The Informal Ukrainian Voiceover: Introducing the AVT Technique

Kateryna Sivak ✉
Independent Researcher

_____

Abstract

This article offers the first ever introduction to the practice of informal Ukrainian voiceover translation of fiction. Specifically, it outlines the defining traits of this voiceover style, such as the presence of multiple voices and isochrony, and how it compares to the more widely known voiceover techniques. It also provides an insight into its production by discussing the five key stages of the process: translation, role assignment, recording, sound mixing and release. This work draws on interviews with Ukrainian informal voiceover producers as well as virtual ethnographic observations, which were conducted as part of a broader ethnographic study of the informal media economy of Ukraine. This article thus contributes to the growing yet still rather limited body of work on informal AVT, which has so far focused mainly on fansubbing and considerably less on revoicing techniques.

Key words: voiceover, informal AVT, fandubbing, pirate translation, Ukraine, revoicing, cyberdubbing.

✉ kateryna_sivak@proton.me, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1742-8367

Introduction

Since the early 2000s, the amount of screen media content being produced has been increasingly growing (BFI, 2023; Box Office Mojo, 2024). Arguably, one major factor behind this growth has been the development of streaming services, which have been competing on content exclusivity (Crosby & McKenzie, 2021; Iordache, 2021). This has led to a significant increase in investments in content production and an overabundance of audiovisual content on offer (Lang & Steinberg, 2022; Longo & Baiyere, 2021). Consequently, the demand for immediate and abundant access to screen media is now ever higher. However, this speed of releasing new titles has been rather challenging for language service providers worldwide as they have been struggling to meet the correspondingly growing demand for translation of all this content in their local markets (Massidda, 2020). Therefore, a significant range of content often remains linguistically inaccessible to audiences in many parts of the world.

The lack of official translation has been especially significant for languages that can be considered marginal(ised), e.g., due to a relatively low number of speakers or, as is the case with Ukrainian, as a result of linguicide policies.[1] Since "languages attract varying priority levels depending on their target market size" (Dwyer, 2018, pp. 155–156), it is only logical that global streaming services tend to prioritise translations into the more popular, more economically viable languages. Consequently, the percentage of films and series currently available with Ukrainian translation on global and Ukrainian streaming services is rather low. As for global platforms, Netflix is currently leading, with over 500 titles in its catalogue currently having Ukrainian revoicing (i.e. dubbing or voiceover) or subtitles.[2] Ukrainian localisations on Apple TV+ are currently limited to subtitles, an "extremely unpopular" AVT mode in Ukraine (Juli Bettany, personal communication, January 13, 2021), while the first-ever Ukrainian revoicing on Prime Video appeared only in December 2022 (Karmanska, 2022). As for Ukrainian streaming platforms, a significant part of foreign titles in their libraries is only available with Russian revoicing. Nevertheless, the number of Ukrainian dubbing or voiceover on these platforms is increasing, with major streaming services having recently opened their own dubbing

---

[1] Since as early as the 17th century, Russia has been persecuting for the use of Ukrainian in Ukraine, including modifying the grammar, spelling and vocabulary of Ukrainian to increase its proximity to Russian, all accompanied by the imposition of Russian as a substitute for Ukrainian. Some of the most infamous of such linguicide acts include the Valuev circular of 1863, which effectively prohibited publishing in the Ukrainian language, and Ems Ukaz of 1876, which further reinforced these restrictions (for a more detailed chronology of such anti-Ukrainian policies, see https://esu.com.ua/article-17240). This has expectedly led to a significant number of Ukrainians still being fluent in Russian and to the ongoing dominance of the Russian language in Ukraine's media space.

[2] According to the Unofficial Netflix Online Global Search (uNoGS), available at:
https://unogs.com/search/?country_andorunique=or&start_year=1900&end_year=2023&end_rating=10&genrelist=&audio=Ukrainian&audiosubtitle_andor=or&countrylist=21,23,26,29,33,36,307,45,39,327,331,334,265,337,336,269,267,357,378,65,67,390,392,268,400,408,412,447,348,270,73,34,425,432,436,46,78.

studios (Detector Media, 2021; NV.UA, 2021). Furthermore, the situation is noticeably better with cinema releases, which are all screened with Ukrainian dubbing.[3]

Yet, there is still a considerable amount of content, particularly TV series, that remains linguistically inaccessible to the Ukrainian viewer. In such cases, i.e., when official audiovisual translation (AVT) providers do not deliver, their counterparts – pirates, amateurs, fans, or even AVT professionals – may volunteer to take matters into their own hands and translate content themselves, albeit informally. Informal practices not only fill these gaps but may allow viewers to access desired audiovisual content more quickly, as official releases can take significantly longer. The availability of this informal translation is thus often the only reason why many Ukrainians can be part of the global audience of numerous series or streaming feature releases. The significant role of informal AVT in a major European market such as Ukraine underpins the rationale for examining the voiceover practices discussed in this paper.

It is worth clarifying that the term *informal* here is used interchangeably with the terms *unofficial* and *pirate*. This aligns with the informal media economy theoretical framework (Lobato & Thomas, 2015), which underpins the broader study the findings presented here are part of, as elaborated shortly. Fundamentally, this framework suggests moving away from viewing major Hollywood studios or national broadcasters as central components of the media industry and, accordingly, file sharers or amateur content producers, i.e., those that operate outside of the formally regulated space, – as "merely noise around this regular system" (Lobato & Thomas, 2015, p. 19). Instead, this approach emphasises that such unofficial ways of translating, distributing, or consuming content, including those commonly termed piracy, constitute an everyday media experience in many parts of the world and, therefore, should be seen as an integral part of the media landscape, albeit a questionably legal one.

Following this approach, informal/pirate/unofficial media practices, such as the informal Ukrainian voiceover are neither condemned nor actively celebrated; they are simply explored as media practices, while their legality and formality are set aside. Importantly, informality does not necessarily negate quality or professionalism (i.e., high level of skill) but simply suggests that a specific activity is not formally regulated, e.g., there is no contract of employment in place, or those undertaking said activity may not have the copyright holder's permission to distribute or modify the copy in question. The term *informal* thus offers a concise yet all-encompassing and, notably, unbiased way of referring to a broad array of practices that exist outside the formally regulated space.

