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## The Pragmatic Theory of Politeness in TV Subtitling

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Subtitling for television is an area that has only recently come into focus of translation studies. This paper, based on our recent research in the area, highlights the specific features of subtitling and then illustrates how these may serve to shed light on particular aspects of the translation process. The pragmatic notion of politeness is examined against the backdrop of the many constraints inherent to the subtitling technique.

Until very recently, only a small amount of research had been conducted in the area of translation for television and the cinema. The papers, few in number, mainly focused on particular difficulties involved in the translator's task, or else contrasted the two most frequently employed techniques – subtitling and dubbing – advocating one in favour of the other, often in no uncertain terms. Between 1970 and 1990, academic studies conducted in this area were few and far between, and it was only in the 1990s that translation scholars recognised the possibilities that this “poor relation” offered to the study of the translation process and its various aspects.<sup>1</sup>

This paper will show that it is precisely the specific features of this type of translation that allow for an in-depth analysis of the translation process by shedding light on particular elements and their role in achieving the overall communicative goal of a given text. We will focus on a single dimension of this complex process, the pragmatic<sup>2</sup> one, and more particularly on a single category – politeness. By looking into subtitling as a translation

<sup>1</sup> Among the authors who have tried to incorporate screen translation into a comprehensive model for the study of the translation process are Basil Hatim and Ian Mason of Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh (Mason 1989; Hatim and Mason 1997). For other literature written in this area, see the Bibliography. A comprehensive list can be found on [www.transedit.st](http://www.transedit.st), a website run by J. Ivarsson.

<sup>2</sup> The pragmatic dimension of context is related to our ability to “do things with words” (Austin 1962).



process, we will try to show what kinds of elements tend to get lost in translation, and what effect such losses may have on the target text (TT).

## Subtitling

For a subtitler translating television feature films and serials (further 'TVF/S texts') the question of choice is closely related to the specific features of the subtitling technique, the most important of which are the following:

- The constraints of available time and space, requiring reduction and adaptation of the source text (ST);
- The requirement to match the TT with the language component, the picture component and the sound component of the source product which is a polysemiotic text;
- The existence of two sets of participants in the communication act;
- The mode shift from speech to writing.

Given the exacting – and often conflicting – demands these factors may impose on the translator's choices, it is imperative to say a few words about each one before any linguistic analysis can take place.

## Constraints of time and space

The main goal of TV subtitling, which is one of the techniques<sup>3</sup> employed in the translation of television products, is to enable the viewers to watch the programme originally written in a language they do not understand, or do not understand well enough. A TV subtitle<sup>4</sup> consists of one or two (occasionally three) lines of translation, mostly in

<sup>3</sup> The other techniques are voice-over, dubbing, and consecutive or simultaneous interpreting. On Croatian Television (HRT), voice-over, sometimes combined with subtitling, is used for the translation of documentaries. The translator produces a written translation of the ST, which a professional TV narrator reads in the studio and this is recorded "over" the original sound recording. Dubbing, on the other hand, is aimed at creating the impression that the on-screen characters are actually saying the words that the viewers can hear. This technique requires great skill not only on the part of the translator, but also the actors who will read the lines in the studio. HRT employs dubbing very successfully, but its use is limited to the translation of cartoons. Simultaneous or consecutive interpreting is used in programmes featuring a guest in the studio, while big news breaking stories taken directly from satellite stations are generally interpreted simultaneously simply because time is of essence.

<sup>4</sup> Subtitles developed from "intertitles", descriptive titles drawn or printed on paper, filmed and placed between sequences of the film. The first intertitle appeared in 1903 and disappeared with the invention of sound film (1927). The idea to place the printed text in the image appeared very early and was later used for the purposes of translation. For more details on the history of subtitling see Ivarsson 1995b. New technical developments are described in Ivarsson 1995a.



white or yellowish letters against a darker background, appearing near the bottom of the screen simultaneously with the source text and its accompanying moving image. The number of characters allowed per each subtitle depends on the equipment used in the process. On Croatian Television (HRT) it is up to 33 characters per line (including spaces), or 66 characters per subtitle.

