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ON FILM TITLES: TRANSLATION OR RETITLING?

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to show the translation of film titles into English and their retitling to develop in parallel, and both processes involve transformations.

Methodology and Approach to analyze the Internet sources materials are based on comparative and descriptive method of their linguistic and lexicographic constituents.

The results. Differences of film titles in the source and target languages are resolved in course of the realization of translational strategies, based on transformations and modulations. The presence of variations in translation into one and the same language is caused by the practice to demonstrate films in various countries.

Theoretical and Practical Implication. General approach to film titles translation once again proves transformation to be the principle means to reach understanding of the target audience along with strategies of modulation and retitling. The analysis of the material is useful for theoretical and applied translation studies, including compilation of special dictionaries and manuals and teaching wide profile translators.

KEYWORDS

film title, tagline, retitling, transformation, modulation, source language, target language

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НАЗВАНИЕ ФИЛЬМА: ПЕРЕВОД ИЛИ ПЕРЕИМЕНОВАНИЕ?

АННОТАЦИЯ

Цель работы – показать, что перевод названий фильмов на английский язык и их замена-переименование развиваются параллельно, и оба процесса включают трансформации.

Процедура и методы исследования. Анализ материала из интернет-источников основан на сравнительно-описательном методе их лингвистической и лексикографической составляющих.

Результаты исследования. Различия названий фильмов на языке оригинала и языке перевода преодолеваются за счёт реализации переводческих стратегий, основанных на трансформациях и модуляциях. Наличие вариантов перевода на один и тот же язык обусловлено практикой показа фильма в разных странах.

Теоретическая и практическая значимость. Общий подход к переводу названий фильмов подтверждает, что трансформация – основной способ достижения понимания в целевой аудитории наряду с приёмами модуляции и замены. Анализ материала полезен для теоретического и прикладного переводоведения, включая составление специальных словарей и справочников, подготовку переводчиков широкого профиля.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

название фильма, замысел, переименование фильма, трансформация, модуляция, язык оригинала, язык перевода

INTRODUCTION

A film title is actually a concise statement that is to provide insights into the subject matter of the film storyline. In addition, a film title sets the mood and captures the audience before any other movie feature. It can be viewed as a potential key to a film success on the market. This is the obvious reason why filmmakers literally spend years trying to come up with a film title that would be both striking and marketable. Most films are produced under a “working title” because the official title has not yet been decided upon [9, p. 14]. It is useful to highlight the pivotal role of a similar feature that sets a given movie for global success: the title under which it is released overseas and worldwide.

The translator has to capture the semantic multidimensionality of the original title in order to transmit accurately the same vision, sense and tonality embodied in the original title. A film title should thus be studied as a complex linguistic unit based on its structural-semantic and functional-pragmatic characteristics. Title translation plays an instrumental role in intercultural communication as it reflects

the cultural and sociopolitical situation or shifts in the world. Film title translation could be quite problematic to achieve, given the fact that the translation could face numerous intra- and extra-lingual challenges (e.g. trademark infringement and lawsuits). There might also be linguistic limitations related to the form and content of both – source and target languages.

Film title translation and re-titling is an art that is practiced by different distributors from all around the world. If after translation the new title is not accepted by the original distributor, for certain films, there might be given guidelines so that to stick to the original title as much as possible.

The title is at the heart of a film's marketing strategy, analogously to the poster, the trailer and the advertising campaign. It is necessary to bear in mind the target audience for which the product is intended, if it is for younger children, students or elderly people; cinephiles or regular movie-goers, or others. And thus the image is created, the one to be given and perceived as well. Then its positioning comes in: a film is often found on the borderline between two genres; so the question is if to sell it as a comedy or drama or horror movie or fantasy action [10]. And one more thing: if the film title is accepted by each and every of parties – producers and consumers.