In the field of AVT, Baños and Díaz-Cintas (2024) argue that the terms *cyberdubbing* and *cybersubtitling* can be used to describe informal or unofficial revoicing and subtitling production activities, respectively. Despite the name, *cyberdubbing* encompasses not only dubbing

---

[3] Some films may have additional screenings in their original language, with Ukrainian subtitles. However, it is an extremely rare practice in Ukraine that can only be afforded by major cinemas, as subtitled films can only attract a niche, small audience (usually those wishing to practice the language of the original).

techniques, i.e., when the translated audio track replaces the original one, but also voiceover translation, i.e., when the translated audio track is added over the original. Yet, considering that voiceover has not been taken seriously enough as a translation technique (Woźniak, 2012), by primarily utilising the term *informal voiceover* rather than *cyberdubbing*, this article aims to help reinforce the status of voiceover as a valid AVT mode. Additionally, the three types of motivations behind cyberdubbing – namely, fandom, altruist, and activist (Baños & Díaz-Cintas, 2024) – do not fully encompass the motivations of the Ukrainian informal voiceover practitioners (see further). *Informal*, conversely, does not imply a particular set of motivations and is thus a broader term.

In anglophone academic literature, the most researched type of informal AVT practice is fansubbing, i.e., non-commercial production of (typically interlingual) subtitles by fans of the content that is being translated. Since the early 2000s, there has been a growing body of work on fansubbing, with scholars exploring it in relation to copyright and the formal industry, and the workflows and overall structure of fansubbing communities and the resulting quality of their fansubs (Condry, 2010; Díaz Cintas, 2009; Hatcher, 2005; He, 2014a, 2014b; Hills, 2016; Kirkpatrick, 2002; Lambert, 2006; Lee, 2011; Pedersen, 2019; Pérez-González, 2019). However, although fansubbing is indeed common in many countries, it is important to recognise that informal translation comes in a variety of AVT modes, including voiceover and dubbing, while the motivation for producing it is not limited to fandom.

With this article, I aim to contribute to a limited yet growing body of work on informal AVT that considers practices beyond fansubbing by introducing the Ukrainian informal voiceover as an AVT practice. After providing a brief overview of existing research on informal revoicing and, specifically, voiceover, I outline key distinct features of the Ukrainian informal voiceover and provide an insight into the main stages of its production. More broadly, this paper emphasises the importance of recognising informal AVT practices as crucial for understanding how audiences in different countries access and consume media.

The findings presented in this paper were obtained through primary research conducted between 2021 and 2022, as part of a wider virtual ethnographic study into Ukraine's informal media economy (Sivak, 2023). The methods used to obtain data for this paper include participant observation of Ukraine's torrent communities and walkthrough (Light et al., 2018) of Ukrainian pirate streaming websites, interviews with 16 Ukrainian informal voiceover practitioners, and their YouTube live streams, where they demonstrated how they produced their revoicings in real time. All images in this paper are courtesy of the interviewees. All interviews were conducted in Ukrainian and translated by the author into English.

1. Informal Revoicing

Compared with informal subtitling, informal revoicing has received considerably less academic attention. The most studied informal revoicing practice is the one produced by fans, i.e., fandubbing. Fandubbing involves replacing the original audio track with a new one recorded by the fandubber(s)

(Chaume, 2007, 2013). Notably, the term "fandubbing" is commonly used to refer to parodic revoicing rather than an actual, interlingual translation of the original dialogues. In this case, the original dialogue is replaced with an entirely different one for humorous purposes (Baños, 2020, p. 212). This is why it is sometimes called *fun*dubbing (Chaume, 2013). One of the few scholars who places fundubbing at the centre of their study is Mertens (2023, p. 2), who looks at abridged anime where "YouTube users edit together a condensed version of an anime series and provide their own dubbed voice acting to create a parodic remix that pokes fun at a show", exploring how this practice may distort or undermine the original. Nevertheless, of more relevance to this discussion are studies on "interlinguistic genuine fandubbing" (Zhang & Vazquez-Calvo, 2022, p. 197), or "serious dubs" (Baños, 2020, p. 214), i.e., informally produced interlingual revoicing that attempts to reproduce the meaning of the original accurately.

Some of the key studies on "serious" informal revoicing include Shafirova and Cassany (2019), who consider a case of fandubbing within the bronies, an adult fan community of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* (2010), and Nord et al. (2015), who look at fandubbing in Iran. Shafirova and Cassany (2019) offer insight into the process of fandubbing for one of the seasons of the animated series by interviewing a fandubber, who both translated and revoiced the material. Shafirova and Cassany's (2019) study highlights the value of using ethnographic methods for delving into the practicalities of an AVT practice – an approach similarly adopted in this paper. Nord et al.'s (2015) study serves to highlight that, much like in the case of (fan)subbing, informal revoicing is not limited to the activity of fans or amateurs. While their work focuses on conventional fandubbing and quasi-professional dubbing, Nord et al. (2015, p. 3) note the existence of "professional dubbings which have not received authorization for distribution in the official Iranian market" and which are freely available online. Official dubbing studios in Iran may produce dubbing for films that did not pass state censorship or whose exclusive dubbing rights may be given to another company (Nord et al., 2015). In such cases, pirate websites may purchase this professional dubbing and make it available for their audiences (Nord et al., 2015).

Another noteworthy study here is Li (2022), who provides an example of non-fan informal dubbing produced for the Chichewa-speaking audience in Malawi. Since no foreign films are officially released in the country, Malawians' only choice is to rely on pirate distribution networks and unofficial translations (Li, 2022). These translations are produced by male dubbers with "secondary school education, which qualified them as skilled English speakers to translate films from English into Chichewa" and who are self-taught in using Adobe Audition, which they illegitimately download from the internet (Li, 2022, p. 4). According to one of the informal dubbers whom Li (2022) interviewed, a motivation for producing informal dubs is to enable Malawians to appreciate films beyond their action scenes, which do not require translation. Yet, Malawian dubbers ultimately sell their dubs, along with the burned CDs containing pirated copies of the films they translate (Li, 2022), indicating a commercial motive. These studies demonstrate that informal AVT practices can indeed exist beyond amateur fan space, and the informal Ukrainian voiceover introduced in this paper serves as further evidence of that.

