"ŠTA JE BRE KUME, OPET SI DORUČKOVAO KEROZIN?" POLYSEMY IN SUBTITLING

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Abstract The purpose of this study is to describe general issues that occur when subtitling, and to present a case study highlighting the difficulties in translating/subtitling the polysemous word 'kum' in Macedonian, Serbian and Croatian (meaning godparent, witness, Godfather, and so forth). The aim is to illustrate that, when subtitling, it is often not possible to stick only to the meanings of words given in dictionaries, but that it is necessary to consider especially the communicative situations in which the word or sentence is uttered. Notably, in subtitling such an approach is desirable, because, as we demonstrate below, we must also consider the visual and audio aspects of the material being translated/subtitled. As a case study, we have selected the audio track and subtitles for Miloš Radivojević's film *Ni na nebu, ni na zemlji*.

»ŠTA JE BRE KUME, OPET SI DORUČKOVAO KEROZIN?« TITULKOVÁNÍ A POLYSÉMNÍ SLOVA

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Abstrakt Cílem této studie je popsat obecné problémy, které se vyskytují při titulkování, a představit případovou studii, která upozorňuje na obtíže při překladu/titulkování polysémního slova 'kum' v makedonštině, srbštině a chorvatštině (s významem kmotr, svědek, Kmotr atd.). Při titulkování často není dostačující držet se pouze významů slov uvedených ve slovnících, naproti tomu je nezbytné zohlednit zejména komunikační situace, v nichž je slovo či věta vyslovena. Zejména při titulkování je pak takový přístup žádoucí, protože, jak ukazujeme níže, musíme brát v úvahu také vizuální a zvukovou stránku překládaného/titulkovaného materiálu. Jako případovou studii jsme vybíráme audiotrack a titulky k filmu Miloše Radivojevíće *Ani na nebi, ani na zemi*.

1   Introduction

In this study, we are concerned mainly with polysemous words and their translation in the context of audiovisual translation (AVT), esp. subtitling. Although this interdisciplinary topic is, in our experience, very interesting and necessary for film translators, as far as we know, this it is still not explored widely. We believe that our article may be of particular help to subtitlers, who are often faced with similar problems in their work.

Firstly, we describe the issue of polysemy, in the context of translation and subtitling. Secondly, we will present our case study, and show the definitions of the selected word *kum* and its mutually incompatible meanings. Finally, we present all the concrete cases of translation/subtitling of the word *kum* based on the audio track and subtitle list from the film *Ni na nebu, ni na zemlji*, the 1994 film directed by Miloš Radivojević.

In the study, we focus primarily on the translation (and subtitling) of polysemic words and on their strategies, as this is a topic that, in our opinion, is far from being explored as thoroughly as it needs to be in the Czech context. There appears to be a lack of professional publications and extensive research on Czech subtitling (as noted by Pošta 2011: 9–10). This is the only publication (apart from a degree thesis written in recent years) to deal with the issue of subtitling, and is a publication intended for laymen (Pošta 2019: 124–125). Two interesting anthologies that deal with subtitling, among other things, have been published in Slovakia: Gromová, Janecová (2014); Paulínyová, Perez (2015).

Nevertheless, the topic of AVT is recognised and reflected widely in studies and publications written or edited by Díaz-Cintas (2003, 2009), Orero (2004), Dwyer (2017), etc. In previous papers we dealt with some of the pitfalls and perils of translation from the South Slavic area (Dufková 2020), and with subtitling films from the South Slavic area (Dufková 2019; Dufková, Vizjak 2020; Dufková, Tomečková 2021 pre-printed version).

2   Translation

The translator presents to the reader not reality itself, but the author's interpretation of reality, using stylistic elements. As Vermeer (1992: 37–51) stated, we should not consider translation merely as a language transfer (or trans-coding), but also as a cultural transfer, which requires extensive linguistic and cultural knowledge of both the source and target languages (Jabir 2006: 37–46). The main requirements are as follows: Understanding, interpreting, and re-stylising the subject matter. Translation as a field of study has a long tradition in the Czech Republic. One of the fundamental publications is Umění překladu by Jiří Levý (2012, first published in 1963, translated and published in English in 2011). In his work, Levý gave readers an inside look into the translation process. More recently, the process of translation has been handled by Fišer (2009). However, the situation becomes a bit more complicated when audiovisual translation is concerned.

