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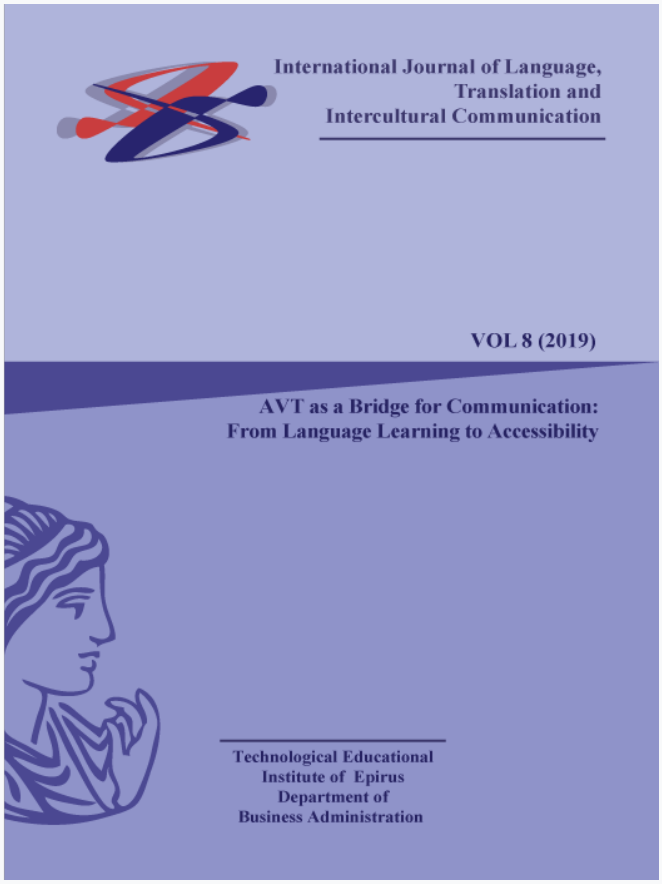

The Language of Interlingual Subtitles: Studying the f Word in Skins

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The Language of Interlingual Subtitles: Studying the f Word in Skins

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Abstract

The language of interlingual subtitles and the effect it has on viewers is a concern for viewers of subtitled audiovisual content, subtitlers, and SVOD[1] services such as Netflix[2], as well as other cable, national and commercial broadcasters that show subtitled content. Subtitles are a popular form of audiovisual translation and their usage is growing worldwide. Conveying conversational dialogues from one language via subtitles to another may not come without obstacles as subtitles are a reduced, written, form of text, where many features of conversational, spoken language may be lost. Skins, a British teenage series, containing fast-paced dialogues and slang, as well as an abundance of expletives, will be used as an illustration of this topic. The subtitling of only one expletive will be compared across all seven seasons of this television series, by analysing the opening episode of each season, against different circumstances in which particular seasons were subtitled. The study of the corpus of Croatian subtitles of this TV series, based on the analysis of the opening episode of each season of this TV series has been conducted. The article aims to show that the way subtitles are depends on how they were created, under what set of circumstances.

***Keywords**: interlingual subtitles, culture, subtitling, Skins, subtitler's experience, subtitling circumstances*

Introduction

In this article the term subtitling refers to interlingual subtitling, that may simply be explained as subtitling from one language to another. In many cases that is subtitling from English into many other target languages, such as French, Spanish or Chinese, among the big world languages, or Croatian and Dutch among the smaller languages. English is *the* source language of audiovisual media, and that is the case with the investigation conducted for the purposes of this article. However, the source language of interlingual subtitling may be any language. Interlingual subtitles may be placed on one or more lines, depending on the country and/or language (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 82-84, Pedersen 2011: 19), and if integrated, subtitles may be placed on various parts of the screen (Fox, forthcoming), even though they are centred at the bottom part of the screen in many instances. Fox's study shows that integrated titles, a relative novelty and not subtitling mainstream at this point, "do have the potential to improve the viewing experience and offer film producers new angles of incorporating translation into their

[1] SVOD is an abbreviation for streaming and video-on-demand
[2] Based on coversations and conference talks by Chris Fetner, Director of Global Partnerships at Netflix

image compositions" (*ibid.*). Subtitles involve a "synchronous semiotic channel" (Gottlieb 2001:15), which means that they should appear on the screen when an utterance begins, and disappear when an utterance ends. This leads to many challenges subtitling involves, since it involves spatial and temporal restrictions. However, these spatial and temporal restrictions may only be partly responsible for the relatively barren language of subtitles, that is a type of block language at certain times. These difficulties under which subtitles are create lead to a special kind of language, the language of subtitles. It is the language of subtitles that is the focus of our attention in this article.