Another type of constraint is that of available time. A subtitle should remain on the screen for at least two seconds, while a two-line, “full” subtitle should not disappear before six seconds have expired. It is important to point out that a subtitle should neither remain on the screen for too short a period of time – for obvious reasons – nor should it remain there longer than necessary. The latter is just as important as the former: a subtitle hanging around for too long can be as irritating as that disappearing before one has had a chance to grasp its content. Furthermore, the reception of a TVF/S text is a linear activity, in the sense that textual elements appear one after another in a sequence of time. The possibility of returning to preceding elements, which characterises the reception of written texts in general – and even of translated films on video tapes – is not an option here.<sup>5</sup> This is why the subtitler must make painstaking efforts to ensure maximum coherence and retrievability of meaning for the end receiver, who does not get a second chance once the soundtrack dialogue and its correspondent subtitles have moved on. To do this in the very limited time and space available to the subtitler requires no small amount of skill and ingenuity.

## Polysemiotic text

Another factor governing the subtitling technique has to do with the nature of the television product as a ‘polysemiotic text’ (PST). The latter notion refers to the fact that what TV audiences receive via the audio-visual channel is a text consisting of a variety of language and non-language components<sup>6</sup>, all of which stand in a complex relationship with both one another and the subtitled TT. In translating the language component of a PST, coherence is required between the subtitled text and the source text of the language component, as well as between the subtitled text and the elements/signs/values of the non-language components.

Matching the subtitled text to what the audience can see on the screen may be relatively simple most of the time, with the moving image actually benefiting the

<sup>5</sup> Except, of course, if a TV product is videotaped. This possibility is not an integral part of a TVF/S text, which is why the subtitler cannot – and should not – count on it.

<sup>6</sup> For the translator, the most important component is the language component, which is mostly spoken (oral), but occasionally also written. Although the non-language component (which includes the visual image, sounds, music, etc.) is not translated as such, it is very closely connected to the translator’s task, precisely because the language component is only one – and arguably not even the most important – component of the polysemiotic text.



translator and enabling him or her to reduce the ST with little or no loss to the end receiver. The picture component can, however, create additional constraints, not the least important of which is the requirement of allowing the viewers enough time to *watch* what is happening on the screen rather than having them spend all their time reading the subtitles.<sup>7</sup> This means that the TT needs to be shorter<sup>8</sup> than the ST, but also more readable, clearer, and more coherent. The translator must adapt the cohesion strategies to the conciseness of the TT in such a way as to ensure maximum retrievability of meaning for the end receiver. Cohesion devices such as recurrence, which is always motivated in the ST, are often a luxury the subtitler cannot afford to preserve in the TT.

## Two sets of participants

If all texts can be viewed as acts of communication, the same can be said of TV texts. What makes a TV text, particularly a 'TVF/S text' interesting is the existence of two sets of participants in communication.<sup>9</sup> Writing about subtitling for the cinema, Hatim and Mason (1997:83) provide a useful scheme for looking at the communicative situation of film dialogue, as shown in Fig.1.

·Text producer 1 = script writer (film producer, director, etc.)
·Text producer 2 = character A on screen
·Text receiver 1 = character B on screen
·Text receiver 2 = viewers
·(Text receiver 3 = other potential receivers, such as programme editors, censors, etc.)

<sup>7</sup> Another type of problem arises when there is a play on words hinging on the connection between the language component and the visual image, which requires a fair degree of ingenuity on the part of the subtitler.

<sup>8</sup> On average, a subtitled text is about 30 percent shorter than a corresponding "full" translation. See Ivarsson 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Two sets of participants in communication exist in certain other kinds of texts featuring fictional dialogue, such as novels. While the characters communicate as real persons within the textual world, the author (through their conversation) communicates with the reader. As far as other types of TV texts are concerned, the most obvious example is the TV interview, in which the host interviews a guest in the studio. The communication takes place between the two interlocutors, who alternate in their roles of text producer and text receiver. But in addition to these participants we can see on screen, there is another type of text receivers – the viewers – for whom the text is in fact intended. Whatever the host and the interviewee say to each other, they do for the sake of the viewers. Furthermore, behind the host of the programme, we can sense the presence of another participant (or group of participants) in communication: the author(s) of the programme (producer, editor, TV station), who are in fact the initiator of the situation in the studio and who are trying to say something to the viewers in this particular way. See Alexieva 1999 : 348.



