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LINGUISTIC FEATURES AND AUDIOVISUAL ASPECTS OF TRANSLATING THE TV SERIES “STRANGER THINGS”

Summary. This article deals with the linguistic and audiovisual challenges involved in translating the American science fiction TV series “Stranger Things”, with particular attention to its rich interweaving of youth slang, idiomatic expressions, humor, cultural allusions, and references specific to the 1980s. The purpose is to identify key translation issues and to analyze how audiovisual context influences the choice of translation strategies in both subtitled and dubbed versions.

The study is based on a comparative analysis of selected episodes from “Stranger Things”, examining the original English-language dialogues alongside their Ukrainian translations in dubbing and subtitling. Qualitative methods are applied, including contextual and pragmatic analysis of translation choices, with special attention to the preservation of meaning, stylistic register, and cultural relevance. The research also draws on theoretical frameworks in audiovisual translation (AVT), including domestication and foreignization strategies, and considers the technical constraints imposed by each mode of translation. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated approach to both linguistic and audiovisual dimensions of translation within a single case study, addressing how specific linguistic features – such as youth sociolects and culturally bound references – are adapted or transformed through different modes of AVT. The article also highlights underexplored tensions between fidelity to source content and the functional demands of audiovisual media, particularly in maintaining authenticity and cultural resonance for Ukrainian-speaking audiences.

The analysis reveals that the translation of “Stranger Things” requires not only linguistic competence but also a deep understanding of audiovisual semiotics and cultural intertextuality. Dubbing tends to favor domestication strategies for viewer comprehension, while subtitling often preserves more of the original cultural and linguistic content due to spatial and temporal constraints. The study underscores the importance of balanced translation strategies that respect both the source text's identity and the expectations of the target audience, particularly in works with dense cultural layering like *Stranger Things*.

Key words: TV series translation, audiovisual translation, slang, cultural references, allusions, dubbing, subtitles, localization.

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ЛІНГВАЛЬНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ТА АУДІОВІЗУАЛЬНІ АСПЕКТИ ПЕРЕКЛАДУ ТЕЛЕСЕРІАЛУ «STRANGER THINGS»

Анотація. У статті досліджено лінгвальні особливості та аудіовізуальні аспекти перекладу американського телесеріалу “Stranger Things” з акцентом на перекладацьких труднощах, які виникають при трансляції молодіжного сленгу, ідіом, жартів, міжтекстових відсилань і маркерів культури 1980-х років. Метою є виявлення ключових перекладацьких проблем та аналіз впливу аудіовізуального контексту на вибір перекладацьких стратегій у субтитрованих і дубльованих версіях.

Дослідження ґрунтується на порівняльному аналізі обраних епізодів серіалу «Stranger Things». У ньому зіставлено оригінальні англійські діалоги з їх українськими версіями в дубляжі та субтитрах. Застосовано якісні методи аналізу, зокрема контекстуальний та прагматичний аналіз перекладацьких рішень з урахуванням збереження змісту, стилістичної відповідності та культурної релевантності. Теоретичне підґрунтя становлять підходи аудіовізуального перекладу, зокрема теорії доместикації та форенізації, а також враховано технічні обмеження кожного з видів перекладу. Новизна дослідження полягає в комплексному підході до аналізу лінгвістичних і аудіовізуальних аспектів перекладу на основі єдиного кейсу, що дає можливість висвітлити, як конкретні мовні елементи – зокрема молодіжні соціолекти й культурно марковані реалії – адаптуються в межах різних форматів аудіовізуального перекладу. Особливу увагу приділено молододослідженій проблематиці поєднання точності передання змісту з функціональними вимогами медіапродукту.

Аналіз демонструє, що переклад серіалу “Stranger Things” вимагає не лише високого рівня мовної компетенції, а й глибокого розуміння аудіовізуальної семіотики та міжкультурної інтертекстуальності. Дубляж здебільшого орієнтується на доместикаційні стратегії задля полегшення сприйняття, тоді як субтитри зберігають більше оригінального змісту, стикаючись при цьому з технічними обмеженнями. У статті підкреслено важливість збалансованого підходу до перекладу, який враховує як ідентичність джерельного тексту, так і очікування цільової аудиторії, особливо в контексті культурно насичених медіапродуктів.

Ключові слова: переклад телесеріалу, аудіовізуальний переклад, сленг, культурні алюзії, локалізація, дубляж, субтитри.

