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CONTEXTUAL REFORMULATION OF MOVIE TITLES

SUMMARY: This paper is the result of extensive research and analysis of collected movie titles from the period between 2011 and 2020 in an effort to record and present highly creative and striking movie title translations created through some degree of contextually reconstructing the original title. Why, for example, was the movie *The Hundred-Foot Journey* translated as *Indijski začín na francuski način*, or *The Lincoln Lawyer* as *Advokat na točkovima*? In this regard, the paper shows contextual reformulation as a translation method recognized as a result of translation skill and linguistic creativity. The aim of this paper is to show through numerous illustrative examples the importance and effect of applying this translation method which, although requiring a little more time, devising, a little more freedom and is certainly riskier, gives impressive results in situations when it is adequately applied.

KEYWORDS: *feature films, title, contextual reformulation, translation method, context*

1. Introduction

Movie titles such as *Gayby* or *Stuber* inevitably present challenges for translators and often lead to a dilemma whether to leave them in their original form or to creatively design a Serbian version of the title

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after carefully observing the plot of the movie. Consequently, the title of the movie *Paklene ulice* (literally *Streets of Hell*) was creatively presented as an alternative to the direct translation of *Fast and Furious*. These are just some of the many examples of movie titles, as research subjects, that will be presented in this paper when it comes to their translation using a method that is anything but a form of direct translation. Just as any creative work, the representatives of the seventh art largely owe their recognition to the given title, primarily on the domestic market, which should then be translated into other languages so that the story in question arouses equal interest and gains the attention of the target audience. This paper represents research, the aim of which is to show that linguistic creativity in the translation of movie titles still exists at a solid level when it comes to official translation of movie titles commercially available to the domestic audience. This certainly goes in favor of better pleasing the audience, because creatively translated titles, especially when they are unmistakably linked to the plot of the movie, have a direct impact on the education of people and facilitate the bridging and understanding of cultural differences.

2. Research

The research segment which constitutes the base of this paper consists of 1015 movie titles which were produced between 2011 and 2020, classified according to the degree of existence or absence of contextual reformulation – a method used for translating them into the Serbian language. The titles were collected from official websites of local cinemas (*Cineplexx*, *CineStar*) and their movie repertoire for the period specified and according to certain criteria, then from the catalogs of distribution companies (*Tuckwood Cineplex*, *First Production*, *Pro Vision*, *Taramount*, *MegaCom Film*), as well as from websites like *IMDb* and *MojTV*. Due to the large number of units in the sample, only some of the representative examples will be mentioned in the paper.

1.1. Movie Selection Criteria

Several criteria were taken into account when selecting movie titles for the research part. These are primarily popular titles that have an English title, and in which English is the language entirely or for the most part used to convey the plot of the movie.

Furthermore, the selected movies were commercially available or officially shown at cinemas, thus having their titles officially translated into Serbian. Titles are also limited to the so-called *A production* (feature films), therefore avoiding B-rated movie category, as well as movies not officially distributed in the Serbian language.

The next criterion refers to the time period within which the collected movie titles were produced, which is the period from 2011 to 2020. Indicating this is important as the actual number of movies produced per calendar year is actually much higher; however, not all of those titles were commercially available to viewers.

The selection of movie titles is also restricted to the concept and genre. Only feature films with an invented story and live actors were considered. Documentaries and animated movies are not part of the corpus.

1.2. Movie Titles Research and Classification Methodology

Movie titles included in this corpus are sorted by the method of classification according to the absence or presence of contextual reformulation, a method of translating their original titles from English into Serbian. Movie titles which have been left in their original form are mostly titles composed of proper nouns or which have been translated literally and, as such, have not been reconstructed, so they are classified as direct translations. For the purpose of classification method, an analysis method was first used in order to allocate each of the movie titles to an appropriate category according to its characteristics, as well as a statistical method for displaying descriptive statistical indicators of each of the examined categories state.