## Figure 1 – TVF/S texts: participants in communication

If the text is encoded in a language that the end receiver does not understand, the situation is made all the more complex by the existence of an additional participant in communication, the translator. The translator's task is to 'preserve the coherence'<sup>10</sup> of communication between addressees on screen at the same time as relaying a coherent discourse from screenwriter to mass auditors' (Hatim and Mason 1997 : 84). Two kinds of intentionality can be discerned in every TVF/S text: one operating on the level of communication between the fictional characters on screen, and the other on the level of communication between the scriptwriter and the viewers. The intentions of text producer 1 and text producer 2 (scriptwriter and character A) can, but often do not, overlap. The translator frequently finds him/herself torn between the two conflicting demands, and has to decide which of the two levels of intentionality to preserve. It seems logical that the subtitler's top priority should be to establish coherence for the end receivers (the viewers), with the demand for preserving the pragmatic dimension of relations between the on-screen characters taking second place. In this paper we shall try to show to what extent the pragmatic indicators are lost in subtitling and what effects that loss may have on the pragmatics of inter-personal relations between the fictional characters.

### Mode shift

Translation into subtitles involves a shift in 'mode' from speech to writing. Mode refers to that aspect of register describing the medium selected for language activity.<sup>11</sup> Mode shift is an important and relatively well-documented aspect of subtitling, especially insofar as it affects the other aspects of register such as 'tenor'<sup>12</sup>, features of dialect, sociolect, tonal register, etc. What we are interested in here are the features of register in the service of inter-personal pragmatics of fictional characters or, in other words, how this mode shift affects the pragmatic dimension of context.

<sup>10</sup> On cohesion and coherence see Halliday and Hasan 1976.

<sup>11</sup> The 'mode' of TVF/S texts is mainly spoken and only sporadically written. To be more precise, we can embrace the model proposed by Gregory and Carroll (1978: 47) and describe these texts as having been 'written in order to be spoken as if not written'. If we analyse the supposedly spontaneous conversation between the fictional characters, we cannot disregard the presence of a scriptwriter somewhere in the background, nor can we forget that there existed a script, a written text, before there was any on-screen dialogue. Nevertheless, a script is all the more successful if it resembles spontaneous conversation, which is why the two types of communication have a lot in common.

<sup>12</sup> 'Tenor' is that aspect of register related to the relationship between the participants in communication (level of formality and distance), as well as to what a language user is trying to achieve with particular use of language ('emotional', 'manipulative', 'authoritative' tenor). A prominent tenor-related feature of a subtitled translation is neutralisation or levelling in the TT of various kinds of ST tenor. This is due primarily to the mode shift from speech to writing, but also to the nature of television as a means of mass communication.



## Theory of ‘politeness’

The term ‘politeness’ is not used here in its general-language sense, but rather it refers to the way in which interlocutors accommodate to each other, by modifying (attenuating or strengthening) the force of their utterances to suit what they deem to be appropriate to the immediate communicated situation (Brown and Levinson 1987). In other words, the term covers all aspects of language use that serve to establish, maintain or modify interpersonal relationships between the text producer and the text receiver. On the level of texture, politeness indicators include lexical choice, syntactical structure, intonation, ambiguity (vagueness), unfinished utterance, modality, as well as conventional expressions of politeness. Especially important indicators of politeness dynamics are attenuators or down-toners, which can tone down the aggressiveness of an assertion, and intensifiers or boosters, which strengthen the force of an utterance.

The theory proposed by Brown and Levinson rests on the assumption that all language users have what they describe as ‘face’, which they want to maintain in communication. It is in the language users’ mutual interest to maintain each other’s face; hence they maintain their own face, but also their interlocutor’s in order for the interlocutor to maintain their face in return. For this purpose they employ a series of ‘face-saving strategies’, which minimise risk in situations that are referred to as ‘face-threatening acts’ (FTA). The more an act threatens the speaker’s or the hearer’s face, the more drastic the strategy the speaker will select.

## ‘Face-saving strategies’ in subtitled translation

In order to illustrate a face-saving strategy, we provide a very simple example from the TV serial *ER*<sup>13</sup>, as shown in Sample 1.

### Sample 1

<i>Finn:</i>	<u>Excuse me. You gonna be in here long?</u>	<u>Oprostite, hoćete li još</u>	<u>Excuse me, will you</u>	ER 011
<i>Weaver:</i>	No. Almost done. Just a minute.	<u>duogo?</u> -Ne, sad ću biti gotova	<u>be long?</u> -No, I’ll be done now.	