Additionally, it is important to address a common view on serious, non-anime (fan)dubbing as a practice that has only recently started to increase in popularity and that, compared with (fan)subbing, has always been rather marginal and aimed at a niche audience (Baños, 2019a, 2020; Perego & Pacinotti, 2020; Pérez-González, 2019). This view unfairly overlooks the widespread popularity of informal revoicing in Eastern European countries in the 1980s and 1990s, namely the single-voice pirate voiceover, which arguably originated in Russia (Glushneva, 2020; Żurek, 2020). This Russian revoicing is often referred to as the Gavrilov voiceover, with Gavrilov being the name of one of the simultaneous, "on-the-spot" interpreters who worked at film festivals and private screenings of Western films at the time (Franco et al., 2010; Glushneva, 2020; Żurek, 2020). In the 1980s, these interpreters started using their skills at home to create "single-voice, improvised, barely synchronised translations directly to videotapes" (Glushneva, 2020, p. 100). This translation would be the only option available to the audiences in many now-post-Soviet countries, including Ukraine, well into the 1990s (Skomorokhova, 2012; Sofienko, 2014). While today, the Ukrainian audience largely considers Gavrilov-style voiceover a "sad legacy of the early 1990s" (Tereshchenko, 2017, p. 168), voiceover, in general, has remained a widespread form AVT in both formal and informal spaces. Yet, despite its long history and popularity, there is effectively no academic research on voiceover in Ukraine. This lack of research on Ukrainian voiceover – and voiceover in general – may be explained by the fact that AVT studies are mostly dominated by scholars "most of whom have never been exposed to this kind of translation [voiceover]" and who, therefore, "limit themselves in their essays to brief tidbits about the bizarre audiovisual practice that exotic nations seem to be fond of" (Woźniak, 2012, p. 210). As Franco et al. (2010, p. 23) note, while academic interest in voiceover as an AVT practice has been increasing, "whether this interest reflects a better understanding, or even, a greater recognition of voiceover as an audiovisual mode of transfer remains to be seen". This paper, therefore, addresses this research gap by giving due attention to Ukrainian informal voiceover, i.e., a type of AVT that provides the only way for a large – Ukrainian-speaking – audience to consume audiovisual content.

2. The Ukrainian Informal Voiceover

Voiceover is an AVT mode where the translated audio track overlaps the original. However, the type of voiceover varies among countries, genres, and between formal and informal spaces. Therefore, before exploring how the Ukrainian informal voiceover is produced, it is important to outline the specifics of the voiceover style used by Ukrainian informal practitioners.

What primarily distinguishes one voiceover style from another is the degree of synchronisation of the translated track with the original one (i.e., in terms of isochrony or lip synchrony as discussed below), the number of voices used, and the rendering of emotion (acting). Polish voiceover of fiction, for instance, involves a single narrator, "lektor," reading out the translated text in a way that up to 90% of the original dialogue is retained (Woźniak, 2012). This is achieved by considerably condensing the translated version of the dialogues and by reading it largely in between original utterances (Woźniak, 2012). In most Western countries, where voiceover as an AVT technique has been

predominantly used for non-fiction, the translated track is usually condensed to a lesser extent and is set to start a few seconds later than the original speech (Chaume, 2013; Matamala, 2019; Sepielak & Matamala, 2014). In both cases, it is common for the translated text to be uttered with a relatively monotone intonation, in the sense that voiceover actors do not aim to reproduce the emotions or intonations of the original voices. Recently, however, there has been a shift towards the more emotive voiceover, such as *simil sync*, which will be discussed shortly. Conversely, techniques such as the Ukrainian informal voiceover, as explained below, are the reason why this AVT mode is sometimes called half-dubbing, partial dubbing, or pseudo-dubbing (e.g., Chaume, 2013; O'Connell, 2007), as it combines features of both dubbing and voiceover.

As in dubbing, the Ukrainian voiceover track is synchronised in length and timing with the original, a notion referred to as isochrony, meaning that voice actors aim to start and end speaking at the exact same time as the actors on screen. As for the number of voices, the minimum requirement is the preservation of the differences between male and female voices, meaning there are at least two actors participating in the recording process. Yet, a two-voice voiceover is often considered basic, with the informal Ukrainian voiceover practitioners normally striving for multiple-voice voiceover, where each character is dubbed by a different voice.[4] Importantly, informal voice actors *act*, imitating the original intonations and emotions, rather than monotonously reading their lines. Most Ukrainian voiceover groups attempt to maximise lip synchronisation, a feature generally considered exclusive to dubbing (Baños, 2019b; Franco et al., 2010). As in dubbing, it may involve synchronising facial expressions, breathing, and actions (e.g., chewing or yawning while speaking), but also translating in a way that if, for instance, the original utterance ends with a name (i.e., a word that, when translated, is likely to sound similar to the original) then the translated version should also end with that name (SVOÏ Production, personal communication, November 4, 2021). Ultimately, the Ukrainian informal revoicing style can be explained as a synthesis of dubbing and voiceover, which aims to follow most of the dubbing standards but, like voiceover, retains the original dialogue heard.

The reason for the above is that, unlike in the case of Polish voiceover, for instance, where a lektor's task is to create the illusion that the audience understands the original language (Woźniak, 2012), the goal of Ukrainian informal voiceover is the same as in dubbing, i.e., to create an illusion as if the actors on screen were speaking in the target language (Díaz Cintas, 1999). So, why do the Ukrainian informal voiceover practitioners not simply produce dubbing instead of trying to achieve a dubbing effect with voiceover? The answer to this question lies primarily in the practitioners' inability to obtain a separate music and effects (M&E) track[5] due to the unofficial nature of their work.

---

[4] "Different voice" does not necessarily equal "different actor", as a single voice actor may often use a different voice for different characters. This is especially the case for secondary characters.