2.1   Audiovisual translation

Audiovisual translation (AVT) is a relatively new field of study (Díaz-Cintas 2009: 1–2). Dubbing and subtitling are among the main areas that studies of AVT focus on. However, currently, other spheres of AVT have become more important, attracting a growing interest: Subtitling, voice-over and narration should be mentioned. At present, subtitling is developing very rapidly. There are many technical advances, such as the Internet, online dictionaries, online translators and subtitling programmes that make the work easier, faster, and more automated (Guillot 2019: 32–33). This also opens up further opportunities for amateur subtitlers.

2.2   Subtitling

Subtitling is one of the two most frequently mentioned types of AVT (Pošta 2019: 28–30). Simply put, subtitling is adding text to audiovisual media to deliver the same message that is expressed by the source medium. Subtitling is not limited to the transcription of spoken speech. Moreover, subtitling cannot be imagined as the mere transcription of a spoken prepared speech. Subtitles should be condensed, but accurate. Because we perceive written and spoken forms of language differently, at times the expressions, emotionally coloured lexemes, need to be toned down.

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Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the translated text (whether in the form of dubbing or subtitling) should have the same effect on the target viewer/reader as the original. Along with all these factors, we also have to take into account other components of the work, such as meaning-making features, e.g. acoustic and visual elements, especially song lyrics, etc. (Pošta 2011).

According to Gottlieb (1992: 166, followed by Pedersen 2007), 10 subtitling strategies can be listed: Expansion, paraphrasing, transfer, imitation, transcription, dislocation, condensation, decimation, deletion and resignation.

As far as technical matters are concerned, we must take into account the following elements.

From the point of view of the reader/viewer and the subtitler, it is important to note that the text of subtitles, which is displayed directly on the screen, has only one or two lines, each line containing only 36 (sometimes 40) characters. Only 2 seconds are allotted for each line, or 4 seconds in the case of two lines. This time limit is important – it allows the reader/viewer to perceive the text as well as the sound (music and sound effects, too) and the verbal (written signs in the image) and non-verbal visual parts (of the film), but there is no space for a transcription and a word-by-word translation. It should be remembered that subtitles have a dedicated space in the screen – they are usually displayed at the bottom. However, this sometimes overlaps an important part of the image. There is no space for extra information such as explaining terms, explaining jokes or footnotes.

2.3   Polysemy in translation

Polysemy can be defined as a case in which a single word has multiple meanings; each of these meanings has to be learnt separately in order to be understood. There are numerous known types of polysemy which can be classified as follows: polysemy can be divided into obvious (explicit, overt) and covert (implicit, hidden) polysemy. The obvious polysemy can be split up further into metaphorical and metonymic subtype, as well as radial polysemy (when the primary meaning stands in the centre and the secondary meanings out of it as rays), and linking or chain polysemy (when the secondary meanings of the word develop sequentially as a chain). The same category includes systematic or common polysemy, in which the relationship

between the senses is predictable, since any word of a particular semantic class has potentially the same meaning. In terminology, we find polysemy with a hyponymic connection between the meanings of a term that can be called hyponymic (Grinev-Griniewicz 2016: 28). To these varieties of polysemy the contronym should be added, well known in linguistics, which combines opposite meanings with one word.