<sup>13</sup> *ER* (translated into Croatian as *Hitna služba*) V/25, episode no. 467553 (“*They Treat Horses, Don’t They?*”). The number in the far right-hand column of each text sample denotes the ordinal number of the subtitle. The first column contains the source text with the names of characters, the second column shows the subtitled translation as it appeared on the screen, and the third column is the formal (rather literal) translation of the Croatian subtitle for the sake of non-Croatian speakers. The programme was translated by an experienced and well-versed TV subtitler.



In Sample 1, *Finn* has come to paint the room in which *Weaver* is using a photocopier. She is in the way and he wants to ‘do something with words’, namely, make her leave the room. The situation implies a ‘face-threat’, and *Finn* has a whole series of face-saving strategies at his disposal, ranging from one which would completely eliminate the ‘face-threat’ (by his not carrying out the FTA at all) to one which would threaten the interlocutor’s – and potentially also his own – face the most (by simply telling her to move out of the way). He selects a strategy somewhere in between the two extremes, combining obliqueness of utterance (“you gonna be in here long” in fact means “I want you out of here”) and a formal expression of politeness (“excuse me”). The strategy, together with the interpersonal pragmatics, has been preserved in the subtitled translation despite its being slightly shorter than the ST.

The next sample should illustrate how the pragmatic indicators of politeness can be lost in the process of TV subtitling:

<i>Carter:</i>	I guess these are the, um, these are the cables that go with that?	Ovi kabeli idu s tim? -To su RCA Kabeli.	<u>These cables go with that?</u> -Those are RCACables	ER456
<i>Roxanne:</i>	No. <u>Actually</u> , those are RCA cables.			

### Sample 2

*Carter* and *Roxanne* have met recently and this is the first time they meet in *Carter*’s apartment. *Roxanne* is something of an expert when it comes to stereo systems since she used to sell them<sup>14</sup>, and she is putting together *Carter*’s new stereo. *Carter* is obviously not as well-versed, but he is doing his best to ‘save his face’. The indicators present in the ST are an attenuator (“I guess”), unfinished, hesitant utterance with recurrence (“these are the, um, these are the...”), and interrogative sentence structure. *Roxanne* is also trying to save his face by using the conventional attenuator “actually”. All the indicators except the interrogative structure have been lost in translation. By relying only on the subtitled text, we would not be able to get a full picture of the interpersonal pragmatics between the two characters, such as the one emerging from the ST.

Let us now consider another example (Sample 3) from the same episode of *ER* in order to establish to what extent it is possible to preserve the pragmatic dimension of politeness in TV subtitling, and how the loss of those indicators affects the final product.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. subtitle no 454 of the same episode.



<i>Benton:</i>	There is one thing though. Um... this hearing aid is expensive. And I just found out that my insurance won't cover it.	No taj je aparat skup. Saznao sam da ga osiguranje ne plaća. But the aid is expensive.	I found out the insurance doesn't cover it.	ER 230
<i>Carla:</i> <i>Benton:</i>	Well, why won't they? Well, they don't cover for anybody. That way they don't have to pay for the elderly.	Zašto? -Da ga ne moraju plaćati starijim ljudima.	Why? -So they don't have to pay it for the elderly.	ER 231
<i>Carla:</i> <i>Benton:</i>	Oh, that's so low. Yeah. I hate asking this...	Kako podlo! -Da. Nerado te pitam...	How low! -Yes. I hate asking you...	ER 232
<i>Benton:</i> <i>(cont'd)</i>	But this thing is five thousand dollars. And I've only got twenty-seven hundred in the bank. So I was...	To stoji 5000 \$, a ja imam samo 2700 u banci. Zato...	It costs \$5000, and I only have 2700 in the bank. So...	ER 233
<i>Carla:</i>	Peter, I said that we share everything and I meant everything, okay? It means we share everything.	Peter, rekla sam da dijelimo sve i tako sam i mislila.	Peter, I said we share everything and that's what I meant.	ER 234
<i>Carla:</i> <i>(cont'd)</i>	Don't worry about it. Let's just be happy that something can be done. Okay?	Ne brini se. Budimo sretni da se nešto može učiniti.	Don't worry. Let's be happy something can be done.	ER 235

### Sample 3

In Sample 3, the two interlocutors are *Benton* and the mother of his son, *Carla*, with whom he is no longer in a relationship. *Benton* has just told *Carla* that their son *Reese*, who is hearing-impaired, can be helped by a digital hearing aid. In the sequence in Sample 3, *Benton* finds himself in a situation that is a classic example of a 'face-threatening act': he wants *Carla* to pay part of the money needed to buy the hearing aid for *Reese*.