TRANSLATION PROCESS AND DISCREPANCIES IN THE FILM TITLES INTERPRETATION

The practice of finding a title has turned into an art form on its own. Analogously to a person's name, it marks the film forever and sets the first impression. The title translated is equally as important as the original one. Translating a film title is challenging given the fact that language and culture interweave. Therefore, the practice of film title translation is chiefly built on a number of semantic and pragmatic dichotomies – foreignization/domestication as translation strategies, literal/free translation, faithfulness to the source text/intention to capture the global audience's affection as a priority, prescriptive/descriptive approaches, etc. The translation process demands effort to avoid omission of information and thus convey the wrong information.

Although the English language is really global being the most commonly spoken language in the world, some English film titles are being translated as if re-titled into English, e.g., in France: *He's Watching* → *A focus to kill*; *Ready or Not* → *Wedding Nightmare*, etc. [11].

Words or expressions with no direct equivalent in the target language, e.g., culturally specific terms, sayings and idioms are common reasons for translation discrepancies. Other extra linguistic reasons may include ethical or legal matters such as already registered trademarks in order to avoid any possible confusion with some well-known objects or concepts bearing the same name in the target language culture, or Britishisms and Americanisms that need to be introduced or removed as domestication and foreignization approaches [14].

On a few samples, let's see how it works:

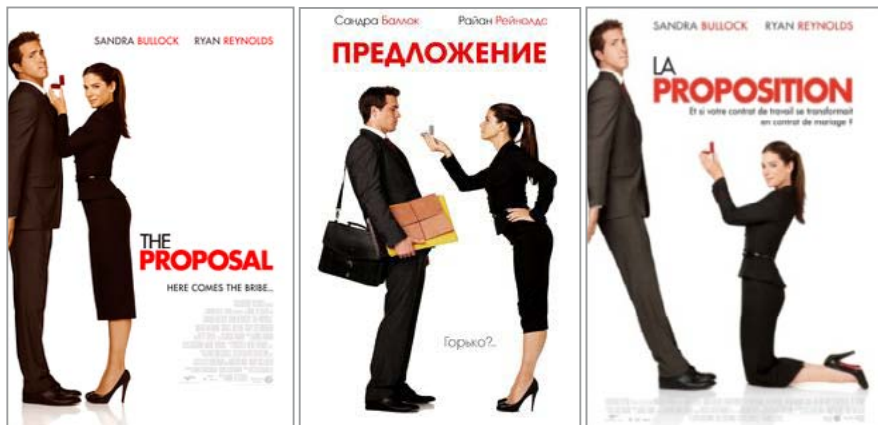


Source: StreamCompleat: film *streaming gratuity* en HD VF. Available at: <https://www.streamcomplet.vet> (accessed: 20.12.2019).

“Winter’s Tale” (US) (Weed Road Pictures & Marc Platt Production; director A. Goldsman, distributor Warner Bros. Pictures, 2014) – *“A New York Winter’s tale”* (UK and Ireland) – *“Любовь сквозь время”* (RU) – *“Un amour d’hiver”* (FR) – *“Conte d’hiver”* (QC) is the example of retitling within foreignization.

To highlight the American origin of the film, *New York* was added to the original title upon release in the UK and Ireland. The practice of retitling marks growing trend in other EU countries, e.g., France that released the film as *“Un amour d’hiver”* [8]. In Russia, the original title was completely replaced with an outline of the synopsis, literally translated and retitled *“Love across time”*. The protagonist travels in time to find his significant other who was once deceased, whereas, in France, the title was only partially changed; the word *tale* was replaced by *love* literally *“Winter’s Love”*. Adding “catchy” words to film titles is a commonly used advertising technique [7]. Only in Quebec, the French-speaking part of Canada, the original film title was translated word-for-word into French, literally *“Conte d’hiver”*.