The way language is used in interlingual subtitles has been the subject of interest of several AVT scholars (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998, Gottlieb 2001, Diaz-Cintas and Remael 2007, Pedersen 2011), to name a few. Yet, the focus of this both theoretical and practical quest for deciphering the language of interlingual subtitles and what it means to viewers is based, among other aspects, on subtitler's situation discussed in this article.

The research question we are going to try to answer in this article is: how do circumstances, explained below, under which subtitles are created, influence the language of subtitles? Our hypothesis is that the language of subtitles is going to change depending on the circumstances in which the subtitles have been created. Even though this hypothesis may seem logical and expected, testing it is not quite straightforward.

1 Background

We first need to go back a couple of decades. The 1970s where a time when AVTS[3], as well as TS[4], didn't exist as independent research disciplines. As subtitled film and later television started to gain popularity, scholars, primarily linguists, started to examine the factors that influence the language of subtitling, but also dubbing (cf. Chaume 2012). These were the beginnings of the now abandoned juxtapositioning of subtitling and dubbing. Factors of "national character" (Vöge 1977: 120) were recognized as some of the factors that determine the translation of films. Vöge names factors such as national legislation, the size of the linguistic area and the tradition of film translation among these factors (*ibid.*), while explaining why some countries opt for subtitling, while other opt for dubbing, as regards the prevalent mode of audiovisual translation in a given territory. Audiovisual translation was at the time, in the 1970s, analysed by using films as examples; however, with the development of various types of audiovisual media, the discussion has nowadays been significantly broadened. Thus in the 21st century, for scholars such as Romero Fresco (2009: 68-69) and Pedersen (2010: 21-23) the way language is used in audiovisual translation, dubbing or subtitling respectively, is a matter of viewers' habit of considering subtitled or dubbed audiovisual texts as real-sounding dialogues. This "habit" is what Vöge means by "tradition of film translation". Pedersen brings forward the concept of "the contract of illusion" (*ibid.*), claiming that: "There is a tacit agreement, a 'contract of illusion' if you will, between the subtitler and the viewers to the effect that the subtitles *are* the dialogue, that what you read is actually what people say." (2010: 21-23). Romero Fresco, while studying dubbing, came to a similar

[3] Audiovisual translation studies
[4] Translation studies

conclusion by explaining the concept of "the suspension of linguistic disbelief" (2009: 68-69), claiming that: "The suspension of linguistic disbelief can thus be defined as the process that allows the dubbing audience to turn a deaf ear to the possible unnaturalness of the dubbing script while enjoying the cinematic experience" (*ibid.*). Whether this is the case could be tested through experimental research, which is gaining more popularity in the study of audiovisual translation. However, it is not quite clear whether subtitlers approach their work with the presumption that viewers will take their standardised or neutralised translation as a real-sounding dialogue, and they will do their best to convey the conversational style of ST in their translations, so that the viewer can enjoy the film or a TV series. The question is therefore whether subtitlers count on the contract of illusion and the suspension of linguistic disbelief, since they stand between the film and the viewer. Furthermore, is has not to this date been proven that viewers take subtitles or the language of dubbing as something natural.

The issue of why dubbed texts may sound unnatural was explored by Chaume (2004 and 2012), as well as Baños-Piñero and Chaume (2009). The two authors studied "prefabricated orality" of dubbed texts and the usage of colloquial discourse markers in dubbed translations, that are used to make these translations sound more natural. Prefabricated orality deals with the level or naturalness or unnaturalness of film or television series scripts that are first written to be spoken and then translated to be spoken by dubbing actors.

Mattson (2009) studied the usage of discourse particles, in particular *you know*, *well, like* and *I mean* in subtitling by studying translations of ten American films into Swedish. She describes discourse particles as "words or expressions, common in spoken language, which do not have a clear lexical meaning, but which do have a pragmatic meaning" (2009: 10). Mattson's findings show that only one fifth of discourse particles in 1032 occurrences over these ten films have been translated, because of a lack of equivalents in other languages. She also concludes that "DP [discourse particles] functions can be of great importance for the understanding and appreciation of film dialogue". (2009: 277). According to this study, subtitlers apparently *do leave out* features of the spoken language while translating.