3. The Title

When considering the translation of movie titles, it is necessary to briefly refer first to the concept of the title itself, that is, to that what gives a specific name to a piece of work, be it literary, artistic or cinematic. A notable explanation of movie titles is given by Kalman, who states that a title is like “a visit card of a work of art, and just as the first impression can be of crucial importance for further acquaintance when two people meet, the situation is the same with a movie title and the further relationship of the viewer towards the movie.” (Kálmán, cited in Panić Kavgić, 2011, p. 148). From here, one can immediately see the importance of connecting the semantic content of the title with the content of the work it names, which should then also be conveyed in a given language.

4. Contextual Reformulation

In this paper, the portrayed translation method, which is a kind of equivalence, can lead to the production of creative and more culturally intertwined translation in the target language, taking into account both linguistic and non-linguistic elements. Many movies in their titles “can include various aspects of human life, such as politics, economics, history” (Xiuquan, 2007, p. 8). Briffa as well talks about the importance of context and its integration into a title of the work. According to him, the context represents a cultural perspective, because works of art often are an expression of a culturally conditioned way of thinking that is specific to the culture in question, and as such, it also carries certain elements that pervade the given culture (Briffa, 2009, p. 13).

The method that this paper presents as a process of translating movie titles is referred to by Panić Kavgić (2011) as *contextual reformulation*. It is a procedure based on the fact that “a movie in the target language is given a substantially and/or structurally new title, which is partially or completely different from the original, and which is in accordance with the linguistic and non-linguistic context in which the given translation is created “ (Panić Kavgić, 2011, p. 137). In short, it is the translation method that implements given non-linguistic elements

with linguistic elements of the language into which a title is translated. Linguistic elements can also include various informal structures, where “coinage words, their meanings, collocations and idiomatic phrases are conditioned by many cultural domains, and therefore users of a particular language begin to adopt these speech units in order to satisfy their new communication needs” (Crystal, 2003, p. 146), which are very often autochthonous and used daily in a given language. Similarly, Jovanović (2016) classifies idioms, slangs and puns as very frequent and informal forms of speech. When creating movie titles thematically intended for a specific audience or age group, a degree of informality specific to the intended age group should be used. When such a title is translated, it is desirable to use a similar technique in order to achieve the same or very similar effect with the same age group into whose language the given movie title is translated. The lexemes used in such titles can stand in stylistic contrast, while at the same time referring to the same entity, that is, they have different *associative features*. For example, lexemes *father*, *dad* and *pop* are marked associatively, because they refer to the same concept, but they are stylistically different because they differ in the degree of formality. Both the association and associative features that lexemes can have are also discussed by Prčić (2016), claiming that an associative feature is “any distinctive feature or a feature of a lexeme, and partially also of a referent, which is relevant when establishing some stylistic contrast” (p. 79). Certain lexemes “are in stylistic contrast, due to the presence of a stylistically associative feature” (p. 80) and, as such, are specific to a certain speech community or sociolect. The translator of a movie title “should preserve such a feature in the translation, so that it is immediately clear which target group the movie is intended for” (Panić Kavgić, 2011, p. 142). Some of these associative features can be observed in titles such as *Daddy’s Home 2* (*Stigò ćale 2*), *Ma* (*Keva*), *Grown Ups 2* (*Matorani 2*) and *Office Christmas Party* (*Ludi Božić u kancu*) which have been translated by employing youthful slang.

According to Panić Kavgić (2011), there are two most common forms of contextual reformulation, depending on the degree of reconstructing the translated movie title. So, there is **complete** and **partial** contextual reformulation (p. 138). This refers to the degree of possibility to recognize a movie title in its original English counterpart. **Complete**

contextual reformulation means it is not possible to recognize the original title in English from the translated counterpart, that is, it is not possible to clearly establish the semantic connection between the two titles because the title has been completely reconstructed in relation to its original form. *Table 1* contains some of the numerous representative movie titles created by employing the full contextual reformulation method.

Table 1. Distributed movie titles translated using the complete contextual reformulation method.