Another example is the US movie *“The Proposal”* (Touchstone Pictures, K/O Paper Products Mandeville Films, director A. Fletcher, distributors Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2009) – *“Предложение”* (RU) – *“La Proposition”* (FR). The title could be properly interpreted through the tagline: due to her expired visa, the editor-in-chief of a huge New York publishing house may undergo deportation. Determined to retain her position, she convinces her assistant to temporarily act as her fiancé to escape the unwanted consequence. Her assistant accepts the proposal but demands a promotion. Compare the posters which bear similar visual impact:



Source: StreamCompleat: film *streaming gratuit* en HD VF. Available at: <https://www.streamcomplet.net> (accessed: 20.12.2019); Кино-Театр.РУ. Available at: <https://www.kino-teatr.ru> (accessed: 20.12.2019).

The original title perfectly suits the plot of the film as it conveys both meanings – a marriage proposal as well as a business proposal. This title was translated into French as “*La proposition*” which actually means “offer” (as a business offer).

In French, a marriage proposal is *une demande* (en mariage) which highlights only one aspect of the film plot and doesn’t concern the tagline at all. In Russian, the translated title conveys both meanings as the original one, but as opposed to the French title, the Russian variant is more associated with a marriage proposal when used on its own.

- Деловое **предложение**: business **proposal**.
- **Предложение** руки и сердца: a marriage **proposal**.

Nonetheless, “*Предложение*” on its own is rather associated with the marriage proposal.

As is known, a film tagline is a short text which serves to clarify an idea for, or is designed with a form of, dramatic effect. Many tagline slogans are reiterated phrases associated with the film itself¹. Let’s now compare some taglines rendering the idea of a film title “The Proposal”:

- **Here comes the bride** – typically English/British tagline.
- **Горько?...** – typically Russian tagline: there is no direct equivalent for this expression in English. It means ‘Bridegroom, come on, kiss the bride!’, usually shouted by guests at the wedding. The question mark at the end implies that this expression is used figuratively.
- French tagline: **Et si votre contrat de travail se transformait en contrat de mariage?** (literally ‘What if your employment contract turned into a marriage

¹ 75 Best Movie Tagline Examples, and Why they work [Electronic source]. Available at: <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/best-movie-taglines> (accessed: 01.10.2019).

contract?’ in English). A more detailed outline of the synopsis is given, complying both intended meanings.

Above all, we can clearly see that both Russian and French film taglines denote the lack of dual meaning.

Thus film distributors faced a difficult decision. They are mainly believed to opt for reference reasons. In Russian, the translated title conveys both meanings, compare:

- 1) **предложение** руки и сердца – a marriage **proposal**;
- 2) деловое **предложение**: a business **proposal**. Nonetheless, in Russian, **“Предложение”** on its own is rather associated with the marriage proposal.

Next example clearly speaks of some linguistic limitations to convey the proper meaning and sense. **“Hitch”** (US) (Overbrook Entertainment, director A. Tennant, distributor Columbia Pictures, 2005,) – **“Hitch, expert en séduction”** (FR) – **“Правила съёма: Метод Хитча”** (RU).



Sources: StreamCompleat: film **streaming gratuit** en HD VF. Available at: <https://www.streamcomplet.net> (accessed: 20.12.2019); Кино-Театр.РУ. Available at: <https://www.kino-teatr.ru> (accessed: 14.01.2019).

There is no direct equivalent for the word **“Hitch”** either in Russian or in French. Dictionaries state the meaning of **HITCH** as follows:

hitch, v. 1. informal: to travel by asking other people to take you in their car by standing at the side of the road and holding out your thumb or a sign (see: coll. hitchhike); 2. to move a part of your body or something that you are carrying to a high position;

to get hitched – informal: to get married [12, p. 680].

“Hitch” (as in expression *get hitched*) is taken for the nickname of the protagonist who coaches other men in wooing the women of their dreams. Therefore, a tagline was added to the film title for more clarity. In Russian, the original title has

been transcribed in Cyrillic letters followed by an outline of the plot and formed a simulation of literal translation: *Pick up Rules: Hitch Method – Правила съема: Метод Хитча*. Such a variation of film title translations once again presents *Hitch* as a person, who invented and applied a certain method as if representing the main character of the film story. In French, the film title bears a description of the main character's job as a hooker seducing women (literal translation: **Hitch, seduction expert**). This method of translation is viewed as "spoiler" because it reveals the plot of the film and happens to change the original English title. Compare the posters, and see to the similarity of visual representation of the main character by Will Smith.