Even though dubbed and subtitled texts involve different semiotic channels, since subtitles are read and dubbed texts are spoken, they share a certain level of unnaturalness or artificiality that may also depend on translator's decision-making process, which may be influenced by circumstances defined in section four of this article. This artificiality comes from the fact that at least one of the semiotic channels in both dubbing and subtitling involves writing. Written texts sound more artificial than spoken conversations. This is at least partly due to our inclination to write in standard language. We normally do not use expletives in writing, we do not use discourse particles (cf. Mattson above). Ellipsis (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998:87), a common trait of conversations, is rarely used in writing. In interlingual subtitles ellipsis is by definition edited, even deleted, since they may prove difficult to read, especially if the reading at which subtitles are created exceeds levels that allow for comfortable reading. Reading speed is usually expressed in characters per second (cps) or words per minute (wpm). Writing involves a degree of formality. It is taught in schools, one of the first institutions humans encounter in life. Letters are usually written in a formal fashion, even though that has been somewhat changed with the advent of the internet, and in particular social media. Laws are written

in formal legal registers, news is delivered in standard language, both written and spoken. It is inherent to human beings to write using standard language, devoid of the features of everyday, spoken language, or containing only a few of them. This has a significant impact on subtitling, not solely because of spatial and temporal restrictions of subtitling, but also because subtitles *are* a written form of language, and not spoken. A written word, even though it may be quite ephemeral on television, cinematic, computer or smartphone screen, is by its nature more permanent that the spoken word. Subtitling conversational dialogues is therefore characterised by a conflict between the inclination to write formally and yet render these conversational dialogues so that they reflect the ST as closely as possible.

2 Corpus-based research of subtitles

Alongside the analysis of the subtitler's situation in section four, this study is embedded in Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) and corpus-based research. It was in 1985 that Toury published his essay "A Rationale for Descriptive Translation Studies", in which he pointed out the importance of non-linguistic features of translation. "[T]ranslators operate first and foremost in the interest of the culture *into* which they are translating, and not in the interest of the source text, let alone the source culture." (1985: 18-19). Toury called for a methodology of the analysis of translated texts that will enable to determine "why [translation]is realized the way it is" (1991: 186). Having this in mind, this study has been undertaken to determine why the language of subtitles is the way it is, and to investigate whether circumstances in which subtitles have been created dictate the way the language of subtitles in them is. Culture is an important aspect of this analysis, especially the adolescent subculture with its specific sociolect and an abundance of expletives.

Mona Baker (1993) called for the study of large corpora of both original and translated texts in translation studies claiming that "[i]t will [also] allow us to explore, on a larger scale than was ever possible before, the principles that govern translational behaviour and the constraints under which it operates" (1993: 235). Even though this article is primarily oriented towards the study of the translated text, the subtitles, subtitling by definition involves the study of parallel texts, since subtitles, i.e. the translation, are broadcast parallel with the original text, the spoken language of the original film or, in our case, a TV series. The corpus included in this study can't be described as *large*, but rather as a *complete* corpus that includes all episodes of all seasons of this television series subtitled from English into Croatian.

There haven't been many corpus-based studies in audiovisual translation. Ranzato (2010) used corpus-based research to study the rendering of geographically connoted language varieties, slang more specifically, and Baños-Piñero (2013) studied linguistic characteristics in dubbing. The lack of large-scale studies in corpus-based studies of audiovisual texts is due to the fact that the collection of subtitled corpora is harder than collecting of written corpora (Defrancq et al. 2015). Yet, this study is slightly different since the corpus was readily available, given that the author of this article also subtitled all episodes of all seven seasons of *Skins* from English into Croatian. This study is therefore a corpus-based study of the language of subtitles of one specific TV series, based on the theoretical principles of DTS.

2.1 Subtitler's situation

"Subtitling Situation" (Pedersen 2011: 115-120), or "Subtitler's situation" (Nikolić 2012: 101-103), may be defined as circumstances under which subtitlers work, and these circumstances may be both intrinsic and extrinsic, having effect on the translation. Intrinsic circumstances are micro circumstances under which subtitles are created and may range from circumstances that are characteristic for many other work processes, such as whether there is enough time to complete a certain task or to whether remuneration is motivating enough for the subtitler. Intrinsic circumstances may also include subtitler's self-censorship, they are person-specific and individual. Extrinsic circumstances are mostly connected to various restrictions imposed on the subtitler, that may ultimately influence some of the intrinsic circumstances. Extrinsic circumstances may also be influenced by "expectancy norms" and "professional norms" (Chesterman 1997: 64-70). These norms regulate what readers expect and what translation process should be like. On the other hand, restrictions may be imposed by the broadcaster, but they may also be connected to subtitling standards or rules, written and unwritten, or to practices defined in the *Code of Good Subtitling Practice* (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998: 157-159). Let us investigate circumstances under which subtitles are created in greater detail.