[5] Music and effects track. This audio track contains music and any other sounds you hear in the film, e.g., background noises, footsteps etc., but the dialogues. These sounds are normally recorded separately, after the scenes are shot, often with the help of foley artists, who recreate the necessary sounds using a variety of techniques. In post-production, M&E and dialogue tracks are combined into one audio track that is ultimately heard on screen. When a film is exported to countries where it needs to be dubbed,

To produce dubbing, practitioners may either create a new M&E track themselves or try to isolate dialogues from music and effects. Both options have been attempted by the Ukrainian informal revoicing practitioners, but the resulting quality did not meet their standards. Bozhena (personal communication, September 23, 2021), for example, took part in creating dubbing for the webseries *Hot Date* (2017), where, in addition to voice acting, she also performed the role of a foley artist, recreating sounds from chewing to spilling a glass of wine on the table. AdrianZP (personal communication, July 22, 2021) experimented with various software tools and plugins, attempting to separate dialogues from the rest of the audio with varying success. Although technically achievable, neither of the options could guarantee a satisfactory level of sound quality, and since quality is a priority for Ukrainian informal revoicing practitioners, it is voiceover, a technique that involves simply adding another audio track to an existing one that has become the technique of choice for those informally producing AVT in Ukraine. It is likely that another contributing factor here has been a long-established familiarity of the Ukrainian audience with the voiceover technique, which is elaborated on shortly. SVOÏ Production (personal communication, November 4, 2021) thus referred to this revoicing technique as "dubliuchka", which is a combination of the words dubliuvannia (дублювання – Ukrainian for dubbing) and ozvuchka (озвучка – colloquial Ukrainian expression for voiceover).

In the academic literature on AVT, the closest voiceover type to the Ukrainian informal one is *simil sync*,[6] which is used for reality shows in Italy and other countries (e.g., Baños, 2019b). According to Rossato (2020), it is a "dramatised voiceover", which, similar to the Ukrainian technique, involves several different voices for each character, some degree of acting for imitating original intonations, and synchronised timing (see also Sileo, 2020). A similar revoicing style, one that has elements of both dubbing and voiceover, is also observed in the audiovisual translation of factual entertainment in Spain (Permanyer, 2012, cited in Baños, 2019b, p. 270). Yet, in these countries, this hybrid revoicing technique was developed by formal broadcasters as a cheaper alternative to dubbing, which has become too expensive to produce (Barra et al., 2020). However, in Ukraine, this hybrid voiceover originated in the informal space:

> In [official] studios, they normally teach you to voiceover in a dry, monotonous manner. [Unofficial] voice acting has changed due to competition for the consumer. If you want your voiceover to be chosen, you need to do it better than others (…). This led to the fact that [informal] voiceover acting came close to that of dubbing. Perhaps this is inherent specifically to [former] CIS countries, since we consume pirated content the most here.
>
> Vlasiy (personal communication, January 11, 2022)

Indeed, a typical voiceover of fiction broadcasted on Ukrainian TV channels has been a two-voice, relatively monotonous revoicing, with Ukrainian utterances starting a few seconds after the original,

---

the production company provides local distributors and studios with a separate M&E track, so that they can combine it with the dialogues in their local language. The informal Ukrainian voiceover practitioners can only hope to obtain a video file through pirate sites, where M&E track is already embedded.

[6] Also known as SRNL (Sincronismo Ritmico Non Labiale). In 2017, it was included into the general framework of AVT modes in Italy (Sileo, 2020).

similar to the Western documentary voiceover. It is only in the last several years that Ukrainian broadcasters and streaming services have started to adopt this more advanced voiceover, adding more voices and emotions (most likely for similar reasons as in Italy and Spain, i.e., as a cheaper and easier alternative to dubbing). In the informal space, the practice of multiple-voice voiceover has existed since the early 2000s, with the phenomenon of informal voiceover groups established in Russia as early as the mid-1990s, as the next wave after Gavrilov and Goblin[7] voiceovers (Chief Studio, personal communication, July 13, 2021). These Russian voiceovers also used to be widespread in Ukraine and in most post-Soviet countries, where Russian has been a widely understood language. Ukrainian voiceover started actively emerging only in early 2010s, effectively as an alternative to the Russian one (Chief Studio, personal communication, July 13, 2021; Ether Production, personal communication, June 11, 2021). By this time, Russian informal voiceover groups had already been well-developed, with established production processes, allowing them to release voiceovers quicker than the newly created Ukrainian groups (Juli Bettany, 2022; Chief Studio, personal communication, July 13, 2021; Ihabi [informal voice actor], personal communication, January 24, 2022). Since outperforming Russian groups in speed was initially unrealistic, Ukrainian informal voiceover practitioners decided to outperform them in quality, which, as Vlasiy (personal communication, January 11, 2022) noted, has led to more advanced, dubbing-like voiceover (also Ihabi, personal communication, January 24, 2022). Today, the field of Ukrainian informal voiceover is notably developed, with around a dozen established voiceover groups regularly producing Ukrainian translations for films and series and with new groups continuing to emerge. The rest of the paper offers an insight into these groups' voiceover production.

3. Producing Ukrainian Informal Voiceover

The phenomenon of Ukrainian informal voiceover groups, colloquially referred to as "studios",[8] which is detailed in Sivak (2023) and (2024), can be summarised as follows. Each "studio" is usually founded by one or two informal voice actors, i.e., people whose main job may not necessarily be related to AVT, who nevertheless dedicate their free time to developing their voice acting skills and to producing unofficial voiceovers. They would have learnt how to use audio recording and editing software, purchased necessary equipment (e.g., microphone), and, thus, are able to produce their voiced-over versions from home. Since most of the informal Ukrainian revoicings are multiple-voice voiceovers, the founders, who normally coordinate the entire process, invite other voice actors to join a given translation project. As most of the informal AVT practitioners produce their voiceovers

---

[7] Goblin is a Russian version of fundubbing: largely parodic voiceovers infamously saturated with profanity for humorous purposes (Franco et al., 2010; Chaume, 2013).

[8] Audiences refer to them as "studios" arguably due to high quality of their voiceovers, which rarely differs from the ones produced by official translation studios. One interviewed member of a Ukrainian torrent community even uses the state of informal voiceover in Ukraine as the benchmark to assess that of formal translation studios, suggesting that the latter "have finally caught up". Throughout this paper, some of the name of these groups are anonyms as not all of the groups have consented for their real names to be used.

from home, most of the collaboration tends to happen virtually. These can be actors without their own "studio," i.e., who do not take the lead in the production process, or founders of other groups. Notably, skills required for the complex process that is voiceover production are not limited to voice acting, which means that in addition to voice actors, other professionals, such as translators and subtitlers, may be involved. Therefore, the number of members in a voiceover group is fluid, involving anywhere from three to ten people, depending on the specifics of each project. Generally, the stages of producing a voiceover informally are as follows: translation, role assignment, recording, sound mixing, and release.

