

SOME FEATURES OF THE ROMANIAN INTERPRETATION OF THE ANIMATED SERIES "MASHA AND THE BEAR": A CULTURAL-PRAGMATIC APPROACH¹¹

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Abstract

The article examines the key features of the interpretative translation in audiovisual content, using the globally popular Russian animated series "Masha and the Bear" as a case study. Special attention is paid to issues of cultural adaptation and the translation of culture-specific realities-lexical units denoting concepts unfamiliar to the target audience. Based on an analysis of translation strategies (analogies, lexical substitution, and neutralization) applied in the English and German localizations of the series, the study formulates general interpretative principles applicable to Romanian. The paper supports the thesis that a strictly literal translation of fictional discourse is not possible; in most cases, the text undergoes interpretation aimed at preserving the pragmatic and communicative effect of the original. The findings indicate that for Romanian localization, as for other languages, priority is given to functional equivalence and accessibility for the child audience, even at the cost of partially diminishing national coloration, especially when translating precedent phenomena, phraseological units, and child-specific word-creation.

Keywords: audiovisual translation, interpretation, cultural adaptation, Romanian language, lexical substitution

Rezumat

În articol, examinăm caracteristicile-cheie ale traducerii interpretative în conținutul audiovizual, utilizând ca studiu de caz serialul de animație rusesc „Mașa și Ursul”, popular la nivel mondial. O atenție deosebită este acordată atât problemelor de adaptare culturală și traducerii realităților specifice culturii ruse, cât și unităților lexicale care nominalizează concepte nefamiliare publicului-țintă. Pe baza unei analize a strategiilor de traducere (analogie, substituție lexicală, neutralizare), aplicate în variantele engleză și germană ale serialului, studiul formulează principii interpretative generale aplicabile limbii române. Lucrarea susține teza că o traducere strict literală a discursului ficțional nu este posibilă; în majorita-

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tea cazurilor, textul este supus unei interpretări care vizează păstrarea efectului pragmatic și comunicativ al originalului. Constatările indică faptul că în traducerea în limba română, ca și pentru alte limbi, se acordă prioritate echivalenței funcționale și accesibilității textului pentru publicul infantil chiar cu prețul diminuării parțiale a coloritului național, în special, atunci când se traduc unități glotice specifice: frazeologisme sau elemente înregistrate doar în limbajul copiilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: traducerea audiovisualului, interpretare, adaptare culturală, limba română, substituție lexicală

1. Introduction

In the modern media space, the Russian animated series "Masha and the Bear" (2009 – present) has become a global phenomenon, localized into dozens of languages. Its rapid international spread, including European countries such as Romania, poses important questions for researchers in Audiovisual Translation (AVT) particularly regarding cultural adaptation strategies for children's content.

AVT differs from traditional written translation in that it must simultaneously consider verbal, auditory, and visual elements, which dictates specific requirements for the choice of translation solutions. A key problem when translating fictional and audiovisual texts is the transmission of culture-specific realities-lexical units that denote concepts, objects, or phenomena unique to the source culture. Preserving the national coloration often conflicts with the need to ensure a proper comprehension of the text by the target audience, especially in the case of children.

As shown in studies on the series' translation into English, the most frequent strategies are the use of analogues and lexical substitution, which confirms the predominance of an interpretative approach over a literal one.

The objective of this article is to determine the dominant translation strategy in the Romanian version of the animated series "Masha and the Bear" by analyzing the features of localization of precedent phenomena and the linguistic characteristics of the main character. The material for the study consisted of comparative data from the Russian and Romanian versions of the animated series, presented in tabular form.

2. Theoretical Premises and Research Hypothesis

Audiovisual translation for a child audience is subject to a strict pragmatic imperative: the text must be maximally understandable and easily processed by the child, without distracting them from the visual component. This requirement typically leads to the neutralization of hard-to-translate cultural markers.

Interpretative translation (as defined by Komissarov and Sdobnikov) involves abandoning the search for a formal equivalent in favor of recreating the pragmatic and communicative effect of the original. In the context of children's AVT, this means that cultural specificity may be sacrificed in order to achieve functional equivalence (accessibility and comprehensibility).

