, Mary Magdalene, the Holy Grail, sacred femininity, and the history of the Church. In the Polish translation, these elements remain discursive and relatively detailed. In the film, they are made more immediate and dramatic. The statement that the Holy Grail is not a cup but a person becomes a cinematic revelation rather than a long interpretative argument. This makes the idea accessible but also reduces some of the novel's discursive complexity.

The same applies to *The Last Supper*. In the novel, the painting is discussed through extended explanation and symbolic reinterpretation. In the film, the painting becomes part of a visual lecture. The image is shown, pointed to, reframed, and interpreted through dialogue. The viewer is visually guided toward the absence of the chalice and the figure associated with Mary Magdalene. The shift here is not simply from text to image. It is from verbal argument to guided audiovisual seeing.

The Polish viewer receives the film through another layer of translation: subtitles or another audiovisual translation mode. This means that the Polish reception of the film is not identical to that of the novel. The reader of *Kod Leonarda da Vinci* receives a full literary translation and can reread explanations, pause over clues, and follow the logic of the text. The viewer of the film receives spoken English, images, sound, and a condensed Polish written layer on screen. Subtitles must be short and temporally limited. Therefore, the Polish film experience involves both intersemiotic adaptation and audiovisual translation.

This distinction is important for translation studies. The Polish translation of the novel and the Polish subtitles of the film should not be treated as equivalent translations. The novel translation is an interlingual literary translation. The film subtitles are an audiovisual translation inside an already intersemiotic adaptation. The former preserves verbal complexity more fully; the latter works under constraints of time, space, image, and synchronisation. Both mediate the same story, but through different semiotic conditions.

The main analytical categories proposed in the paper are: verbal-to-visual shift, verbal-to-auditory shift, condensation, omission, expansion, substitution, symbolic reinterpretation, cultural simplification, narrative restructuring, object-centred shift, spatial semiotic shift, and multimodal compensation. These categories make it possible to avoid vague judgments such as "the film is faithful" or "the translation is accurate". Instead, they allow the researcher to describe precisely what happens to meaning when it moves between language, culture, and medium.

The paper argues that *The Da Vinci Code* is particularly well-suited to intersemiotic analysis because the novel itself centres on the reading of signs. Symbols, puzzles, visual objects, hidden messages, and interpretative acts drive the story. Therefore, when the novel is translated into Polish and adapted into a film, it is not only the plot that changes medium. The very mechanism of decoding changes. The reader decodes through verbal narration; the viewer decodes through images, sound, spatial cues, and cinematic rhythm.

The analysis also shows that intersemiotic shifts involve both gains and losses. The Polish translation usually preserves more verbal explanation, terminological detail, and cultural commentary. The film, however, gains immediacy, visual force, spatial atmosphere, and emotional intensity. The novel explains more; the film shows more. The translation protects discourse; the adaptation intensifies perception. Neither mode is inherently superior. They create different forms of access to the story's symbolic system.

In conclusion, the movement from verbal code to audiovisual sign in *The Da Vinci Code* demonstrates the complexity of translation across languages and media. The Polish translation and the film adaptation both reconstruct Brown's symbolic thriller, but they do so through different semiotic resources. The Polish translation transforms the English text into another verbal-cultural system. The film adaptation transforms verbal narration into a multimodal audiovisual structure. For this reason, the study of *The Da Vinci Code* requires an integrated approach combining translation studies, adaptation theory, intersemiotic analysis, and multimodal analysis. Such an approach makes it possible to understand how religious, historical, visual, and cryptographic meanings are preserved, condensed, omitted, visualised, or reinterpreted across media.

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