3.1. Translation

The goal of this stage is to produce a Ukrainian translation of the original dialogue of the film or series that is to be revoiced, and present it in the form of subtitles, without taking into consideration any specific subtitling parameters. These subtitles are intended solely as a script for the voice actors, meaning they will read them from a screen that displays the film along with the subtitles (see Figure 1 for an example of such subtitles).

Figure 1

Example of Subtitles a Voice Actor Receives From the Translator in the Informal Ukrainian Voiceover Process
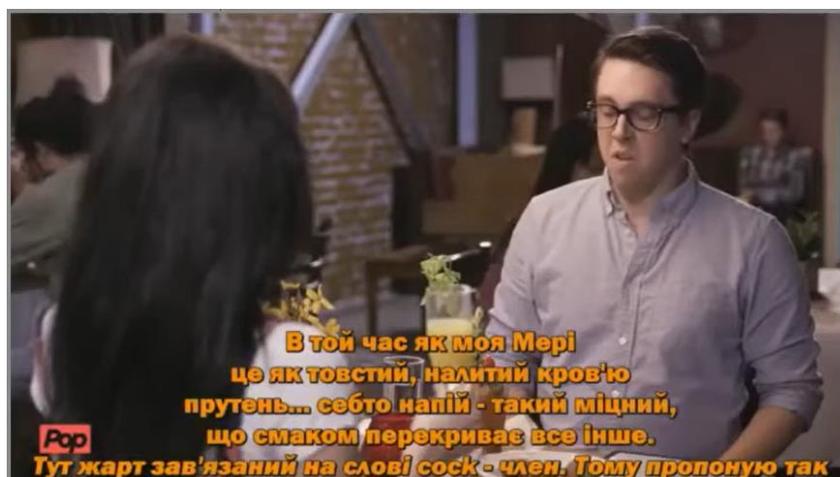
Since in AVT of fiction, it is important to preserve its function as entertainment (Baños, 2019b; Sileo, 2020), the interviewed practitioners emphasised that what they do is best described as "adaptation", i.e., "translation, adapted specifically to the Ukrainian viewer" (Ether Production, personal communication, June 11, 2021). This translation approach, often referred to as domestication, aims to establish an emotional connection with the target audience (Weston, 2022). In practice, this means that if, for instance, the original text contains a joke, the priority would be not to provide an accurate translation but to ensure that the local audience laughs at it, which in turn may involve coming up with an entirely different joke. Yet, the aim is nevertheless to avoid unnecessary changes

to the original text as much as possible, as indicated by the interviewees from the voiceover group Dublicat:

> Personally, I like to joke a little in translations, to make it a bit livelier and bring some humour for the local audience. Yet, it is important not to overdo it, so that I do not to become another Goblin in its worst manifestation.
>
> Yevhenii Titomyr from Dublicat (personal communication, October 6, 2021)

> I try to stick to the original as much as possible. Every screenwriter has their own style, and I try to reflect it in the Ukrainian version. Naturally, it's not always possible, especially when it comes to phraseological units or swearing.
>
> Olga from Dublicat (personal communication, October 6, 2021)

Another noteworthy point is the quality of the translation that informal voice actors receive. All AVT modes are forms of "constrained translation" (Mayoral et al., 1988), meaning that the translation process is constrained by the technical features of the specific media for which the translation is made. In conventional subtitling, for instance, subtitlers often need to rephrase a potentially more accurately translated sentence in a more concise way so that it does not exceed the character limit. As for the informal Ukrainian voiceover, translated utterances must match the original ones in length when pronounced, maintaining isochrony, and striving to keep words such as names in the same time point as the original to maximise lip synchrony. In formal dubbing industries, translators specialise in this particular AVT mode, i.e., have skills such as respecting lip synchrony and isochrony, with Fedir Sydoruk being one such example in Ukraine. Some informal voiceover groups, e.g., Ether Production (personal communication, June 11, 2021) and Breloque (personal communication, June 8, 2021), are founded by professional voice actors working for major formal revoicing studios. They have industry connections and can invite specialised translators, including Sydoruk, to prepare translations for their informal revoicing projects. However, more commonly, translators producing subtitles for the groups are simply people with knowledge of the source language, meaning their subtitles are rarely suitable for recording without additional editing (Chief Studio, personal communication, July 13, 2021; Gwean & Maslinka, personal communication, September 29, 2021). Often, the responsibility to adapt the translation to the original timings lies with the voice actor during the recording stage. Before that, the translation (in the form of subtitles) must be distributed among the voiceover cast, which is the goal of the next stage.

3.2. Role Assignment

The project coordinator (usually the group's founder) colour-codes[9] the subtitles that they would have received from the translator, assigning a distinct colour to each character. The project coordinator decides on the voiceover cast, i.e., which characters will be revoiced by which actors,

---

[9] A standard tool in any subtitling software.

taking into consideration character synchrony Mayoral et al. (1998, p. 59), which is "the harmony between the image of the character and his or her voice and words". It implies matching the age, gender, speech peculiarities and overall voice style of individual characters on screen. For instance, in Stranger Things (2016), the character Dustin Henderson is played by an actor with a rare bone condition affecting the growth of his teeth, which noticeably affects his speech (LaMotte, 2020). In the voiceover by Breloque, the actor revoicing Dustin similarly imitates this speech peculiarity. Furthermore, there have been cases where a group's approach to casting was guided by the goal to match the actor's voice not so much to the one in the original but to the one in the official Ukrainian translation. TVAnimation.ua's revoicing of The Simpsons (1989) offers a notable example here.

The voiceover group TVAnimation.ua picked up the translation of the sitcom starting from its 33rd season, making the series accessible to the Ukrainian-speaking audience days after their premiere in the U.S., unlike the official Ukrainian broadcasts, which would often premiere a year later, if at all. All previous seasons of The Simpsons had already been officially revoiced by Ukrainian broadcasters, which showed the animated series. Throughout all previous seasons, the revoicing cast has remained the same. The voice of Yevhen Malukha, the actor who revoiced Homer Simpson, has become particularly recognisable to the Ukrainian audience. "The voice of Homer" has become a common way to refer to the actor. Knowing this strong association between Malukha's voice and the character, TVAnimation.ua managed to secure him – alongside the other three actors, who dubbed the rest of the characters in the official version – for their informal translation. In 2020, the group also created an additional Ukrainian translation of *The Simpsons Movie* (2007), although it had already been dubbed in Ukrainian for its official cinema screening back in 2007. TVAnimation.ua did their own informal version because the official dubbing studio hired a different actor for Homer's character. Over time, the group received many requests from the audience to create a translation with "the canonical voice" of Malukha, as they ultimately did. Specifically, since the rest of the actors in the official dubbing remained the same, the group has taken the official dubbing as a base, only replacing Homer's voice. What these cases highlight is that the informal Ukrainian voiceover is not only produced to address the lack of Ukrainian translation but also to meet the Ukrainian audience's quality expectations.