3 The circumstance under which subtitles are created

3. 1 Intrinsic circumstances

3.1.1 *How subtitlers feel about their work, motivation*

Motivation is important for successful completion of any task. Whether subtitlers like and feel motivated about what they do is highly individual. For instance, a subtitler who works on the subtitling of *Dr Who*, a popular British TV series subtitled into many languages, and doesn't like surreal television series, is likely to produce worse result that the subtitler with keen or at least moderate interest in this British television series that has had a significant number of fans. It is often the case that subtitlers do not know whether they will enjoy their work until they have seen the material. This is the case with both films and new television series. Subtitling, like many other jobs, requires precision and concentration. Therefore, working while tired may also have an impact on the quality of the final product, like in any other job. Mistakes in subtitling are obvious since subtitles are broadcast simultaneously with the original utterance, which is one of the most unique features of this type of translation. Although "a guess or a careless translation never goes unnoticed" (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998:105), careless translations do take place also due to a lack of motivation, and they are indeed easily noticed. This of course has a significant influence on the language of subtitles.

3.1.2 *The wear and tear*

This is closely connected to the previous category of motivation and is also individual. Some subtitlers never lose their initial interest and motivation for subtitling, but many do, or they at least lose a part of the initial interest and in many cases sheer enthusiasm for the job. This is also partially due to the fact that subtitlers sometimes start feeling their job has become more repetitive over time. If we compare this to travelling for instance: having never visited a country one is travelling to is not going to be the same if one is travelling to the country for the 2nd, or 22nd time. Again, this is not pertinent only to subtitling, but to many other jobs, if not all. The longer subtitlers stay in the profession, even though they always work on a new audiovisual material, the feeling of fatigue may increase over time. The "wear and tear" especially affects subtitlers who mostly work on the same types of materials, for instance *telenovelas* or only certain types of films, etc.

3.1.3 *Subtitler's self-censorship*

It has already been mentioned that subtitling is in fact writing and the fact that what subtitlers are writing to be shown to potentially millions of viewers may lead some of them to self-censor their work. If a subtitler doesn't use expletives in everyday life and considers swearing rude, they may avoid using expletives in subtitles as well. Cases of self-censorship may sometimes be drastic, for instance when an audiovisual material is teeming with expletives, and there are no expletive in subtitles. This may also be connected to the usage of pronouns of power and solidarity, or T-V pronouns, (see Brown and Gillman 1960 and Pavlović 2004). In languages such as Croatian, Italian, Spanish, French, German and others, T-V pronouns are used in situations where in English only the pronoun *you* is used. Since writing involves at least a certain level of formality, some subtitlers may decide to use the V pronoun in situations when this pronoun would not be used in real-life situations.

3.2 Extrinsic circumstances

3.2.1 *Deadlines*

Short deadlines imply that the subtitler must work more quickly, and thus hasten the decision-making process, or make it shorter, in order to complete the task. It is sometimes neglected that subtitlers make their decisions about how to translate a sentence, a phrase or a word in matter of seconds, if not less. Even though technology and subtitling software development have enabled subtitlers to work more quickly and efficiently than they used to 20 or more years ago, subtitlers still *need sufficient time* to complete their tasks. Worsening remuneration means the subtitler will have to take more work in order to make their work economically viable, and that means that they will have to work more in a shorter period of time. Deadlines are becoming shorter not only because turnover is

shorter for subtitling companies or broadcasters than it used to be in the age of VHS tapes and analogue television, but also because subtitlers work with larger volumes of work, which means that each particular subtitling task needs to be completed in less time than before. Deadlines may thus be directly connected to the quality of subtitles, if the subtitler, pressured by worsening economic circumstances, is inclined to take so much work that they are unable to produce subtitles of a quality they would have delivered had they had reasonable time to complete them. Yet again, it must be noted that this issue is not pertinent solely to subtitlers. As our world is getting more connected, faster, automated, and customer-oriented, many professionals are under pressure to work with barely manageable deadlines, or to work more to make a living, especially nowadays when the so called gig economy[5] employs many people. The way subtitlers make a living and how much they earn is important, as discussed in the following section.

3.2.2 *Remuneration*

AVT conferences frequently end with lively discussions about subtitling fees, since most subtitlers are freelancers, and working conditions in general. Extrinsic circumstances such as remuneration, which may motivate or de-motivate the subtitler, depending on a situation, may also influence the time a subtitler has at their disposal for completing a certain task. A deadline of a month for the subtitling of a film may not in reality be that to a subtitler who has another ten or more films to be completed before that particular film. As it has already been pointed out that poor, insufficient remuneration may mean that subtitlers must take more and more work, and that may have a direct influence on the quality of work and deadlines (see 2.2.1). This is where intrinsic and extrinsic circumstances intertwine and influence one another.