Polysemy has become a significant issue in interdisciplinary studies since particular words or phrases tend to have multiple meanings, and the way to decide on the intended meanings involves cultural understanding that may be problematic for different groups of people. Nida (1969: 63), on the other hand, does not consider polysemy to be a crucial problem for the translator, since the different meanings of a single word are rarely in competition, for they not only have relatively well-defined markers which help to differentiate the meanings, but often they are so diverse as not to compete with one another for the same semantic domain. For example, the word *kum*, which is a polysemous word, does not exist in the Czech and Slovene languages; for this reason, it is also difficult to translate it in the context of the film. The viewer often hears it while watching the film, but in Czech and Slovenian it is translated in a different word in this context – and here is our problem. Namely, when we want to translate the text or subtitles of the film in question, we must take into account several meanings of the word *kum*. If we focus on only one of them, the person who is present at the wedding in order to confirm its validity – the equivalent in Czech is a *svědek*, and in Slovenian *priča*. When we translate the word *kum* in the context of the child's representative at baptism, the equivalents for it are *kmotr* in Czech and *boter* in Slovene. This is also just one of its meanings, it has even more. The third, for example, is found in the Czech language, where the word *Kmotr*, written with a capital letter, means mafia godfather or godfather, while in Slovene we use a phrase *mafijski boter*.

A polysemous word enters into all relations between words (synonymic, antonymic, hyperonymic-hyponymic, etc.) with each of its meanings separately.

In translation, a number of cases of so-called hidden polysemy have been identified, where a term in one language corresponds to two or more terms in another language due to the differences between national terminologies. The differences and peculiarities of national terminologies are, in many cases, the result of their unrelated autonomous development (Grinev-Griniewicz 2016: 25). According to Mohammed

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(2009), words cause translation difficulties when they appear in decontextualised sentences, as there is no strong biased linguistic context that could eliminate their ambiguity and determine their meaning. However, ambiguous words can cause problems even in the presence of a strongly biased linguistic context if the translator does not take the context into account and adheres to the key meaning of the word. To resolve ambiguity, the translator must consider the context. In addition, the translator must also be aware that their translation is reasonable and makes sense. In the process of preparing a text in the target language, they must be aware of polysemous words, i.e. the central meaning of words, and they must choose other semantic variants that match the context, and they must also pay much attention to the text, type of text and colloquial relations, as they play an important role in determining the meaning of a polysemous word.

3   Case study

We deal with the subtitling from one Slavic language to another one. Czech, the target language in this work, is the subtitler's mother tongue (as Newmark recommends, 1988: 3). We are concerned with the linguistic and socio-cultural differences between the source Serbian text (from the audio track) and the target Czech text (subtitles). In this paper we focus on the polysemous word 'kum'. This word can take on different meanings in different contexts. We describe these meanings in more detail in the subsection. We then use the example of the use of the word 'kum' in various communicative situations that occur in the film *Ni na nebu, ni na zemlji* to demonstrate the ways in which this term can (and perhaps should) be handled.

3.1   Methodology

To describe the above-mentioned issues and the solutions of some problematic tasks, we use a descriptive qualitative method, more precisely, a corpus-based analysis. The data for this research will be taken from audio tracks and Czech subtitles, and were collected by using the documentation method. Firstly, we describe the meaning of the word 'kum' according to the dictionaries. Secondly, we describe the distribution of this word in the source text (audio track), and we distinguish the communicative situations. Finally, we present the solution used for subtitling and offer space for discussion.

3.2   Definitions and meaning: Comparison of the words *kum* and *kmotr*

According to Skok (231–232) 'kûm' means 'compater', 'cognatio spiritualis', specification according to Skok are collocations: 'krsteni' or 'vjenčani kum', thus 'a male godparent' or 'best man, witness'. The second meaning in this dictionary refers to a euphemism which was used in Dubrovnik in the 16th century with the meaning 'vještica', thus 'witch'. The next expression refers to the euphemism of the word 'kuga' ('plague'), and the last one refers to the croatian–kajkavian word for 'seljak, susjed' ('peasant, neighbour'). The diminutive 'kumče' (kum + suffix -če) means 'filiolus' ('young son'), and the Croatian–kajkavian derivative kûmek (kum + suffix -ek) means 'peasant (the title given to him by a citizen)'. There are also Serbian prefixed words such as 'prikumak' and 'prikumica' with the meaning 'who is with the godfather at the baptism, the wedding, who helps him'. The formation 'kuma' at Istra behaves as a procliticon with the function 'title to every man', thus it is possible to address someone 'kuma-Stipe, kuma-Jadre', where 'Stipe' and 'Jadre' are the proper names.