Year	Original title	Translated title
2011	<i>30 Minutes or Less</i>	<i>Ekspresna pljačka</i>
2011	<i>Friends with Benefits</i>	<i>Veza bez obaveza</i>
2011	<i>Reel Love</i>	<i>Srce na udici</i>
2011	<i>The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo</i>	<i>Muškarci koji mrze žene</i>
2011	<i>The Lincoln Lawyer</i>	<i>Advokat na točkovima</i>
2012	<i>Mud</i>	<i>Leto na obalama Misisipija</i>
2012	<i>Thanks for Sharing</i>	<i>Zavisni o seksu</i>
2012	<i>The Company You Keep</i>	<i>Pravilo ćutanja</i>
2012	<i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i>	<i>Čarlijev svet</i>
2012	<i>Wanderlust</i>	<i>Kuda plovi ovaj brod</i>
2012	<i>What to Expect When You're Expecting?</i>	<i>Imate li znanje za drugo stanje?</i>
2013	<i>Behind The Candelabra</i>	<i>Moj život s Liberačijem</i>
2013	<i>Fast & Furious 6</i>	<i>Paklene ulice 6</i>
2013	<i>Out of the Furnace</i>	<i>Čelična pravda</i>
2013	<i>Pain & Gain</i>	<i>Znojem do love</i>
2013	<i>The Heat</i>	<i>Žestoke devojke</i>
2013	<i>The Railway Man</i>	<i>Tragovi prošlosti</i>
2014	<i>A Million Ways to Die in the West</i>	<i>Ko preživi pričaće</i>
2014	<i>The Hundred-Foot Journey</i>	<i>Indijski začini na francuski način</i>
2014	<i>The Little Death</i>	<i>Slatka tajna orgazma</i>
2015	<i>Absolutely Anything</i>	<i>Sve što poželiš</i>
2015	<i>Once I Was a Beehive</i>	<i>Leto za velike stvari</i>
2015	<i>Trainwreck</i>	<i>Haos u najavi</i>
2016	<i>Hell or High Water</i>	<i>Po cenu života</i>

2016	<i>The Shallows</i>	<i>Opasnost iz dubine</i>
2017	<i>All The Money in the World</i>	<i>Cena života</i>
2017	<i>Call Me By Your Name</i>	<i>Skrivena ljubav</i>
2018	<i>A Simple Favor</i>	<i>Slatka mala tajna</i>
2018	<i>Keepers</i>	<i>Tajna svetionika</i>
2018	<i>The Girl in the Spider's Web</i>	<i>Ono što nas ne ubije</i>
2019	<i>Drunk Parents</i>	<i>Promil do (k)raja</i>
2019	<i>Hustlers</i>	<i>Prevarantkinje sa Vol Strita</i>
2019	<i>Stuber</i>	<i>Ortaci na točkovima</i>
2020	<i>Unhinged</i>	<i>Van kontrole</i>

When creating a title by employing **partial contextual reformulation**, there are some lexical elements that remain unchanged and which can be recognized in the original title, so its reconstruction is only partial. In such cases, one part of the title is contextually reformulated, while the other part is translated by direct translation. An example of such a movie title is *Real Steel* (*Čelična borba*) in which the translation equivalence between the lexemes *čelik* and *steel* does exist, whereas the lexeme *borba* is completely unrelated to the rest of the original title, but is faithful to the context of the movie plot. Table 2 shows interesting creations of movie titles translated by using this method.

Table 2. Distributed movie titles translated using the partial contextual reformulation method.

Year	Original title	Translated title
2011	<i>Final Destination 5</i>	<i>Poslednja ekskurzija</i>
2011	<i>Horrible Bosses</i>	<i>Kako se rešiti šefa</i>
2011	<i>Real Steel</i>	<i>Čelična borba</i>
2011	<i>Sucker Punch</i>	<i>Iznenadni udarac</i>
2011	<i>The Art of Getting By</i>	<i>Umetnost prepuštanja</i>
2011	<i>The Iron Lady</i>	<i>Čelična dama</i>
2011	<i>Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy</i>	<i>Dečko dama kralj špijun</i>
2012	<i>Hit and Run</i>	<i>Udri i beži</i>
2012	<i>Iron Sky: Invasion</i>	<i>Čelično nebo</i>
2012	<i>Magic Mike</i>	<i>Vreli Majk</i>
2012	<i>The Five-Year Engagement</i>	<i>Veridbi nikad kraja</i>