3.1.3 *What subtitlers know about their audience*

Nord's "translation briefs" (1997:59), an important aspect of translator's work from the functionalist perspective, are "extremely rare in real-life subtitling" (Pedersen 2011:115). Pedersen explains:

> [u]nfortunately, translation briefs are extremely rare in real-life subtitling, and even rarer for an analyst of subtitling to acquire. This means that the answers to the questions arising from the Subtitling Situation often have to be sought elsewhere: from subtitlers, guidelines, subtitling companies, broadcasters, the Internet and even TV guides. Nevertheless, it is crucial to take Subtitling Situation into consideration, because in very many cases, pivotal explanations about subtitling behaviour lie here (115-116).

[5] The term gig economy is in 2017, especially in the UK, used to stress problems that low unmployment may hide. As it is not solely how many people are employed, but also what sort of contracts they have and in what conditions they work. Job certainty is something that has come to the fore. Companies such as Uber and Deliveroo hire workers as freelancers who work with no holiday or sick pay, and are paid only for the hours they clock. It should be noted that subtitlers have been working in gig economy for a long time, and it is only now, when this employment phenomenon has included more professions, those that are more obvious to the members of the public, that this problem has been tackled by the media and politicians.

It should be added that translators have a higher chance of knowing who is going to use their translations than subtitlers do. For instance, a translated legal document may be used by courts or companies, a financial report will be used by a company that ordered it, etc. On the other hand, subtitlers are rarely given a description of their target audience, and may only suppose who might watch the programme they are working on. The broadcaster may also not know much about the potential audience, or may only assume who do audience are. A new TV series, especially the one that has just been premiered, may leave the subtitler in the dark regarding the target audience. If a television series is in question, subtitlers realize only later who a typical viewer of the television series is, if they become aware of it at all. Even if the subtitler may presume who the viewer will be, it is solely a presumption, and different subtitlers may presume different things about the same audiovisual material. The issue of knowing more about the audience will be discussed later in the text.

3.2.4 *Broadcaster restrictions*

Broadcasters may impose restrictions on subtitlers, regarding the language they may use, for various reasons. One of the reasons may be regulator's decisions and rules. The other may be too many viewers' complaints, or broadcaster language policy. In some instances, the watershed hour, after which a certain type of programming is allowed, is 9 PM, in others it is 10 PM. This may also be reflected in the type of language that is allowed after the watershed hour. In broadcasters with multiple channels, on some of the channels the language policy may be more relaxed. Parental guidance is also recommended because of strong language, and that strong language may also be used in subtitles. Broadcasters are also sensitive to viewers' complaints, and these complaints are at times connected to subtitles. Subtitlers must follow broadcasters' rules and these rules can rarely be relaxed or changed.

3.2.5 *The conditions of work*

Every job can be affected by conditions in which it is performed. Some subtitlers can't work if they are exposed to too much noise, for instance from a noisy neighbour or if they are exposed to too much street noise. Subtitlers are at times required to work in-house, which may be a problem for some who may be more used to working at home. Some jobs are hard to perform if is too hot or too cold. These reasons may seem unusual or mundane, but they affect the quality of the final product.

4. The audiovisual material: Skins

Skins is a British adolescent drama set in Bristol. It contains conversational dialogues that explore topics such as mental illness, adolescent sexuality, substance abuse, bullying and death. If *Skins* could be compared to literature, they could be compared to naturalism that used detailed realism to depict reality, usually hardships of everyday life. In a way, this

television series could be compared to Émile Zola's novel *Germinal* from 1885, even though this novel is set in another time and it depicts the misery of the life of miners. The scenes are quite dark, characters are not portrayed as happy teenagers as they would be in an American TV-series of this type[6], but as young people caught up in dealing with difficulties of life. Some of the topics are quite heavy, such as depression for instance, and contemplation of suicide.

The series was created between 2007 and 2013, containing 61 episode spread over seven seasons. The cast of the series changed after a couple of seasons, with only a few characters appearing in four seasons. The character of Effy, played by Kaya Scodelario, appears in 26 episodes (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0840196/, last visited 2th of October 2016), including the last episode. The first two seasons are particularly abundant with difficult topics such as mental illness and substance abuse, with seasons three to six equally fraught with such topics, but with perhaps more humour. The last season, season seven, contains only six episodes, which are in actual fact three films divided into two episodes each. The last episode of the series is particularly difficult as it depicts, among other themes, dying of cancer of one of the young characters.