*Benton* begins with a face-saving strategy using indirect utterance: "the hearing aid is expensive", "the insurance won't pay for it". The FTA has additionally been attenuated by the conventional formula "There's one thing though", which paves the way and signals to the interlocutor that what follows may contain a face-threat. Since *Carla* does not offer money straight away, but wants to know why the insurance will not pay for the hearing aid, *Benton* is forced to continue with the FTA. He is still indirect, but this time slightly more concrete: "this thing is \$5000", "I've only got 2700 in the bank". To attenuate the face-threat caused by this, he employs some additional devices: another conventional attenuator "I hate asking you this", together with unfinished utterance with a verb in the past tense and implicit modality: "So I was...[wondering if you could...][hoping that you might...]".





At this point *Carla* takes over, also using a face-saving strategy. She does not explicitly mention money, but instead reminds him of her promise that they would share everything. She repeats this several times to impart greater force to her words. *Carla* makes an additional effort to attenuate *Benton's* possible face-loss by using the conventional "Don't worry about it." The strategy she employs in her next sentence tones down the importance of what *Benton* is asking of her, reducing the face-threat even further: if what he wants is not important (the important thing is that something can be done for *Reese*), then the threat to his face – and, indirectly, to hers – has been minimised.

Both participants in this act of communication put in a great deal of effort in order to maintain their own and their interlocutor's face. What could have been expressed in half a dozen words on the level of basic content ("Pay \$2300 for *Reese's* hearing aid. –OK."), in fact took as many as 75 words in the ST. For the requirement of efficiency<sup>15</sup> to be violated to such an extent, there has to be a good reason, which in this particular situation can be accounted for only if we take into consideration the pragmatic notion of 'politeness'.

The subtitled translation, whose most prominent feature is inherently its conciseness, cannot even begin to compete with the ST in situations when pragmatic factors demand such length. Some indicators of politeness simply have to be lost. In Sample 3, it is the conventional formula "There's one thing, though", and the cohesive device of recurrence ("I said that we share everything and I meant everything, okay? It means we share everything."). But it would be wrong to assume that all the indicators have been lost in translation. In fact, quite a few have been preserved: obliqueness in ER 230 and 233; the conventional formula combined with the unfinished utterance *Benton* uses in ER 232 ("I hate asking this..."), and *Carla's* attempt to make light of his request (ER 235). The latter might have been further emphasised if "Don't worry about it" had been translated as "Nije važno" ("Never mind") or "Pusti to" ("Forget it"), both of which are more natural Croatian down-toners than the literal "Ne brini se".

The category of 'politeness' largely depends on other pragmatic variables. For instance, greater 'distance' and/or difference in 'role' will cause greater face-threat and will therefore require more drastic politeness strategies. 'Power' and 'solidarity' will play an equally important role in the dynamics, as Sample 4 illustrates:

<sup>15</sup> De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981:123) list several guiding principles governing textual communication. Together these principles can be summed up in the following way: how to achieve maximum 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency' in communication. Effectiveness is a requirement for optimum achievement of a communicative goal, and efficiency has to do with achieving a communicative goal in the most economic manner possible. Language users counter-balance the two principles to achieve maximum effect for minimum effort. See also Grice's 'principle of cooperation' in Grice 1975 and 1978.