2012	<i>This Is 40</i>	<i>Ovako je sa 40</i>
2013	<i>Fading Gigolo</i>	<i>Matori žigolo</i>
2013	<i>Insidious: Chapter 2</i>	<i>Astralna podmuklost: Poglavlje 2</i>
2013	<i>The Big Wedding</i>	<i>Venčanje godine</i>
2013	<i>The To Do List</i>	<i>Seks po spisku</i>
2013	<i>White House Down</i>	<i>Napad na Belu kuću</i>
2014	<i>How to Make Love Like an Englishman</i>	<i>Ljubav na engleski način</i>
2014	<i>Open Windows</i>	<i>Pogrešan prozor</i>
2014	<i>The Other Woman</i>	<i>Osveta na ženski način</i>
2015	<i>Love the Coopers</i>	<i>Božić kod Kuperovih</i>
2015	<i>The Lady in the Van</i>	<i>Dama iz dvorišta</i>
2016	<i>Bad Moms</i>	<i>Opasne mame</i>
2016	<i>Mike and Dave Need Wedding Dates</i>	<i>Frka na venčanju</i>
2016	<i>Office Christmas Party</i>	<i>Ludi Božić u kancu</i>
2016	<i>Bad Moms</i>	<i>Opasne mame</i>
2017	<i>How to Be a Latin Lover</i>	<i>Male tajne velikog latino zavodnika</i>
2018	<i>Book Club</i>	<i>Klub zadovoljnih žena</i>
2018	<i>If Beale Street Could Talk</i>	<i>Šapat ulice</i>
2018	<i>The House with a Clock in Its Walls</i>	<i>Kuća magičnog sata</i>
2019	<i>Knives Out</i>	<i>Nož u leđa</i>
2020	<i>My Spy</i>	<i>Otkrila sam špijuna</i>

In addition to these two most productive forms of contextual reformulation, Panić Kavgić (2011) lists several other forms of this movie titles translation method. They are **associative** and **supplementary** (p. 140), as well as **intra-language contextual reformulation** (p. 141).

Associative contextual reformulation is a method by which a translator of a movie title attempts to evoke association with an already existing movie title in order to achieve a greater effect. Thus, the movie *Book Club* from 2018 was most likely translated based on the title of the movie *The First Wives Club* (*Klub zadovoljnih žena*) from 1996, which was translated as *Klub prvih žena*. Similarly, the 2017 movie *Rough Night*

(*Ludilo devojačke večeri*) is reminiscent of the 1977 movie title *Saturday Night Fever* (*Groznica subotnje večeri*).

Supplementary contextual reformulation involves contextual translation of a movie title while adding new elements to clarify or supplement the title. Examples of such translated titles are *Chappie* (*Čepi: Robot koji je promenio svet*), *Leatherface* (*Maska od kože: Početak*), *The Maze Runner* (*Nemoguće bekstvo*), *The Rum Diary* (*Portorikanske noći: dnevnik opijanja*), whereby in addition to the contextual reformulation, there is also additional information included in these movie titles.

Intra-language contextual reformulation implies changing a movie title in the original language itself during its distribution in certain countries. It is actually a “different title” or a movie “also known as”, and examples of such titles from the corpus are: *The Avengers* (*Osvetnici*, also known as *Avengers Assemble*), then *Pirates of the Caribbean: Salazar’s Revenge* (*Pirati sa Kariba: Salazarova osveta*, also known as *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales*), as well as *Neighbors* (*Loše komšije*, also known as *Bad Neighbors* in the UK market).