According to the etymological dictionaries (Skok, Vasmer), the word 'kum' is based on the Latin word 'commāter' (in Czech 'spolumatka'), which, in the Slavonic Church formed the word 'къmotra' (as fem.), and from this word the form for the masculine was formed: *къmotrъ. This form is not preserved among the South Slavic languages, but it is still used in the West Slavic languages: Czech *kmotr*, *kmotra*, Slovak *kmotor*, *kmotra*, Polish *kmotr*, *kmotra* (Machek), Upper Sorbian *kmótr*, *kmótra* (Vasmer), Lower Sorbian *kmótś*, *kmotša* (Vasmer).

The undocumented form for the masculine (of the Latin word 'compāter') should be, according to Vasmer, *къpetrъ or *kǫpetrъ, in Old Church Slavonic 'купотръ' and the feminine 'купетра'.

In the languages spoken in the Balkan Peninsula it is possible to find this form in Albanian (*kumptër*, *kundër* from 'compāter') and in Romanian (*cumătră*, *cumătru* from 'commāter').

In some South Slavic Languages, the following words occur in Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian *kum* and *kuma* (resp. *кум* and *кума*). The Slovenian language is slightly more influenced by German, thus the word *boter* (from the German *Gevater*) occurs primarily.

3.3 Meanings of the word *kum* in some South Slavic languages

The words *kum*, *kuma* can have several meanings in individual South Slavic languages. Below we list the various meanings we have found in online dictionaries (HJP, ДРМЈ) and in Skok's etymological dictionary. This list is not exhaustive, and, in some cases, it is possible that in certain communicative situations a different word is used to express a given meaning. For comparison, we have also included the Macedonian meanings.

Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian:

- a male godparent
- a female godparent
- a godchild, a godson, a goddaughter
- a very powerful man in a criminal organisation, especially the Mafia
- a person who is present when an official document is signed, and who also signs it to prove that they saw this happen
- a family friend who does the first haircut of a male child
- a witness at a rite or launch of a ship

+ Croatian and Macedonian:
- a friend, a person of trust

+ Serbian and Macedonian:
- a person who has contributed to resolving a situation (irony)

+ Croatian:
- a word to address the peasant and the farmer

+ Serbian:
- a family member of "kum"

+ Macedonian:
- the wife of the godfather
- the holder of organising a ritual or traditional folk celebration
- a familiar to an older man

3.4   Occurrence of the word *kum* in the context of the film *Ni na nebu, ni na zemlji*

In this case study, we describe the contexts in which the word *kum* appeared in the audio track of the film *Ni na nebu, ni na zemlji* (1994). The story takes place during the civil war in Yugoslavia. We meet three friends, Nikola, Pop and Stole, in Belgrade. The period of civil war in Yugoslavia is depressing for these young people. They stumble hopelessly from nothing to nothing. Even in such a time, however, each of them tries in some way to give their lives meaning and perspective. The film was directed by Miloš Radivojević, a notable Yugoslav/Serbian filmmaker who made such films as the experimental and highly significant film *Testament* (1975), a film that may associate The Graduate, named *Dečko koji obećava* (*The Promising Boy*, 1981), a film about one love, and the pitfalls of the former regime *Una* (1984), a film based on the true story of the childhood of Miloš Radivojević *Kako u me ukrali Nemci* (How I Was Stolen by the Germans, 2011).

In the following Table we present the contexts in which the word *kum* has appeared in the film.