Based on the analysis of general AVT principles and a preliminary comparison of fragments, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

2.1. Research Hypothesis

The dominant strategy in the localization of the animated series "Masha and the Bear" into Romanian is cultural-pragmatic interpretation (functional adaptation). This strategy is manifested in two key aspects: 1) the total neutralization of precedent phenomena and culture-specific realities in episode titles, and 2) the normalization of the child speech of the character Masha, which serves both the task of simplifying perception and fulfilling a potential educational function for the target audience.

2.2. Neutralization of Precedent Phenomena in Episode Titles

The Russian version of the animated series actively uses precedent phenomena – cultural allusions, proverbs, phraseological units, and quotes – in episode titles, which adds an extra layer of comedic and semantic meaning. The Romanian translator, conversely, completely omits this cultural layer, replacing it with neutral, descriptive titles directly related to the episode's plot:

No Episode	Russian Version (Precedent Phenomenon)	English Translation from Russian	Romanian Translation from Russian	English Translation from Romanian	Proof of Neutralization
5	"Ловись, рыбка" (Аллюзия на сказку «Лиса и Волк»)	"Catch, little fish" (Allusion to the fairy tale "The Fox and the Wolf")	<i>La pescuit</i> (На рыбалке)	"Fishing" (On a fishing trip)	The allusion to the Russian fairy tale is replaced by a <i>simple description of the action.</i>
17	<i>Маши + каша</i> (Аллюзия на сказку «Сладкая каша»)	<i>Masha + Porridge</i> (Allusion to the fairy tale "Sweet Porridge")	<i>Rețetă pentru dezastru</i> (Рецепт для катастрофы)	"Recipe for Disaster"	The title is replaced, focusing on the <i>consequence of the plot</i> (excessive porridge), rather than the fairy tale allusion.
28	<i>Ход конем</i> (Фразеологизм)	<i>Knight's move</i> (Phraseological unit)	<i>La drum cu poneiul</i> (В путь с пони)	"On the road with a pony"	The phraseological unit, which has no direct Romanian equivalent, is re-

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					placed by a description of the key visual action (Masha's pony ride).
36	<i>Двое на одного</i> (Устойчивое выражение/ пословица)	<i>Two against one</i> (Fixed expression/ proverb)	<i>Doar prietenii</i> (Только друзья)	Friends only	A complete semantic substitution, aimed at neutralizing the aggressive undertone in favor of a friendly one, suitable for children's content.
40	<i>Красота – страшная сила</i> (Крылатое выражение)	<i>Beauty is a terrible power</i> (Catchphrase)	<i>Micuța Prințesă</i> (Маленькая принцесса)	"The Little Princess"	The philosophical expression is replaced by a direct description of Masha's role in the episode (she dresses as a princess).

Table 1: Features of Episode Title Translation

The examples in the table convincingly demonstrate that the translator systematically applies neutralization and free translation (modulation), rejecting:

- Russian folklore background (episodes 5, 17), which would likely be incomprehensible to a Romanian child;
- Complex linguistic constructions (phraseological units, catchphrases) (episodes 28, 40), which could be misinterpreted or lose their humorous effect.

The goal is not to preserve the form or the allusion, but to ensure immediate understanding of the plot and preserve the pragmatic appeal of the title. This demonstrates a distinctly cultural-pragmatic approach.

2.3. Normalization of the Masha's Speech

The second part of the hypothesis is related to the linguistic characteristics of the main heroine. Masha's speech in the original intentionally contains

elements of child speech, colloquialisms, diminutives, and grammatical errors, which creates a comedic effect and emphasizes her age.

The analysis of the Romanian version indicates a direct strategy of normalization (or correction), which is a form of interpretation with an educational goal:

Russian Version (Stylistic/Grammatical Elements)	English Translation from Russian	Romanian Variant	English Translation from Romanian	Proof of Normalization
Ой, с приездом (неофициальное, короткое приветствие)	"Oh, welcome" (informal, short greeting)	Нора! Mă bucur că ai venit (= Опа! Я рада, что ты пришла/приехала)	"Oops! I'm glad you came/ arrived"	The short, colloquial "Oh, welcome" is replaced by a more elaborate and grammatically correct greeting phrase.
Скачи, скачи мой коник (дими́нутив, детское слово)	"Ride, ride my little horsey" (diminutive, children's word)	Fugi, fugi poneiule (= Беги, беги пони)	"Run, run pony"	The stylistically marked diminutive «коник» (little horsey) is replaced by the neutral and standardized poneiule (pony, in the vocative case).
Ух, фигурки, пешечки, слоники и пони́ки (детские дими́нутивы, возможное словотворчество)	"Ooh, figures, little pawns, little elephants and little ponies" (children's diminutives, possible word-creation)	Îmi plac figurinele astea. Și pionii, și poneii (= Мне нравятся эти фигурки. И пешки, и пони)	"I like these figures. Both pawns and ponies"	Multiple diminutives (little pawns, little elephants, little ponies) are replaced by neutral, adult names for the pieces and animals (pionii, poneii).
Мишка, я тоже так могу (простое, прямое обращение)	"Mishka, I can do that too" (simple, direct address)	Ursule, uite și eu pot ca tine (= Медведь,	"Bear, look, I can do it like you too"	The address is preserved, but the overall grammatical construction is