This television series is provocative in visual terms, but perhaps even more so in terms of language. Dialogues are not only very colloquial, with at times rather quick dialogue exchanges, but they are full of expletives and other colloquial expressions, that pose challenges for subtitlers. Season one of a similar TV series, some *Skins* fans even consider a sequel of *Skins*, has recently be released by Netflix, called *Sex Education*.

As it has already been mentioned, *Skins* has been selected for analysis because I have subtitled all 61 episodes of *Skins* into Croatian for the HRT, Croatian Radio and Television, the Croatian public broadcaster, which means that I am fully acquainted with the circumstances under which subtitles were created. The series was translated as *Nabrijani*. From the situational point of view described in section 2 of this article, the series may be divided into two parts, given the fact that the 1st and 2nd seasons were translated shortly after their release in the United Kingdom, while seasons 3 to 7 were translated for a different channel, in late 2013, which means six to seven years later. Another important aspect is a difference in what Vermeer called "Skopos" (1978: 223), or the "*purpose, goal, aim*" (Snell-Hornby 2006: 54), which means "the purpose or function of the translation in the target culture, as specified by the client (in a translation brief) or the envisaged user-expectations" (*ibid.*) that will be explained. Regarding subtitler's situation, there was a difference in pace at which season 1 and 2 were subtitled if compared to seasons 3-7.

4.1 *Seasons 1 and 2*

Seasons 1 and 2 were subtitled at the pace of one episode a week. The *brief* said that the series was going to be broadcast at HRT 2, a channel devoted to popular foreign television series, documentaries, sports, and music. The channel may be to an extent compared to BBC 2. The series was broadcast after 10 pm, once a week, in many cases around midnight. Regarding language policy, the HRT policy at the time was to downplay expletives as much as possible, especially if a programme was broadcast before 10 pm. If a subtitler considered that their translation should not downplay

[6] American version of this TV series was abandoned after only one season.

expletives, they should have asked for permission, by contacting the Head of Subtitling at HRT, who would then consult editors in charge of the TV series. Such permission could hardly be granted if the programme was broadcast before 10 pm, but if it was broadcast later, such permission would usually be given, as was the case with *Skins.*

4.2 *Seasons 3 to 7*

These seasons were broadcast on HRT 3, a channel introduced by the HRT in September 2012. This channel is focused on arts, documentaries, high-quality films and television series, as well as reruns of successful films and TV series previously broadcast at HRT 1 and HRT 2. HRT 3 decided to broadcast *Skins* four times a week, also around midnight, by first broadcasting re-runs of seasons 1 and 2 and then immediately premiering seasons 3 to 7 in a row. The subtitler's situation was different firstly by the amount of work that had to be completed in a short time. This task involved delivering subtitles for at least five episodes a week. When subtitlers are on such a busy schedule, they must produce enough "stock" in case unexpected circumstances prevent them from working for a certain period. Furthermore, the HRT wanted to have at least a week of episodes ready in advance, which added more pressure regarding meeting deadlines.

4.3 *The comparison of subtitler's situation*

All subtitles for this television series were produced with a dialogue list at hand and without a template, which means that the subtitler had to translate and spot or time-code all episodes. That means that, technically speaking, subtitles for all episodes of *Skins* were produced in the same way, without templates[7].

Comparing the subtitling of seasons 1 and 2 to seasons 3 to 7, even though the same television series is in question, there were significant differences regarding the circumstances in which subtitles where created. HRT 2 is what one may call a mainstream channel, which made it difficult for the subtitler to determine what sort of a television viewer is going to watch the series. In such situations one may only assume that for instance young audience is going to watch the series, but it is indeed difficult to picture a typical viewer. Even though permission was granted to use expletives in translation, being in the dark about the typical viewer and given the fact that expletives are normally not used in writing, as explained in this article in section 1, self-censorship may easily be applied, as a sort of a safety net against criticism. The choice of words may be more standard, conservative or bland, in many cases unintentionally. That is not the only reason though. When a subtitler is faced with a new material, especially with a relatively new television series, it is difficult in the beginning to get "the feeling" for the TV series and choose the right style, at least in the first couple of episodes. Subtitlers may, also unintentionally, be more neutral in their choice of words in the beginning, until they develop the linguistic styles of characters.