3.3. Recording

When the cast is decided upon, the project coordinator distributes the video file with subtitles among the actors, and the group begins recording. Typically, each actor records their part at home, using their own equipment and preferred software. The quality of their workspaces varies, as even the most basic-level voiceover can be created with just a microphone and a PC. Yet, in this case, even if the acting skills and translation quality are outstanding, the result would likely be deemed unacceptable by viewers. AdrianZP (personal communication, July 22, 2021), a voiceover practitioner as well as the coordinator of numerous informal voiceover projects, suggests the following list of the basic equipment and conditions for a home studio recording to be of adequate quality: a condenser microphone with a pop filter; a pantograph or a floor stand for the microphone, ideally with a shock

mount to reduce vibrations; acoustic foam or covering radiators, mirrors, and glass surfaces with a blanket to eliminate echo (see Figures 2–4 for examples).

The most commonly used software includes Sony Vegas (Pro), Cubase, FL Studio, Adobe Audition, Adobe Premiere (Pro), and Reaper, with the software choice varying not only among different groups but also between actors within one project. Unlike subtitling software, none of these applications are free. Most voiceover groups admitted to using pirated software, a common aspect of informal practices (e.g., see Ameri & Khoshsaligheh, 2019; Carter, 2018).

Figure 2

Home Workspace of AdrianZP

Figure 3

Home Workspace of one of the Members of SVOÏ Production

Figure 4

Home Workspace of Bozhena

An important nuance of this stage, which differs considerably from recording in a formal setting, is that actors are responsible for supervising their own acting, sound quality, and ensuring that the length of their utterances aligns with the original timings. They start by listening to the original phrase, familiarising themselves with intonations, emotions, and any other peculiarities of a given utterance, and reading the translation (subtitles) to understand what they have to say and how. Subsequently, they record their utterance and immediately replay it along with the original to assess the overall quality and timings. If anything is unsatisfactory, they re-record their line until they are happy with the result before moving on to the next utterance. This is where actors often modify the

provided translation to make their line longer or shorter to match the original timings, or to rephrase it in a way that sounds more natural. Table 1 illustrates an example of how a line can be changed during this process.

Table 1

Example of Translation Editing for Rick and Morty (2013) by AdrianZP

Original:	Version provided by a translator to AdrianZP:	The final version recorded by AdrianZP:
Nah, get – get outta here.	*Ні, і вимітайтеся вже.*	*Ні, вимітайтеся вже.*
I've got a million things I've been putting off.	*В мене купа справ, які я хочу зробити.*	*Маю в планах купу справ.*
	Back translation: *No, and get out already. I have lots of things that I want to do.*	Back translation: *No, get out already. Got lots of things planned.*

Additionally, some groups may record in an actual recording studio, which can be a rented one or their own. Ether Production, for instance, built a recording booth in a flat, which the founders rented together. Ultimately, however, groups rarely find it financially feasible to rent a studio, and they often resort to home recording. Furthermore, as professional-grade software and hardware have become more accessible, achieving studio-level quality at home has become more realistic. This is evident not only from the revoicing quality of the Ukrainian groups but also from the fact that even formally employed, professional voiceover actors sometimes work from home (Matamala, 2019).

3.4. Sound Mixing

Once recorded, all audio tracks are passed on to the project coordinator to be mixed into the final voiceover track the audience hears. The main task here is to edit the volume of the tracks. At the points where actors speak, the volume of the original should be reduced[10] so that the Ukrainian voices are heard clearly, while the rest should remain at the same level as the voiceover track. Breloque's group lead emphasised that actors need to provide unprocessed sound for sound mixing, meaning they are discouraged from applying any noise reduction tools, which further highlights the importance of having good equipment and ensuring an echo-free, quiet environment for recording (personal communication, June 8, 2021).

---

[10] Depending on individual preferences, it can be reduced to a point that it is nearly inaudible, or simply noticeably lower. But in either case, the priority is given to the voiceover volume rather than to the original.

3.5. Release

After completion, the voiced-over content is made available on Ukrainian torrent and pirate streaming sites, where it can be downloaded or streamed for free. The most popular titles can reach thousands of downloads or streams. Many groups also promote their work on social media, posting links to their respective platforms. For an insight into the motivations that explain why these informal voiceover practitioners undertake such laborious work, see Sivak (2024). Generally, however, their motives tend to fall under one of the following: (1) supporting Ukrainianisation (language activism), (2) passion for the AVT craft (pursuing the craft of revoicing informally due to inability to find formal opportunities), and (3) commercial (least common; involves sponsorship by illegal online casinos and betting sites).

4. Conclusion

The aim of this article was, first and foremost, to introduce the informal Ukrainian voiceover as an AVT mode, albeit an unofficially produced one. I began by providing a brief review of the currently limited scholarship on informal revoicing practices, which includes works such as Nord et al. (2015), Li (2022), and Mertens (2023). I then described the specifics of the voiceover produced by the Ukrainian informal AVT practitioners, namely isochrony, character synchrony, lip synchrony, and acting, noting how this compares to the more well-known types of voiceover used in other genres and contexts. Finally, I offered an insight into how this Ukrainian revoicing is produced, which was obtained through ethnographic research, including interviews with the voiceover practitioners themselves.

More broadly, the goal of this paper is to highlight that informal, unofficial ways of production should not negate the importance of giving due attention to such AVT practices. As noted earlier in the paper, the voiceover discussed here is often the only available translation for the Ukrainian audience; therefore, dismissing this informal AVT practice would effectively mean missing out on the opportunity to explore how a major European market consumes a significant part of media products. Furthermore, an AVT technique such as voiceover should not be overlooked as an object of study simply because it has not been a technique of choice for the majority of Western countries; otherwise, theories within AVT studies risk developing as exclusionary Western-centric and, thus, unable to productively account for AVT practices outside the West. This paper, therefore, aims to encourage more productive accounts of AVT practices in less-studied geographical contexts, as well as in less traditional, formal spaces.