Contextual reformulation is not necessarily the best option when translating movie titles. Most often, these are situations when, by reformulating the original title, the essence of the plot is partially or completely revealed. One such example is the movie *Red Sparrow* (*Izdaja*, betrayal), the original title of which actually denotes the name of a training school for Russian secret agents, but the translated title can initially indicate the twist or the point of the entire plot of the movie. Another similar example is the movie *Something Borrowed* (*Tuđe slade*). Although it looks more attractive and definitely reformulated, the phrase employed by this title in the Serbian language has the connotation of envy or jealousy, which is not the topic of this movie. The original name is actually part of an old English rhyme that represents a recipe for a successful marriage, whereby the bride should wear something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue to make her marriage happy and successful.

On the other hand, contextual reformulation can be a powerful ally when translating polysemic movie titles. These are titles that convey ambiguity within their structure, i.e., they can be interpreted in more than

one way (Panić Kavgić, 2011). Only by looking at the plot of the movie does the viewer actually get the right picture and understand the true meaning of the title in question. In such situations, contextual reformulation can produce a creative title that still retains the mystery of the movie plot, while remaining equally close to what it is about. The title of the movie *Call Me By Your Name* (*Skrivena ljubav*, hidden love) could be included here, which, in a direct translation, could leave room for ambiguity, because in the Serbian language the possessive pronoun *svoj* would have an ambiguous meaning out of context in terms of its referent. Also, the movie *Blue Jasmine* was translated as *Nesrećna Džasmin* (unhappy Jasmine), thus avoiding the ambiguity of the adjective *blue*, which in English can mean both *blue* and *sad* (in fact, out of context, the whole noun phrase could be interpreted as the *blue jasmine* flower). On the other hand, in the title of the movie *Drunk Parents* (*Promil do (k) raja*), ambiguity is deliberately left in order to achieve a comic effect and hint at the plot which befalls the parents in question.

5. Results and Review

Out of a total of 1015 analyzed movie titles included in the corpus, 310 of them were translated by some form of contextual reformulation, which collectively comprises 30.54% of the total analyzed sample (complete, partial, supplementary and associative all together). This information certainly gives encouragement that the creative translation of movie titles is at a solid level. However, during the research, a fluctuation was observed in the number of movie titles translated using the method of contextual reformulation on an annual basis during a given ten-year period. A substantial and at the same time the largest share of titles translated by using this method was recorded for the year 2012 in the amount of 42.57%, while for the year 2019 it was only 17.31%, as shown in *Chart 1*.

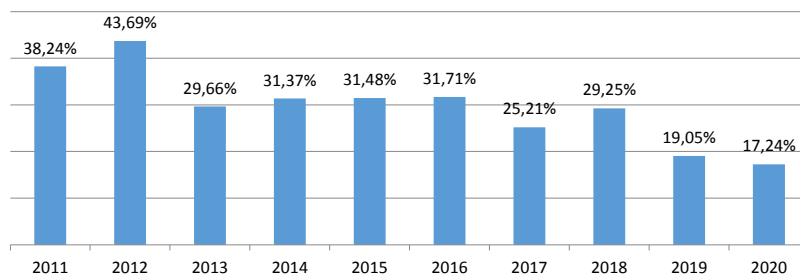


Chart 1. The share of titles translated using the contextual reformulation method per year

Reasons for this fluctuation can be found in the heterogeneity of the sample, i.e., in the number of movies whose titles, due to their structure, were suitable for translating by employing some form of contextual reformulation, so translators mostly translated such movie titles directly, which certainly affected the mentioned method share of presence. Therefore, it is expected that the number of movie titles translated directly is significantly higher, and in this case, it is 705 movie titles, or 69.46% of the total analyzed corpus. This distribution is shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

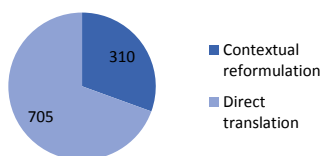


Figure 1. Contextual reformulation share

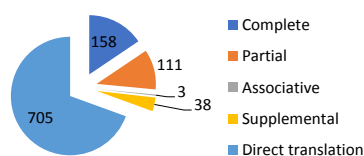


Figure 2. Distribution by type

The total display of the number of movie titles translated by using some form of contextual reformulation is cumulatively shown in Chart 2 for the entire ten-year period.