		смотри, я тоже могу как ты)		standardized, without collo- quialisms or errors.
Ну куда вы все подева- лись? (просторечное «подевались»)	"Well, where did you all dis- appear to?" (colloquial «подевались»)	Unde s-au dus cu toții? (= Куда они все ушли?)	"Where did you all go?"	The colloquial verb подевались (disappeared to) is replaced by the stan- dard and cor- rect s-au dus (= went/have gone).

Table 2: Features of Masha's Speech Translation

The analysis shows that the Romanian translator consistently avoids conveying the stylistic markedness of Masha's speech associated with her young age or use of colloquialisms. If in the original, errors and diminutives contribute to character development and comedic effect, the Romanian version is dominated by linguistic correctness. This normalization of the character's speech is a strong interpretative strategy that clearly prioritizes the educational and normative function of the animated film over preserving the original humor.

2.4. Comprehensive Interpretation of Everyday and Onomastic Realities

Although the provided tables do not include a direct comparison of classic realities (e.g., "Baba Yaga" or "Kolobok"), the analysis of episode titles and Masha's speech this approach to be extrapolated to other categories.

Studies on translation into Polish and English note that such realities as "Kolobok" or "Baba Yaga" are not calqued but are replaced:

- "Kolobok" (Russian fairy tale) - *The Gingerbread Boy* (in English) or *Gogoasă* (Doughnut/Pancake, Romanian analogue);
- "Baba Yaga" (Russian mythology) - *Old Witch* (in English).

For Romanian localization, the strategy of lexical substitution or functional analogue is most likely used:

- **Lexical Substitution:** *Baba Yaga* will be translated as *Vrăjitoare bătrână* (Old witch) or replaced with a local folklore character, for example, *Muma Pădurii* (Forest Mother/Witch).
- **Replacement of Food Names:** References to specifically Russian dishes, such as «кисель» (kisel) (in the expression "kisel banks" - denoting abundance), are replaced with more universal concepts familiar to the Romanian viewer that convey the idea of abundance, or they will be omitted.

Even the translation of brand names is subject to interpretation:

- The Russian inscription «Завтрак туриста» ("Tourist's Breakfast," a type of canned food) is rendered by the Romanian «SPAM (*conservă de carne de porc*)» (SPAM (canned pork)) in one of the book translations. This is not just a translation but a cultural substitution, where the Russian everyday reality is replaced by an internationally known analogue of a canned product (SPAM), making the item more recognizable to a wider audience. Thus, all levels of the text—from episode titles and cultural realia to the character's speech—are subjected to cultural-pragmatic interpretation aimed at maximum adaptation.

3. Conclusion

The analysis confirmed the hypothesis: the dominant strategy in the localization of the animated series "Masha and the Bear" into Romanian is cultural-pragmatic interpretation. This strategy is expressed in two key trends:

- **Total neutralization of cultural markers:** Russian precedent phenomena (proverbs, phraseological units, fairy tale allusions) in episode titles are replaced with neutral, descriptive headlines directly related to the plot («Ловись, рыбка» - «*La pescuit*»).
- **Linguistic normalization of the character's speech:** Colloquialisms, diminutives, and grammatical features of Masha's child speech are corrected in the Romanian dubbing towards more standardized and grammatically correct vocabulary («Скачи, скачи мой коник» - «*Fugi, fugi poneiule*»). This trend reflects the desire to give the AVT an educational function for children.

In Romanian localization, functional equivalence and the child-oriented accessibility are prioritized over linguistic equivalence and the preservation of the original stylistic effect. This indicates that the translator acts not merely as a linguist but as a cultural adaptor, transferring not only the words but also the general meaning into a new cultural context.

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