To sum up the analysis, one can clearly see that translation and retitling are applied in parallel to make film titles adapted and acquired better for the audience of some other language and cultural tradition.

TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES

The practice of finding a title has turned into an art form on its own, firstly, pragmatically to promote a motion picture. Analogously to a person's name, it marks the film forever and sets the first impression. According to the viewpoint of A. Veleva-Borissova, the title carries out a nominative, identifying function, informative function and anticipatory function, "predicting the events", and last but not least, an advertising function inciting the prospective audience to watch the movie in question [13, p. 609]. Even a film's synopsis and genre can be predicted based on its title, e.g., "**Taken**" (The film was produced by Luc Besson's Europa Corp.) is a thriller by all means.

In fact, film titles – both original and translated are a kind of precedential texts [1], though they originate as ambivalent entities existing as a 'working title' in course of filming and upon finalizing, it could be changed due to any reason, primarily, considering film tagline and story. Nevertheless, the title translated is equally as important as the original one. The translation process demands effort to avoid omission of information and thus convey the wrong information as well as to preserve the film tagline if literally translation doesn't comply.

In case there is no equivalent in the target language, genre and plot compressed to a tagline are relied on for choosing a new title. The title translated must meet certain imperative criteria. It is indispensable for a film title to be intelligible by the target language audience, it must have a logical connection with the storyline of the film and, the last but not the least, the title has to be marketable. The titles translated, included in this article, can be considered adequate as they correspond to the content, the idea and genre of movies. Besides a perfect understanding of both – languages and cultures, a gift of words, a feel for the language are of crucial importance [2; 5].

A film title can be studied separately from the film as the title of a given film might be highly publicized prior to a movie premiere. According to V. E. Gorshkova [3], the title might trigger some associations on the recipient's behalf, and thus, influ-

ence his/her willingness to watch a film or total rejection based on his/her preferences and background. The graph below shows the development of the audience/recipient perception, starting from the author's background and determining the direction to stimulate viewer's perception to create recipient's background (**figure 1**):

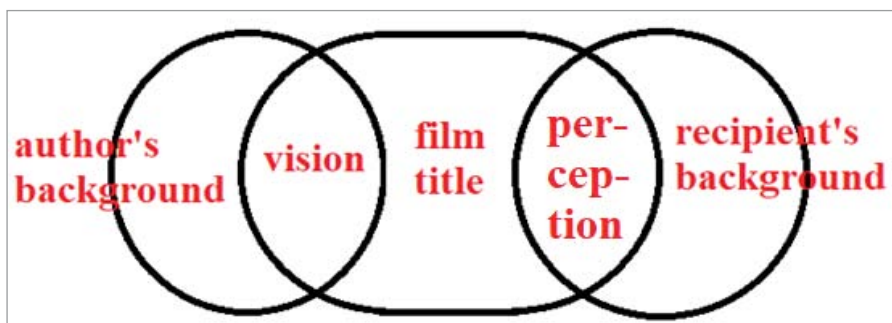


Figure 1. Film title perception

Source: Authors' data.

The transformation of the perception above is a result of involving a third doer – translator creating the interpretation while involving source and target languages, thus there are already three roles: author, translator and viewer (recipient). The graph itself reflects a more complicated situation, which presents an overlapping picture of two languages, two film titles – original and translated ones, three backgrounds, whereas translator's background involves interpretation and translation version of the original film title. Translator occupies the intermediate position and is a mediator between the author and recipient (**figure 2**):