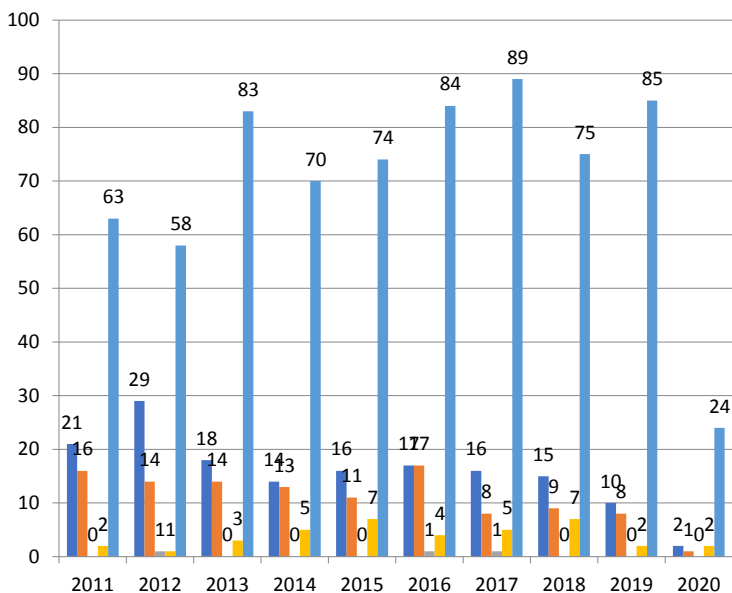


Chart 2. The presence of contextual reformulation types in movie titles from 2011 to 2020.

The corpus consists of movies titles which have been translated to some extent by some form of contextual reformulation where applicable, producing interesting and creative translation of titles while often avoiding direct translation in almost a third of the corpus. However, the remaining part of the corpus consists of movie titles where direct translation is “the most common translation procedure for translating movie titles from English to Serbian” (Panić Kavgić, 2010, p. 94). It is encouraging to note that complete contextual reformulation is the prevalent form of this method in each of the ten calendar years covered, immediately followed by partial reformulation. These two forms are the most common recorded forms of this translation method, which indicates that there is a tendency towards creative translation of movie titles. When *Chart 2* is observed more closely, it is indicative that the contextual reformulation of movie titles has been decreasing year by year, especially from 2013 onwards. The chronologically negative trend can be noticed here, but its existence is actually a reflection of the fact that the respec-

tive years contained titles which, from the translator's point of view or due to their structure, were not viable for any reconstruction. The supplementary contextual reformulation method (3.74%) is significantly less prevalent compared to the complete (15.57%) and partial (10.94%) reformulation, while the least number of movie titles are associated with some previous movie productions (total 0.30%). Given that this research takes into account only feature films, 269 of them were translated using the procedures of partial and complete contextual reformulation, which constitutes 26.5% of the total number of analyzed units. When all four forms of this translation method are taken into account, its total share becomes 30.54%. This is an encouraging fact showing that almost a third of the sample was translated creatively, which certainly contributed to many titles remaining impressive, memorable and recognizable.

Not many authors have immersed themselves in the contextualization of movie titles translation in the Serbian language. The importance of this research is reflected in the display of titles translated using the mentioned method, in which the translator's creativity and skill produced translated titles that are recognizable, creative and attractive. All this simultaneously contributes to raising awareness of the need for high-quality translation and avoiding or reducing inappropriately translated movie titles.

6. Conclusion

Creatively translated movie titles, a sort of bridges in intercultural exchange and dialogue between a movie story and its audience, testify to the importance of applying the described translation method, thus its absence from the cinematographic plane would inevitably diminish the translation and the overall experience of a movie plot. Every movie title, from the moment of its creation in the original language, has its own significant functions that should be transferred into the target language as much as possible. And precisely by employing the modification of the original conceptualization, creative translation produces newly minted titles that are more suitable for understanding, more attractive for the audience, and more successful for the moviemakers.

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