Problem Statement. In the contemporary media landscape, audiovisual culture plays an influential role in shaping linguistic consciousness, particularly among younger audiences. Television series, as a dominant form of mass entertainment, have evolved into powerful vehicles for

transmitting cultural codes, linguistic innovations, and social norms. As such, the issue of accurate and culturally sensitive translation of these media products is of growing importance. However, the translation of television series – especially culturally rich and stylistically complex ones

such as “Stranger Things” – presents numerous linguistic and audiovisual challenges. These include the rendering of youth slang, idioms, intertextual allusions, and 1980s-specific cultural references within the constraints of dubbing and subtitling. The complexity of these challenges underscores the relevance and urgency of scholarly investigation into effective translation strategies for audiovisual content.

The analysis of recent research and publications. The field of audiovisual translation has been the focus of active scholarly interest within contemporary translation studies. Researchers such as D. Chesterman (2016), A. Pedersen (2011), and G. Gottlieb (2017), along with Ukrainian scholars including I. Korunets (2003), M. Dorofieieva (2022), and others, have made significant contributions to understanding the challenges of translating slang, culturally marked realia, humor, and allusions. Much attention has been devoted to the processes of localization and the adaptation of culture-specific content for target audiences (Nettelbeck 2024; Koch 2017).

However, the influence of the audiovisual context on translation remains insufficiently explored, particularly in cases where verbal constructions are closely intertwined with visual and audio elements. This gap is especially evident in the translation of media products that exhibit distinctive stylistic and genre-specific characteristics. One such example is “Stranger Things” – a television series that blends science fiction, teen drama, supernatural motifs, and retro aesthetics. The complex interplay of linguistic innovation and multimodal storytelling in such content highlights the need for more detailed analysis of the linguistic features and contextual dependencies within audiovisual translation.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the linguistic characteristics of the television series “Stranger Things” and examine the key challenges associated with its translation into Ukrainian, particularly in the context of audiovisual translation practices. To achieve this purpose, the study sets out to: identify and classify the main linguistic features present in the original English-language dialogues of “Stranger Things”, including youth slang, idiomatic expressions, humor, and allusions; analyze the cultural references specific to the 1980s and

their functions within the series; examine the strategies used in translating these elements into Ukrainian, with a focus on dubbing and subtitling; assess how the audiovisual context – including visual cues, soundtrack, and editing – influences translation decisions; highlight the implications of these translation choices for Ukrainian viewers’ comprehension and cultural perception.

Presentation of the material. “Stranger Things”, a globally acclaimed series created by the Duffer Brothers for Netflix, premiered in 2016 and quickly became a cultural phenomenon. Set in the fictional town of Hawkins, Indiana, during the 1980s, the plot follows a group of adolescents as they confront paranormal phenomena and government conspiracies. The series masterfully combines genres such as science fiction, horror, thriller, and teen drama, while drawing heavily on retro aesthetics and American pop culture of the 1980s – from iconic films and music to video games and fashion.

One of the defining features of the series is the stylistic diversity of its dialogues. The characters’ speech reflects a broad spectrum of linguistic registers: from children’s and teenagers’ informal talk to official and military discourse. Slang, idioms, intertextual references, and culturally marked vocabulary are widely used, contributing to the authenticity and immersive quality of the narrative. These elements, however, pose considerable challenges for translators working into Ukrainian. Of particular note is the language used by the younger characters, which is rich in jargon, humor, pop culture allusions, and taboo expressions. Many of these items lack direct equivalents in Ukrainian and require creative and contextually appropriate translation strategies. This study investigates how such linguistic phenomena are rendered in Ukrainian dubbing and subtitling, taking into account both linguistic fidelity and the constraints and affordances of the audiovisual medium.

1. Linguistic Features of “Stranger Things”. The lexical dimension of translating TV series often involves dealing with slang, professional jargon, dialects, and culturally specific elements. Contemporary series, including Stranger Things, are characterized by naturalistic dialogue saturated with youth slang, idiomatic expressions, and fixed phrases that rarely lend themselves to literal translation (Дорофеева 2022). Idioms, in

particular, frequently require adaptation, as direct translations may either lose meaning or become incomprehensible to the target audience. Even more complex are cultural allusions, wordplay, and humor – all of which are closely linked to the source language and culture and often lack exact equivalents (Chesterman 2016).