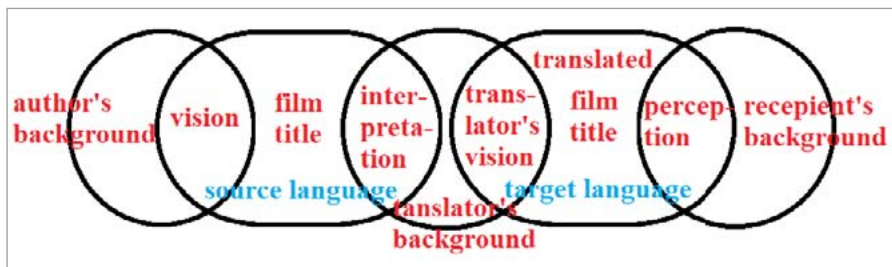


Figure 2. Translator's role in the film title transformation

Source: Authors' data as a modification of the Fig. 6, p. 7 in: Александрова О. И., Красина Е. А., Рыбинок Е. С. Прецедентные феномены кинотекста: название художественного фильма в аспекте перевода // Филологические науки. 2019. № 5. С. 22–33 [Aleksandrova O. I., Krasina E. A., Rybinok E. S. [Precedential phenomena of a film text: film title in the aspect of translation]. In: *Philologicheskiye nauki* [Philological studies], 2019, no. 5, pp. 22–33].

On the other hand, the theory that a film title can be studied separately from the film on the whole, is quite debatable. According to O. I. Aleksandrova "...stages of new title selection are as follows: watching the film and getting familiar with extra materials (slogan, press release, abstract, synopsis, description of characters, trailer, etc.) → translation of the film text → literal translation of the original title → study of all the meanings included in the lexical unites → building bonds between the original name and the film content → correction with visuals and the slogan (if any) accompanying the primary representation of the title → selection of criteria that are the most significant for this film title (bonds with the plot, expressiveness in terms of ideological-and-philosophical content, clarify, attractiveness, genre correlation, recognition, etc.) → new name" [6, p. 107–112]. Once again, it implies that in case there is no equivalent in the target language, the genre and plot are primarily relied on to choose a new title. Nonetheless, the translated title must meet certain imperative criteria. It is essential for the title to be intelligible for the targeted audience, it must have a logical connection with the storyline of the film and, last but not least, the title has to be marketable [7].

The following example proves this idea:

"**WAZ**" (UK) – "**The Killing Gene**" (US) (Vertigo Films, directed by Tom Shankland, released in 2007). The title itself startles the audience and is symbolic. Even the way to pronounce **WAZ** as [double-u delta zed], naming the



Source: StreamCompleat: film *streaming gratuit* en HD VF. Available at: <https://www.streamcomplet.net> (accessed: 20.12.2019).

mixed set of German and Latin letters of the acronym creates the feeling of something mysterious and horrible, though the equation of $w\Delta z = Cov(w,z) = \beta w z V z$, well-known as Price's equation or Price's theorem, in the theory of evolution and natural selection concerns gene changes in frequency over time.

So the abstract theoretical approach makes it possible to decipher the mystery but add some challenge or menace to the film title translation for an American audience. This kind of retitling correlates with modulation (Lat. *modulatio* as 'equality, proportionality, etc.) as a term of translation theory and practice which actually means a translation technique to develop word meaning and senses through the adequate change or transformation of the original word with the translated one so that the meaning be derived on the basis of the original word [4, p. 256; 15].

So **WAZ** example vividly demonstrates the necessity of transformations so that to combine film tagline, story and genre. Besides, non-verbal components of the poster and advertising help specify the essence of the transformation and the informational and communicative functions of the film title.

A new growing trend in American film distribution in France shows that the titles remain in English but they are modulations of the original titles. So modulation seems to be on the borderline of retitling [11]. The **Table 1** below includes some films released in 2019 in France under an English title², while the exact numbers out of 30 films released are:

- adapted title: 12 (40%)
- original title: 18 (60%), and 5 of them are proper names.