Another important difference was the brief for seasons 3-7 at HRT3 that didn't include any specific language requirements, regarding the usage of expletives or any other. Series 3-7 were broadcast around midnight, and very often after midnight, and it was obvious

[7] For more on templates see Nikolić 2015.

that HRT 3 had worse ratings than mainstream HRT 2, although the audience could have been more demanding. Furthermore, by the time seasons 3-7 were broadcast, the series had a devoted group of fans, judging by online discussions about the series, and these were mostly, but not exclusively, younger people.
As one can see, there was no concrete information about the viewers for any of these seasons that the subtitler could have used in order to better his decision-making process, these were all *assumptions*, which make it difficult for the translator, in this case a subtitler, to fulfil what Chesterman calls "the communication norm" (1997: 69) in translation. Chesterman says that "a translator should act in such a way as to optimize communication, as required by the situation, between all the parties involved" *(ibid.)* The optimisation of communication is something subtitlers are preoccupied with, but they are also keen to convey the style, idiolect and sociolect of the original, and tailor it to the target audience. However, during the subtitling of seasons 3-7, solely browsing the internet and reading comments about *Skins* posted by their viewers in Croatia, enabled the subtitler to get some idea about the viewers of this TV series. The viewers were mostly young adults, and the viewership was rather small. Only this information enabled better tailoring of the language used in subtitles, which meant more slang was used, and expletives were used freely, the language of subtitles was less bland.

4.4 The analysis of the corpus

For the analysis of the language of subtitlers, episodes 1 of all seven seasons of *Skins* were selected for comparison. The corpus therefore consisted of subtitles of seven episodes of *Skins.* Subtitles were made in the software called PNS. Videos with subtitled episodes were also made available, courtesy of Croatian Radio and Television (HRT), and subtitles were also printed out. The corpus consisted of a body of 2759 subtitles. That means that the average number of subtitles per episode was 462 and that the series consists of roughly 28.200 subtitles in total. Around 11.5 % of all Croatian subtitles of *Skins* were analysed, which is taken as a representative sample. Given the size of the sample, we can say that the confidence level is 95% and the confidence interval, or margin of error, is 1.6.[8]

The focus of the analysis was the treatment of expletives, which are quite prevalent throughout this TV series, more specifically, the treatment of the words *fuck*. This expletive has been taken for analysis since it is used in the ST without any censorship, and yet it is one of those lexemes that will have to be toned down or omitted in subtitling if the circumstances require so, as explained in section 3 of this article. The number of occurrences of the expletive *fuck* were counted manually, by using the printout of subtitles and watching the respective subtitled episode. As it has already been explained, seasons 1 and 2 of *Skins* were subtitled in different circumstances and broadcast on a different channel if compared to seasons 3-7. Most subtitled episodes of *Skins* contained roughly 460 subtitles.

[8] Online sample size calculator was used: https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm (Last access: 12th August 2017).

These are two examples from episode 1 season 1.

Example 1
[This is a telephone conversation. These are the words of one of the teenage characters.]

ORIGINAL
I've seen a few nipples, and
believe me, yours are fucking hilarious.

TRANSLATION
Vidio sam dosta bradavica,
a tvoje su da rikneš od smijeha.

BACK-TRANSLATION
I've see a few nipples, and
yours are drop-dead (so) funny.

Example 2
[The exchange is between a father and his son. The son is in the bathroom, and the father is trying to get ready for work. It is early morning. The expletives come from the father.]

ORIGINAL
How long are you going to be in there?
-Not for long now. –Oh, fucking, bollocking, fuck twat.

TRANSLATION
Koliko ćeš biti unutra?
-Neću dugo. –Seronjo balavi.

BACK-TRANSLATION
How long are you going to be in there?
-Not for long now. –Little shithead!

The word *fuck* (or *fucking*) appears 30 times in the ep. 1 / season 1, and 28 times in ep. 1, season 2 in the ST. In all instances in the TT, the word *fuck*, or *fucking*, was either neutralised or omitted, or at best the ST was "downgraded", given that the expletive *fuck* could not have been translated literally as it was, at least at the time, considered to be too harsh and unacceptable for public television. The practice of using special characters instead of words while translating expletives was also not accepted, and these were the only three possible translation techniques available: omission, neutralisation or downgrading.

As it has already been said, subtitles for seasons 3-7 were created under different circumstances than subtitles for seasons 1-2. Subtitles for seasons 3-7 were created for a different channel, with slightly more relaxed rules regarding the treatment of expletives. In episode 1 of the third season, the word *fuck* is used 37 times. In 30 of these instances, which means in 81 percent of the cases, the word was translated with its direct Croatian equivalent: *jebati* (Eng. *to fuck*) and its derivations, such *fucking* in its adjectival function.

This is an example from ep 1., season 3.

Example 3
[The speaker is one of male teenage characters.]

ORIGINAL

I was saving this for
lunch, but what the fuck... Cheers.