Grammatical differences between English and Ukrainian also affect the translation process. English tends to use shorter and more concise sentences, while Ukrainian often requires longer constructions to convey the same message (Корунець 2003, с. 88–89). This is especially critical in subtitling, where space is limited and conciseness is essential [Pedersen 2017]. Structures such as gerunds or passive voice, common in English, may lack direct Ukrainian counterparts, requiring syntactic transformation to preserve both meaning and fluency (Nettelbeck 2024).

The language of “Stranger Things” is rich in 1980s-specific slang, jargon, and cultural references. For instance, the expression *totally rad*, denoting strong excitement or admiration, is typically rendered in Ukrainian dubbing as *це круто* or *офігенний*. While functionally accurate, these versions lose the retro flavor, flattening the temporal-cultural nuance.

Dustin’s line *This is so bogus!*, expressing frustration, is translated as *Ну і маячня!*. Although emotionally equivalent, the Ukrainian version omits the 1980s youth-specific connotation of *bogus*, which was stylistically marked in American teen slang of that era.

Another example is *You are such a nerd!*, said with light irony. Its Ukrainian equivalent *Та ти взагалі заучка!* conveys the general meaning but fails to capture the cultural nuance of *nerd* as a marginalized yet intelligent figure in American school culture of the 1980s.

The phrase *She’s a total spaz*, used by children to describe someone clumsy or hyperactive, is usually adapted as *вона якась дика* or *зовсім божевільна*. However, *spaz* carried a specific, often mocking tone within the school context of the 80s – a connotation lost in translation.

Expressions like *No duh!* meaning sarcastic agreement, are translated as *Та ясно ж!* or *І так зрозуміло!*, which convey the meaning but dilute the teen-specific passive-aggressive tone used by characters like Max or Dustin.

The term *douchebag*, used for unpleasant or arrogant characters, is typically rendered as *придурок* or *тупак*, which soften the insult and diminish its original impact.

A more successful example of localized slang appears in Argyle’s humorous warning: *Hold onto your butts, brochachos!* Translated as *Тримайтеся за дупи, брателику!*, this version preserves the comic tone, youth slang, and stylistic eccentricity of the original. Similarly, *Let’s bounce* – 1980s slang for *let’s go* – is rendered as *зваливаймо* or *час валити*, depending on the tone and context. Although these variants convey the idea, the playfulness of the original may not always be fully retained.

In sum, the translation of retro slang presents a significant challenge in audiovisual localization. It requires not only lexical precision but also the recreation of the cultural atmosphere of a specific historical period. Without this balance, the translated version risks losing the authenticity and stylistic identity that define the source text.

2. Challenges of Translating Profanities, Humor and Allusions. One of the most complex aspects of translating “Stranger Things” is the transfer of humor, idioms, taboo expressions, and culturally embedded allusions. The show’s dialogue frequently includes emotionally charged exclamations and colloquialisms, often relying on youth slang, sarcasm, black humor, or pop-cultural references – all of which require careful adaptation rather than direct translation. A particular challenge lies in rendering taboo language. Words like *shit*, *holy shit*, or *son of a bitch*, while common in English dialogue, are rarely directly transferable into Ukrainian dubbing, especially in content intended for family or teenage audiences. For instance: *Oh, shit!* becomes *Ом халена!*, *Канець!*, or *Ой лишенько!*, depending on tone – all milder and more culturally acceptable alternatives. *Holy shit!*, uttered in moments of shock, is adapted as *Оце вже серйозно!* or *Та ну!*, preserving emotion while avoiding profanity. *Son of a bitch!* is rendered as *Ом дідько!* or *Чорт забирай!*, maintaining dramatic weight without literal vulgarity. *We’re in deep shit!* becomes *Ми влипли!* or *У нас великі проблеми*, which reflects meaning and urgency.

Humor, sarcasm, and idiomatic expressions often require even more nuanced solutions. For

example: *I'm screwed.* → *Мені заплик, Все пропало* – expressive, idiomatic equivalents. *Yeah, right!*, used sarcastically, cannot be translated literally as *Так, звичайно*. Instead, localized versions like *Ага, зараз!* or *Та звичайно, як же!* convey the intended irony. Black humor, such as *He's probably dead already*, is softened to *Та він, мабуть, десь застряг* to avoid tonal dissonance while retaining subtle irony.