Table 1: Different contextual meanings of the word *kum*

		original from audio track	target language (CZ)
00:04:43,120	-->	Šta je bre *kume*, opet si doručkovao kerozin?	Hej, _brácho_, zase ses dopoval kerozinem?
00:04:45,920			
01:04:29,960	-->	*Kume*, naruči pesmu.	_Nikolo_, poruč si píseň.
01:04:31,560			
01:06:11,960	-->	Za moga *kuma* Nikolu šampiona...	Pro _bratrance_ Nikolu – šampiona.
01:06:16,840			
01:06:17,120	-->	... od njego(va) *kuma* Mileta Džonsona jedna pesma.	od jeho _bratrance_ Mileho jedna píseň...
01:06:22,000			
01:12:27,080	-->	Vozi, *kume*!	Jedém!
01:12:28,920			
01:20:55,280	-->	Volim i ja tebe, *kume*.	I já tebe, _kámo_.
01:21:00,320			
01:21:12,600	-->	Ajde *kume*, samo da ti pokažem.	Pojď, _kámo_, ukážu ti to.
01:21:15,920			
01:21:25,360	-->	Otvori oči, *kume*.	Otevři oči.
01:21:32,600			
01:21:47,440	-->	*Kume*, da ti dam krug fore.	Dám ti jedno kolo náskok.
01:21:51,520			
01:24:10,880	-->	*Kume*, si živ?	_Brácho_, seš živej!
01:24:13,240			

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In the context of the film the word *kum* occurs a total of ten times. Since there is also a wedding in the film, it can be assumed that the word *kum* here takes on the meaning of 'a person who is present when an official document is signed and who also signs it to prove that they saw this happen.' Four times the word *kum* actually occurs in the context of a wedding, and does indeed fit the meaning given. In the Czech context, the word *svědek* is used for such a case, with the meaning 'a person who is present at some serious act or action to confirm it, to verify it, e.g., the groom's, bride's best man'. Once the word *kum* appeared in the accusative (*za kuma*), once in the genitive (*od kuma*). This is a communicative situation where the groom orders a song for his best man at his wedding. In these cases, the subtitler did not use the Czech word *svědek* (best man), probably because the word *svědek* is usually used in a formal situation during a ceremony of the wedding. In our experience, in informal communication we often do not use the word *svědek* with the above-mentioned meaning, rather we use the person's name.

Therefore, here, the subtitler has chosen the strategy of word substitution, using the word *bratranec* (male cousin), which is adequate in the given communicative situation, because the family relationship between the characters seems to be cousinly (although we don't have exact information on that). The above is also supported by data from the Czech National Corpus (Machálek 2019). The most frequent collocations of the word *svědek* are: očitý (an eyewitness), výpověď (witness testimony), korunní (turn State's evidence), výslech (examination of witnesses), Jehovův (Jehovah's Witness), vyslechnout (to question the witnesses), událost (witness to the even), nehoda (witness to an accident), vypovědět (witness testified), náhodný (accidental witness). It is therefore obvious that the word *svědek* is most often used in a different meaning in Czech, and would not be adequate, even in this communication situation in the film.

In all other examples the word *kum* occurs in the vocative case. In two cases such use is found directly at the wedding celebration, in other cases it is in other communicative situations. The function that such a word has in the context of the film is still the same. It denotes the same people between whom there is a friendly relationship, one of whom is actually the best man at the wedding. The issue is that, in these cases, the word *kum* is used for more than one person – both the best man and the groom, as well as the friend who is neither the best man nor the groom. Therefore, the word *kum* here means rather a designation of a friend and friendship

than a designation of the function of best man or groom at a wedding, as we might conclude from the dictionary meanings of the word. Perhaps that is why the subtitler chose the strategy of substitution in this case. The fact that the word *svědek* does not appear at all in the vocative according to the Czech language corpus contributes to this. The subtitler used the words *brácho* (vocative of *brácha* 'bro') and *kámo* (shortened vocative of the words *kamarád, kámoš* 'mate'). Once the subtitler used a substitution, instead of the word *kume* (vocative) he used the proper name of one of the main characters in the vocative (*Nikolo*). According to the Czech National Corpus, the form of the word *kámo* (vocative) is quite frequent (it is the fourth most frequent form of the word *kámoš*).

As can be seen from the Table above, in three cases the subtitler used the strategy of elimination. The subtitler omitted the *kume* completely. However, in the context of the film, as we have already shown above, such omission does not matter, because in English we do not use the word for best man so often, and certainly not in the given communicative situations.

As can be seen both from the Table and from the discussion of the individual communicative situations in the film, the word *kum* was never translated as the dictionaries would suggest.