References

Ameri, S., & Khoshsaligheh, M. (2019). Iranian amateur subtitling apparatus: A qualitative investigation. *Mutatis Mutandis. Revista Latinoamericana de Traducción*, *12*(2), 433–453. https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.mut.v12n2a05

Baños, R. (2019a). Fandubbing across time and space: From dubbing 'by fans for fans' to cyberdubbing. In I. Ranzato & S. Zanotti (Eds.), *Reassessing dubbing: Historical approaches and current trends* (pp. 146–167). John Benjamins.

Baños, R. (2019b). Translating reality TV into Spanish: When fast-food TV challenges AVT conventions. *Perspectives*, *27*(2), 265–282. https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676x.2018.1424221

Baños, R. (2020). Fandubbing. In Ł. Bogucki & M. Deckert (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of audiovisual translation and media accessibility* (pp. 209–226). Palgrave Mcmillan.

Baños, R., & Díaz-Cintas, J. (2024). Exploring new forms of audiovisual translation in the age of digital media: Cybersubtitling and cyberdubbing. *The Translator*, *30*(1), 129–144. https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2023.2274119

Barra, L., Brembilla, P., Rossato, L., & Spaziante, L. (2020). "Lip-Sync for Your Life" (Abroad). *Canned TV Going Global*, *9*(17), 119. https://doi.org/10.18146/view.210

BFI (2023). *Official 2022 statistics reveal a record £6.27 billion film and high-end television production spend in the UK*. BFI.org. https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/official-2022-statistics#:~:text=Film%20production%20in%20detail,updated%20to%20%C2%A31.64%20billion

Box Office Mojo (2024). *Number of movies released in the United States and Canada from 2000 to 2023*. Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/187122/movie-releases-in-north-america-since-2001/

Carter, O. (2018). *Making European cult cinema: Fan enterprise in an alternative economy*. Amsterdam University Press.

Chaume, F. (2007). Dubbing practices in Europe: Localisation beats globalisation. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series – Themes in Translation Studies*, *6*, 203–217. https://doi.org/10.52034/lanstts.v0i6.188

Chaume, F. (2013). The turn of audiovisual translation: New audiences and new technologies. *Translation and Entertainment*, *2*, 105–123. https://doi.org/10.1075/ts.2.06cha

Condry, I. (2010). Dark energy: What fansubs reveal about the copyright wars. *Mechademia*, *5*, 193–208. https://doi.org/10.2307/41510964

Crosby, P., & McKenzie, J. (2021, August 17). The more video streaming services we get, the more we'll turn to piracy. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/the-more-video-streaming-services-we-get-the-more-well-turn-to-piracy-166090

Detector, Media. (2021, October 29). Megogo launched its own revoicing studio. By the end of 2022, it plans to localise about 400 titles. *Detector Media*. https://detector.media/production/article/193316/2021-10-29-megogo-zapustyv-vlasnu-studiyu-ozvuchuvannya-do-kintsya-2022-go-planuie-adaptuvaty-blyzko-400-strichok/

Díaz-Cintas, J. (1999). Dubbing or subtitling: The eternal dilemma. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, *7*(1), 31–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.1999.9961346

Díaz-Cintas, J. (2009). Introduction – audiovisual translation: An overview of its potential. In J. Díaz-Cintas (Ed.), *New trends in audiovisual translation* (pp. 1–18). Multilingual Matters.

Donaldson, L. F. (2014). The work of an invisible body: The contribution of foley artists to on-screen effort. *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, *7*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.7.05

Dwyer, T. (2018). Multilingual publics: Fansubbing global TV. In *Contemporary Publics*.

Franco, E., Matamala, A., & Orero, P. (2010). *Voice-over translation: An overview*. Peter Lang.

Glushneva, I. (2020). Translation (dis)junctions, or postsocialist connectivity: Network language transfer and cyberdubbing on the runet. *APRJA*, *9*(1), 94–107.

Hatcher, J. S. (2005). Of otakus and fansubs: A critical look at anime online in light of current issues in copyright law. *2 SCRIPTed*, *2*(4), 514–542. https://doi.org/10.2966/scrip.020405.514

He, T. (2014a). Fansubs and market access of foreign audiovisual products in China: The copyright predicament and the use of no action policy. *Oregon Review of International Law*, *16*(2), 307–346. https://ssrn.com/abstract=2685800

He, T. (2014b). What can we learn from Japanese anime industries: The differences between domestic and overseas copyright protection strategies towards fan activities. *American Journal of Comparative Law*, *62*(4), 1009–1042. https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/amcomp62&i=1035

Hills, M. (2016). Transnational cult and/as neoliberalism: The liminal economies of anime fansubbers. *Transnational Cinemas*, *8*(1), 80–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/20403526.2016.1245921

Iordache, C. (2021). Netflix in Europe: Four markets, four platforms? A comparative analysis of audio-visual offerings and investment strategies in four EU states. *Television & New Media*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/15274764211014580

Karmanska, Y. (2022, December 22). Amazon Prime Video dubbed a series in Ukrainian for the first time. *Forbes Ukraine*. https://forbes.ua/news/amazon-prime-video-vpershe-produblyuvav-serial-ukrainskoyu-22122022-10673

Kirkpatrick, S. (2002). Like holding a bird: What the prevalence of fansubbing can teach us about the use of strategic selective copyright enforcement. *Temple Environmental Law and Technology Journal*, *21*(2), 131–153.