Table 1
Films distributed in France under an English title in 2019
(* – the bug marks proper names that stay unchanged)

Original title	French title
Happy Death Day 2U	<i>Happy Birthdead 2 You</i>
Fast & Furious : Hobbs & Shaw	Fast & Furious : Hobbs & Shaw
Hustlers	<i>Queens</i>
Men in Black International	Men in Black International
Poms	<i>Pom- poms Ladies</i>
Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark	<i>Scary Stories</i>
Alladin*	Alladin*
The Vanishing	<i>Keepers</i>
Gemini Man*	Gemini Man*
He's Watching	<i>A focus to kill</i>
Share	Share
Instant Family	<i>Apprentis Parents</i>

² Top Film Streaming 2019 [Electronic source]. Available at: <https://www.filmstreaming1.pro> (accessed: 06.10.2019).

Continued table on next page

Original title	French title
Tall Girl	Tall Girl
Breakthrough	Breakthrough
Escape Room	<i>Escape Game</i>
Hellboy*	Hellboy*
Killer Body	<i>The Wrong Patient</i>
Beats	Beats
The Red Sea Diving Resort	<i>Operation Brothers</i>
Mid90s	<i>90's</i>
Ready or Not	<i>Wedding Nightmare</i>
Booksmart	Booksmart
Point Blank	Point Blank
Alita* : Battle Angel	Alita* : Battle Angel
Crawl	Crawl
Little	Little
American Hangman	American Hangman
The Wind	The Wind
A Score to Settle	A Score to Settle
The Kid*	The Kid*

Sources: Top Film Streaming 2019 [Electronic source]. Available at: <https://www.filmstreaming1.pro> (accessed: 06.10.2019); Dehesdin C. Comment retire-t-on un film américain pour sa sortie française [Electronic source]. Available at: <http://www.slate.fr/story/26243/comment-retirer-film-americain-pour-sortie-francaise-cinema> (accessed: 05.10.2019).

In our opinion, the new trend is demonstrating the evidence of observing a ratio in translating and retitling film titles either in original or target languages.

MAIN RESULTS

The study of film title translation has revealed a number of key factors which help motivate perception of a motion picture by the target audience and make it marketable. Linguistic semantic, pragmatic and communicative means are crucial in the field of translation, and they help create a technique of retitling based on the transformation and modulation techniques in translation. So, both translation techniques and retitling go in parallel as to the art of film promotion and marketing.

The materials included in this study can further serve as foundation for future analysis of film title translation and retitling as well as contribute in other promising areas such as: the practice of film title translation, in theoretical and applied translation studies, for compiling special dictionaries and reference books, and in the preparation of specialist translators of a wide profile.

CONCLUSION

The process of finding a film title has turned into an art form of its own. Analogously to a personal name, it marks the film permanently and sets the first and last impressions. Translating a film title is quite challenging given the fact that language and cultural tradition are interweaved. The translation process demands effort – to transform or modulate the senses and simultaneously preserve the information and, thus, in consequence, convey the right sense and idea supported by a tagline: one should study the entire work in depth to fully understand it and always keep in mind intra- as well as extra-linguistic factors.

The film title translated is equally as important, if not more so, as the original one. In case there is no direct equivalent in the target language, the genre and plot are relied on for choosing a new title. The lack of linguistic means in the target language can be made up for with a new tagline. The title translated must meet certain indispensable semantic and pragmatic criteria and observe translation techniques to reach adequacy to the original film title. It is imperative for any film title to have a strong connection with the storyline of the film and, last but not least, the title has to be marketable. In this article, film titles translated are considered adequate as they correspond to the content, the ideology and the genre of the motion pictures under review. Besides, a perfect understanding of both languages and cultures, translator's gift of words and a feel for language are key elements of a perfect translation. Due to cultural differences and linguistic limitations of the source and target languages, film title translation is correlated with retitling, primarily on the basis of modulation translation technique, as both translation and retitling correlate as they are based on transformations. The process studied also involves a new trend to translate from English into English, so that to promote a motion picture and make the target audience perceive and appreciate the film, its tagline and genre in full.

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