TRANSLATION
Ovo sam čuvao za
ručak, al jebeš ga. Živjeli!

BACK-TRANSLATION

I was saving this for lunch,
but what the fuck. Cheers!

The same subtitling technique was established in the 1st episodes of seasons 4-7: the expletive *fuck* was translated in between 78 and 85 percent of the cases. Just mere watching of all these seven subtitled episodes of *Skins*, without counting expletives and other slang expressions, shows that expletives and slang, features of the spoken language, were treated much more freely in seasons 3-7, as opposed to seasons 1-2 where the language was a lot more neutralized, standardized and expletives were frequently omitted.

It is supposed that the analysis of the Croatian subtitles of all episodes, juxtaposing seasons 1-2 and seasons 3-4, would show the same result: the subtitler opted for a more subdued, standardised language when subtitling seasons 1-2.

5 The conclusion and suggestions for further research

Our hypothesis is that the language of subtitles is going to change depending on the circumstances in which the subtitles have been created. The lexical analysis of the translation of just one word, the expletive *fuck*, has shown that this is the case. A significant part of this article was also devoted to explaining the circumstances under which subtitlers work and factors which may influence the way the language of subtitles is. It has been argued that if subtitlers work under strict deadlines, the quality of subtitles may suffer. Qualitative analysis of the translations that are the subject of this article has not been conducted. In order for that to take place, the subtitler would have to keep a log of circumstances under which subtitles for each episode were created, against the extrinsic and intrinsic circumstances defined in this article. Such an experiment would be possible and it would shed more light on how all the various circumstances listed in chapter 3 influence the way the language of subtitles is. The analysis presented in this article has shown that only one extrinsic circumstance, and the restrictions imposed by the broadcaster, mean that the treatment of language changes, comparing seasons 1-2 to

season 3-7 as discussed above. However, it remains unclear how much self-censorship has influenced the translator's decision making process while dealing with the subtitling of expletives.

Further analysis would indeed show how factors such as (too) short deadlines, poor remuneration conditions, interest for the programme on the part of the subtitler and others influence the language of subtitles. This analysis has only given a snapshot into how broadcaster restrictions may influence the translational treatment of solely one expletive, but may be indicative of possible issues subtitles are faced with when broadcaster restrictions are imposed on them.

Why is the study of the language of subtitles beneficial for viewers, the academic community, subtitlers and broadcaster? Our world is becoming more audiovisual and subtitles, intralingual and interlingual, have permeated not just film and broadcast television, but also video-on-demand services and streaming media. The exposure of viewers to subtitles is thus growing worldwide. It is important that viewers are exposed to quality, readable subtitles, with good translations, since subtitles may even be used for educational purposes, either for language learning or solving poor literacy problems in countries such as India (cf. Kothari 2008 and 2010)**.** It is also important to shed more light on how the language of subtitles comes about, depending on the circumstances, in order to provide evidence to broadcasters and subtitlers on how the language of subtitles is created and how it affects viewers. The effect it has on viewers can only be tested by large-scale experimental research that is yet in its infancy in audiovisual translation studies, but is gaining more ground.

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Biographical Note

Dr Kristijan Nikolić took a university degree in English Language and Literature in the English Department of the Faculty of Humanities, Zagreb University in 1999. Between 2000 and 2009 he worked as a Lecturer in the same Department and since 2009 he has been working as a Senior Lecturer. In 2013 he was also appointed Research Associate in the English Department. He teaches various courses, including Cultures of the United Kingdom and the United States, Translation Workshop, and courses devoted to audiovisual translation, which is his main research and professional interest. Kristijan Nikolić has also been working as a freelance subtitler since 1998, mostly for Croatian Radio and Television (HRT), the Croatian public broadcaster, and SDI Media. Under the supervision of Professor Mary Snell-Hornby, in 2012 he defended his doctoral thesis entitled The Perception of Culture through Subtitles at the Centre for Translation Studies of the University of Vienna.

He was a Visiting Lecturer at the Centre for Translation Studies (CenTraS), University College London , in the academic year 2015/16 and in August 2016 he was appointed Honorary Research Associate at CenTraS. From 2017 he has been teaching Translation Technology, Audiovisual Translation and Localisation at Middlesex University, London.

Kristijan's publications are mainly focused on interlingual subtitling. In 2018 he published an edited volume Fast Forwarding with Audiovisual Translation with Jorge

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Kristijan Nikolić has been the member of the Executive Board of ESIST, European Association for Studies in Screen Translation, since 2008, and served as the founding president of the Croatian Association of Audiovisual Translators, DHAP between 2012 and 2017.