5   Conclusion

In this paper we have shown the problem of translating polysemous words. The important point for us was that polysemous words always enter into relations in a sentence with only one of their meanings. We also showed aspects of subtitling that we classify as audiovisual translation, which can be even more specific than ordinary translation in many ways.

In the practical part of the contribution we pointed out the case of translation and subtitling of a selected aspect, i.e. the word *kum*, which appeared in the audio track of the film Ni na nebu, ni na zemlji by the director Miloš Radivojević.

As we have already shown in the theoretical part of the thesis, the subtitler has to save space and think about non-explaining any issues in footnotes, and must not forget the visual elements of the film. Therefore, in our opinion, it is adequate that

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the subtitler used elimination. We have also shown that, in some cases, it was necessary to use substitution.

Although we have dealt with a polysemous word, the meanings of which in the various Slavic languages have been shown, it is curious that, in neither example, was there an adequate term from a dictionary. The dictionary solution is, thus, not sufficient for subtitling in this specific case.

As far as subtitling is concerned, we believe that, if the subtitler does not understand the communicative situation in the film fully (even from the visual part), the message of the film can be distorted very easily. So, then, we would not follow the fundamental principle of translation, namely, that the target audience should get the same message as the original audience. It is necessary to take into account the pragmatic aspects and sociocultural rules in both languages, the original one and the target one.

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Film

Miloš Radivojević, 1994: *Ni na nebu, ni na zemlji*.

»Šta je bre kume, opet si doručkovao kerozin?« Titulkování a polysémní slova

V tomto příspěvku jsme se zabývaly problematikou překladu polysémních slov. Nejpreve jsme definovaly titulkování jako jeden z typů audiovizuálního překladu. Tak jako i ostatní typy AVT má titulkování svá specifika, která jsme v článku rozebraly. Následně jsme definovaly slova polysémní a poukázaly jsme na jejich zvláštnosti. Zdůraznily jsme zejména to, že polysémní slova vstupují do vzájemných vztahů vždy jen jedním ze svých významů, a proto je třeba při překladu i při titulkování dobře zhodnotit kontext, v němž se slovo vyskytuje.

V praktické části příspěvku jsme představily případovou studii, v níž jsme ukázaly a rozebraly strategie, které použil titulkář při překladu specifického termínu *kum*, který se objevil ve zvukové stopě filmu *Ani na nebi, ani na zemi* režiséra Miloše Radivojeviće (1994).

K. Dušková, K. Vizjak: "Šta je bre kume, opet si doručkovao kerozin?" Polysemy in Subtitling

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Jak jsme ukázaly již v teoretické části práce, titulkář musí především promyšleně šetřit místem a uvažovat o možném (ne)vysvětlování jakékoli problematiky v poznámkách pod čarou (které mívá k dispozici snad jen na festivalech ve formě letáku před promítáním). Podstatné pro titulkáře je mít k dispozici také vizuální materiál, bez něj mnohdy nelze na kontext slov a vět usuzovat. Na konkrétních příkladech jsme ukázaly, že titulkář v našem případě užil zejména eliminace a substituce.

Na významy polysémního slova *kum* jsme poukázaly v rámci více slovanských jazyků. Toto slovo znamená (v užší skupině jihoslovanských jazyků) zejména kmotr, svědek a Kmotr, ve slovnících však nalezneme významů ještě více (většinou se jedná o významy specifičtější pro jeden konkrétní jihoslovanský jazyk). Je tedy nadmíru pozoruhodné, že ani v jednom případě v rámci výskytu v originálním audiotracku nebyl v titulcích použit význam zaznamenaný ve slovnících. Usuzujeme z toho, že slovníkové řešení v tomto konkrétním případě pro titulky není dostačující.

Domníváme se, že pokud titulkář plně nepochopí komunikační situaci ve filmu (a to i v rámci vizuálního materiálu), může velmi snadno dojít ke zkreslení sdělení. Nedojde tak k dodržení základní zásady překladu, totiž že cílové publikum by mělo být vystaveno stejnému sdělení jako publikum originálního díla (v originálním znění). Je třeba brát v úvahu pragmatické aspekty a sociokulturní pravidla v originálním i cílovém jazyce.