<i>Lucy:</i>	Malik, could I ask you a question? Which do you think is the better vein?	Malik, što mislite, koja je vena bolja? – Da vidim.	Malik, which do you think is the better vein? – Let's see.	ER 158
<i>Malik:</i>	Let's see...			
<i>Malik:</i>	That's the one. Big and straight.	Ova. Velika i ravna. Samo uvucite iglu, ništa ne osjeća.	This one. Big and straight.	ER 159
<i>Lucy:</i>	Okay.		Just slide the needle in, he can't feel anything.	
<i>Malik:</i>	Just slide it in. He can't feel anything.			
<i>Lucy:</i>	All right. It's going in. Got a flash. I'm advancing.	Uvlačim. Ulazi krv.	I'm getting it in. The blood is flowing in.	ER 160
<i>Malik:</i>	Sapphire pinkie ring? This man ain't got no class.	Safirni prsten za mali prst? Čovjek nema stila.	Sapphire ring on his little finger? Man's got no class.	ER 161
<i>Lucy:</i>	Hooked up the line, got the tape.	Uvlačim kateter, lijepim flaster.	I'm introducing the catheter, sticking the tape.	ER 162
<i>Lucy:</i>	How come it's not running in?	Zašto ne curi?	Why isn't it running in?	ER 163
<i>Malik:</i>	It's infiltrated. You went all the way through the vein.	Probili ste venu.	You've pierced the vein.	ER 164
<i>Lucy:</i>	No. I was really careful.	– Tako sam pazila!	– I was so careful!	
<i>Malik:</i>	Well, Lucy, you gotta be kinda Zen with it, okay? Now, watch the master, okay?	Morate imati intuiciju i biti smireni. Gledajte majstora.	You must have intuition and be calm. Watch the master.	ER 165
<i>Malik:</i>	It's not about seeing. It's not about feeling. It's about knowing.	Ne radi se o gledanju niti o osjećaju. Sve je u znanju.	It's not about seeing or feeling. It all has to do with knowing.	ER 166
<i>Jarvik:</i>	Malik, you got a phone call in Admit.	Malik, telefonski poziv.	Malik, a telephone call.	ER 167
<i>Malik:</i>	Okay, it's in.	– Ušla je. Sad završite.	– It's in. Now finish it.	
<i>Lucy:</i>	Okay.			
<i>Malik:</i>	Now, finish it up.			
<i>Lucy:</i>	Mm-hm.			
<i>Malik:</i>	I'll take it out there. Okay?	Preuzet ću ondje. Možete?	I'll take it out there.	ER 168
<i>Lucy:</i>	Yup.	– Aha.	Can you do it? – Yeah.	
<i>Malik:</i>	Now, keep an eye on this guy, too.	– I pripazite na njega.	– Keep an eye on him, too.	

#### Sample 4

In Sample 4, the conversation takes place between *Malik*, an ER nurse, and *Lucy*, an intern. *Lucy* is asking *Malik* a favour, which in itself presents a face-threat. The threat is all the greater because of the 'distance' between them, which arises partly from their different 'roles', and partly from their race (*Lucy* is white and *Malik* black). An additional



factor is the fact that *Lucy* has only recently joined the ER, while *Malik* has worked there for some time. These are the reasons for *Lucy*'s indirectness ("Malik, could I ask you a question? Which do you think is the better vein?"), which is aimed at minimising the chances of her or *Malik* – or even both of them – losing their face. The loss would most certainly occur if *Lucy* addressed *Malik* by saying something along the lines of "Come here and help me with this IV!". This would be possible only if there were far less 'distance' between the interlocutors, such as may be the case between two colleagues of the same rank who have worked together for a long time. *Malik* might respond to such a 'face threat' by saying it was her job, or point out the fact that she is incapable of doing it on her own, which would in turn threaten her face, and so forth. As it is, *Lucy* resorts to 'negative politeness' by using obliqueness of expression and interrogative structure, at the same time addressing *Malik* by his first name in order to reduce 'distance' between them and thus conforming to the norms of 'positive politeness'. The combination of the two strategies allows *Lucy* to achieve a high level of 'solidarity', but her complex manoeuvre does not stop there. In addition to accommodating to *Malik*'s 'face-wants' (and thus, by extension, her own), she further attempts to save her face by using another device: the medical 'tenor'. This is especially true of the medical jargon *Lucy* uses to mask her insecurity and show that she is in control: "Got a flash. I'm advancing", "Hooked up the line, got the tape".

Having thus accommodated to *Malik*'s 'face wants' and maintaining her own at the same time, *Lucy* is rewarded by her interlocutor's response. He uses a jocular, friendly tenor coupled with short, laconic, often elliptical utterances associated with intimate, informal types of discourse to maintain 'solidarity'. His use of language is, therefore, also aimed at reducing the 'distance' between the two interlocutors, but not to such an extent as to present a 'face-threat' of a different kind. In this way, both characters make a great deal of effort to save – each other's and their own – face, maintaining at the same time their 'roles' and a certain, desirable, level of 'distance'.