Cultural allusions and wordplay are particularly resistant to literal translation: The pun *You can't spell America without Erica*, based on a name-letter overlap, has no direct analogue in Ukrainian. Compensation strategies include adapted lines like *Америка без мене – не Америка!*, preserving tone and character. Jokes relying on euphemism, such as Dustin's line *He and Jonathan like to smoke smelly plants*, translated as *нюхають якісь там травички*, maintains both ambiguity and humor in a culturally acceptable form.

Overall, the successful translation of humor and allusions in *Stranger Things* depends on balancing expressiveness, cultural norms, and genre expectations. Translators often resort to functional equivalents, compensation techniques, or context-based shifts to preserve both meaning and emotional resonance. This process highlights the interpreter's dual role as both linguistic mediator and cultural adapter in audiovisual localization.

3. Audiovisual Translation Barriers.

Audiovisual translation, particularly dubbing and subtitling, involves not only linguistic transformation but also adaptation to the technical and stylistic conventions of the media product. In dubbing, lip synchronization is paramount: the translated dialogue must align with the actors' mouth movements and match the duration of the original utterance. This often compels translators to prioritize naturalness, rhythm, and stylistic coherence over literal accuracy.

For instance, the phrase *Mike, shut up!* is rendered literally in subtitles as *Майк, замовкни!*, while the dubbed version softens the tone to *Майк, зоді!*, better reflecting the scene's intonation. Similarly, the line *She's our friend, and she's crazy!* is adapted in dubbing as *Просто трохи дивна!*, which preserves the humorous tone while softening the bluntness of the original.

The phrase *Dustin, are you there? Over.* is translated in subtitles as *Дастине, ти тут?*

Прийом., whereas the dubbed version uses *Ти на зв'язку?*, which sounds more natural in Ukrainian. The original insult *You're such a mouth-breather!* translates awkwardly when literal (*Ти такий, хто дихає ротом!*), prompting the dubbed version *Ти такий тупак!* – a more expressive and culturally appropriate equivalent for the target audience.

Somerecurring lines acquire deeper meaning through translation. For example, *Friends don't lie* is occasionally rendered in dubbing as *Справжні друзі не брешуть*, thus reinforcing its moral undertone. Dustin's metaphorical phrase *I am on a curiosity voyage...* is condensed to *Я шукаю істину...* – a simplification that reduces poetic nuance but enhances clarity.

Stylistic differences are also evident. The line *She's not a robot, Hopper.* is dubbed as *Вона ж не машина, Гоннер.*, reflecting more colloquial speech. Brief utterances like *What?* may be adapted as *А?* or *Що таке?*, depending on articulation length and context.

Subtitling, in contrast, emphasizes brevity and visual clarity. Constraints on character count per line force translators to condense dialogue while preserving semantic and emotional impact. For example, extended lines may be reduced to one or two words to avoid overburdening the viewer. Modern technologies, including machine translation and artificial intelligence, are increasingly utilized in localization workflows. While effective in automating routine tasks, these tools fall short in conveying emotional depth, irony, and cultural nuances – critical elements in translating television series. Therefore, the role of the professional translator remains essential to maintain the audiovisual product's integrity and emotional authenticity for foreign-language audiences.

Conclusions. The TV series “*Stranger Things*” presents a complex interplay of linguistic density, cultural multilayeredness, and audiovisual specificity, making its translation a multifaceted challenge. The linguistic features of the series – including youth slang, neologisms, idioms, allusions, and culturally marked references from the 1980s – require not only lexical accuracy but also contextual sensitivity. The audiovisual format introduces specific constraints such as lip-syncing in dubbing, subtitling limitations, and alignment with voice intonation, rhythm, and visual cues. In this context, the translator

assumes the role of a cultural mediator rather than a mere language converter. Effective audiovisual translation involves striking a delicate balance between semantic precision, stylistic and cultural equivalence, and technical constraints dictated by the mode of screen translation. Maintaining the original emotional tone, humor, and intertextual references is crucial to preserving the narrative integrity and viewer engagement.

The translation of “Stranger Things” into Ukrainian illustrates the need for nuanced solutions that go beyond word-for-word rendering. Decisions regarding the adaptation of slang, taboo language, humor, and cultural allusions

must be guided by both linguistic competence and cultural intuition, ensuring the translated version resonates with the target audience while remaining faithful to the source material.

Prospects for further research include comparative analysis of “Stranger Things” translations into other languages, as well as empirical studies on audience reception and the perception of linguistic and cultural elements in localized versions. Such studies would contribute to a deeper understanding of audiovisual translation strategies and their impact on intercultural communication in the era of global media.

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