Lambert, K. S. (2006). Unflagging television piracy: How piracy of Japanese television programming in East Asia portends failure for a U.S. broadcast flag. *Texas Law Review*, *84*(5), 1317–1346. https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/tlr84&i=1335

LaMotte, S. (2020, February 20). 'Stranger Things' actor raises public awareness of rare bone disease. *CNN Health*. https://edition.cnn.com/2020/02/20/health/stranger-things-dustin-henderson-rare-disease-wellness/index.html

Lang, B., & Steinberg, B. (2022, 13 October). Why Wall Street fell out of love with Netflix and other media companies. *Variety*. https://variety.com/2022/digital/news/netflix-stock-wall-street-media-companies-streaming-services-1235402352/

Lee, H.-K. (2011). Cultural consumer and copyright: A case study of anime fansubbing. *Creative Industries Journal*, *3*(3), 237–252. https://doi.org/10.1386/cij.3.3.237_1

Li, J. (2022). Malawians' foreign film dubbing, film pirating and consumption as "Weapons of the Weak". *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2022.2077706

Light, B., Burgess, J., & Duguay, S. (2018). The walkthrough method: An approach to the study of apps. *New Media & Society*, *20*(3), 881–900. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816675438

Lobato, R., & Thomas, J. (2015). *The informal media economy*. Polity Press.

Longo, C., & Baiyere, A. (2021, June 20–23). *So, what should I watch? Choice overload among SVOD users* [Conference presentation]. The ISPIM Innovation Conference – Innovating Our

Common Future, Berlin. https://research.cbs.dk/en/publications/so-what-should-i-watch-choice-overload-among-svod-users

Massidda, S. (2020). Fansubbing: Latest trends and future prospects. In Ł. Bogucki & M. Deckert (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of audiovisual translation and media accessibility* (pp. 189–208). Palgrave Macmillan.

Matamala, A. (2019). Voice-over: Practice, research and future prospects. In L. Pérez-González (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of audiovisual translation* (pp. 64–81). Routledge.

Mayoral, R., Kelly, D., & Gallardo, N. (1988). Concept of constrained translation. Non-linguistic perspectives of translation. *Meta*, *33*(3), 356–367. https://doi.org/10.7202/003608ar

Mertens, J. (2023). Abridged anime and the distance in fan-dubbing: Interpreting culture through parody and fan appropriation. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *0*(0), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/13678779221145439

Nord, C., Khoshsaligheh, M., & Ameri, S. (2015). Socio-cultural and technical issues in non-expert dubbing: A case study. *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language*, *3*(2), 1–16. http://www.ijscl.net/article_11734_b9fac3605ffb0c68da832760430a527b.pdf

NV.UA. (2021, January 5). SWEET.TV Creates unique Ukrainian dubbing for major films as part of "Hollywood in Ukrainian" project. How and why they do it. *NV.UA*. https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/events/sweet-tv-dopomagaye-ozvuchuvati-kultovi-filmi-ukrajinskoyu-i-rozigruye-shchodnya-samsung-4k-50131485.html

O'Connell, E. (2007). Screen translation. In P. Kuhiwczak & K. Littau (Eds.), *A companion to translation studies* (pp. 120–133). Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Pedersen, J. (2019). Fansubbing in subtitling land: An investigation into the nature of fansubs in Sweden. *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies*, *31*(1), 50–76. https://doi.org/10.1075/target.18017.ped

Perego, E., & Pacinotti, R. (2020). Audiovisual translation through the ages. In Ł. Bogucki & M. Deckert (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of audiovisual translation and media accessibility* (pp. 33–56). Palgrave Macmillan.

Pérez-González, L. (2019). Fan audiovisual translation. In M. Baker & G. Saldanha (Eds.), *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies,* (3rd ed., pp. 172–177). Rouledge.

Rossato, L. (2020). Reality television and unnatural dialogues: Trends in the Italian audio-visual translation of factual programming. *The Journal of Popular Television*, *8*(3), 277–283. https://doi.org/10.1386/jptv_00026_1

Sepielak, K., & Matamala, A. (2014). Synchrony in the voice-over of Polish fiction genres. *Babel*, *60*(2), 145–163. https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.60.2.02sep

Shafirova, L., & Cassany, D. (2019). Bronies learning English in the digital wild. *Language Learning & Technology*, *23*(1), 127–144. https://doi.org/10125/44676

Sileo, A. (2020). Dubbing or *simil sync*? A study on reception in Italy. In G. Magazzù, V. Rossi & A. Sileo (Eds.), *Reception studies and adaptation: A focus on Italy* (pp. 174–190). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Silverman, D. (Director). (2007). *The Simpsons Movie* [Film]. 20th Century Studios; Film Flex.

Sivak, K. (2023). *The informal screen media economy of Ukraine*. [Doctoral dissertation, Birmingham City University]. https://www.open-access.bcu.ac.uk/14935/

Sivak, K. (2024). Pirates' voices: Motivations of pirate film translators and fistributors in Ukraine. In J. Morrison & S. Pedersen (Eds.), *Silenced voices and the media: Who gets to speak?* (pp. 275–292). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-65403-9_18

Skomorokhova, S. (2012). 'Goblinism' and translator's visibility in post-soviet Russian translation practice. *Nova Filologicka Revue*, *4*(2), 25–39. http://193.87.33.23/record/554/files/1338-0583(201212)04_02.pdf#page=25

Sofienko, I. V. (2014). The development of film translation in Ukraine. *Linguistic and Conceptual Perspectives on the World*, *50*(2), 401–405. http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Mikks_2014_50%282%29__59

Tereshchenko, L. Y. (2017). Mistakes in audiovisual translation: Linguistic and didactic aspects. *MESSENGER of Kyiv National Linguistic University. Series Philology*, *21*(1), 168–177. https://doi.org/10.32589/2311-0821.1.2018.135673

Weston, O. (2022). Interventional strategies in the Ukrainian dubbing of "The Simpsons Movie" (2007). *Cognitive Studies | Études cognitives*, *22*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.11649/cs.2499

Woźniak, M. (2012). Voice-over or voice-in-between? Some considerations about the voice-over Translation of feature films on Polish television. In A. Remael, P. Orero & M. Carroll (Eds.), *Audiovisual translation and media accessibility at the crossroads. Media for All 3* (pp. 209–228). Rodopi.

Zhang, L.-T., & Vazquez-Calvo, B. (2022). "¿Triste estás? I don't know Nan Molla": Multilingual pop song fandubs by @miree_music. *ITL – International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *173*(2), 197–227. https://doi.org/10.1075/itl.21007.zha

Żurek, I. (2020). Audiovisual translation as a genre: Its evolution and perspectives. *Studia Filologiczne*, *7*, 69–82. http://studiafilologiczne.pwsz.raciborz.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/TEKST_Studia_Filologiczne-nr7_17x24_wer2.pdf