After we have looked into the pragmatic indicators in the ST, let us examine the extent to which they have been preserved in the subtitled translation. *Lucy*'s two introductory questions, which are an indirect request for help with the IV, have been reduced to one, with "could I ask you a question" being left out. The first name has been retained to indicate 'solidarity', while the V-form of address implies 'distance' and perhaps also respect. Obliqueness in "which do you think is the better vein" has also been preserved in translation. This part of the text has thus been rendered slightly less forceful in terms of 'politeness' than the ST, with the subtitled *Lucy* sounding a bit more direct, but the overall impression is not too far from the original, thanks to those indicators that have been preserved.

*Malik*, on the other hand, leaves a more neutral impression than its ST version: many indicators of informal tenor have been lost ("pinkie", "ain't got no", "gotta be kinda"), as have the attenuators ("well", "okay", "now") and recurrence ("It's not about seeing. It's not about feeling. It's about knowing"). The only indicators of informal tenor apparent in



the TT are to be found in ER 161 (“Man’s got no class”),<sup>16</sup> and in ER 165 where the word “majstor” used in this context sounds slangy and facetious.

*Lucy’s* medical jargon has been even more neutralised in the TT: the only indicator of the medical tenor is the word “catheter”, which, although formal and specialist, does not suggest the experience and in-group membership reflected in the ST use of jargon.

## Conclusion

We have looked at two pairs of speakers – with different kinds of ‘role’ and ‘distance’ – trying to save both their own and each other’s ‘face’ in two different situations that may both be described as typical ‘face-threatening acts’: ‘asking for money’ and ‘asking a favour’. A great deal of effort was made by both sets of interlocutors to accommodate each other’s ‘face-wants’ by using a variety of ‘face-saving strategies’ at their disposal. We have also examined the indicators of these strategies present in the ST and tried to assess the extent to which these were preserved – or lost – in the process of subtitling.

As we have seen, most politeness strategies require a lot of effort or, not to put too fine a point on it, a lot of *words*. We have also seen that ‘wordiness’ is not something a subtitler can afford. Owing to the unavoidable brevity of the subtitles – which we have not regarded as a flaw but rather as an exciting opportunity for close linguistic examination – some, but not all, indicators of politeness have been lost in translation. As a result of these losses, the subtitled characters seem to have left a subtly different impression in terms of ‘politeness’: a bit more directness here, a bit less tentativeness there, and a slightly altered portrayal of their linguistic behaviour emerges than the one presented by the ST.

Owing to the many constraints inherent to the subtitling technique described above, preserving all the elements of ST meaning in the TT is not only impossible but it is not even the subtitler’s task. Rather, the subtitled translation can be seen as a kind of ‘guide’ or ‘summary’, helping the TT receiver to process the entire polysemiotic text the meaning of which is retrieved from the combined effect of the subtitled text on the one hand and the other components of the TV product on the other. Hence no discussion of TT loss of meaning should be interpreted as criticism of particular translators or of the subtitling technique. It should rather be seen as a small contribution to the understanding of the translation process as such, in an area that has largely, if unjustly, been neglected in the past.

<sup>16</sup> The expression “nema stila” (‘has no class’, or ‘style’), although not exactly non-standard, belongs to the colloquial type of discourse. But even more informal is the use of the noun “čovjek” (‘man’) without a determiner. Although the Croatian language has no articles, standard usage would require a demonstrative in this particular context. The non-standard omission is, however, very frequent in informal discourse, particularly among younger language users. Neither of these elements is as prominent as those indicators present in the ST, but combined they achieve an effect not altogether different from that of the ST.



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### PRAGMATIČKA TEORIJA ULJUDNOSTI U PODSLOVLJAVANJU ZA TELEVIZIJU

Podslovljavanje za televiziju tek je nedavno postalo zanimljivim područjem u proučavanju prevođenja. Ovaj članak, koji se temelji na našem nedavno provedenom istraživanju, najprije ističe osobitosti televizijskoga podslovljavanja, a zatim pokazuje kako se pomoću njih mogu osvijetliti pojedini vidovi procesa prevođenja. Pragmalingvistički pojam "uljudnosti" propituje se u svjetlu ograničenja svojstvenih tehnici podslovljavanja.

