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The transfer of linguistic and cultural specifics in the context of intersemiotic adaptation

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Abstract:

This paper examines the issue of the intersemiotic adaptation of the fantasy novel Ein Mädchen namens Willow by S. Bohlmann (2020) and the subsequent interlingual transfer of the audiovisual work of the same title, Ein Mädchen namens Willow (2025), into the Slovak dubbed version titled Dievča menom Willow [A Girl Named Willow] (2025). On the theoretical level, the authors present approaches to understanding adaptation in a diachronic perspective, including the changes through which an adaptation differs from the original literary work. Particular attention is devoted to the specifics and constraints of dubbing translation and dialogue adaptation, which the authors categorize into three groups: pragmatic and production-related specifics; technical, content, and formal specifics; and linguistic and cultural specifics. The aim of this paper is to identify and demonstrate, through comparative analysis, selected linguistic and cultural specifics (idiolect, wordplay, rhymed passages, so-

called charactonyms) in audiovisual (dubbing) translation, and to analyse the variability of translation methods and strategies that respect the linguistic and extralinguistic specifics of the text (semantic and expressive levels, the orality, synchronization, temporal constraints, reception characteristics of the child audience).

Introduction

Intersemiotic adaptation can be understood as the transformation of a work from one sign system into another. This process involves a wide range of changes related to the new form of the work or to the channel through which it will communicate with the recipient. In the case of film adaptation of literary works, it is essential to take into account the fact that literature and film operate with different technical and expressive means (such as screenplay, narrative techniques, cinematography, editing, sound, visual effects, etc.). In translation studies, this can be described as intersemiotic translation, a concept defined by Jakobson already in the late 1950s. He understood it as a type of translation in which the sign systems of the source and target media differ. In our case, this involves the adaptation of a literary work (a verbal medium) into a film (an audiovisual medium), and the following interlingual transfer, i.e. dubbing translation of the audiovisual work into a different linguistic and cultural system, which is characterized by numerous technical, formal, and content-related specifics and constraints. Within this context, we primarily focus on the transfer of selected linguistic and cultural specifics; these pose a particular challenge in audiovisual translation and require the application of translation methods and strategies that go beyond the traditional perception of the text as an exclusively verbal unit, and take into account the auditory and visual elements, as well as the embedding of the audiovisual work within a broader media and sociocultural context.

Film adaptation of literary works: Development, possible approaches, and definitions

As a subject of academic research, adaptation has undergone significant development, ranging from traditional approaches that emphasized fidelity to the literary source text to contemporary approaches that view adaptation more broadly as a creative and intertextual process, as well as a reinterpretation of the original text (Hančinová 2025).

In the past, film adaptation of literary works was subject to significant criticism. According to Cartmell and Whelehan (2010), writers and literary critics often regarded film adaptations as a gross desecration of literary works. One of the most prominent critiques of film adaptation is Virginia Woolf's *The Cinema* (1950), in which she criticizes the film adaptation of the literary work *Anna Karenina* and describes cinema as a predatory medium that destroys

the essence of literature (Pinar 2019; Woolf 1950). Such a critical stance towards film adaptation in the past may be explained by the following assumptions (Stam 2005):

- the valorization of historical anteriority, assuming that older art is inherently superior;
- prejudices against visual art and the perception of the written word as a privileged medium;
- the assumption that films are anti-corporeal;
- to an extent, a puritan notion that the process of filmmaking is simple;
- an elitist prejudice, whereby cinema (film adaptation) is perceived as a degradation associated with lower social classes;
- the notion of parasitism as films are seen as feeding on literature.

As early approaches to film adaptation were grounded primarily in fidelity to the original, there emerged a need to establish taxonomies based on the degree of proximity to the source text. In this regard, the following conceptualizations, or rather types of adaptation, can be distinguished (Wagner 1975):

- transposition – the novel (or literary work) is transferred without any significant changes;
- commentary – this term refers to adaptations in which changes have been made to the original to a certain extent, whether intentionally or unintentionally;
- analogy – in this case, adaptations use the literary original as a “point of departure”, while the aim is to create a different artistic work.

Similar taxonomies include those proposed by Andrew (1980), who employs the terms borrowing, intersection, and fidelity of transformation, as well as the categorization by Klein and Parker (1981), who distinguish three types of adaptation: adaptations that preserve the main idea of the narrative; those that preserve the structure of the story while introducing certain modifications to the source text; and adaptations that treat the literary original as an opportunity to create an original work. These taxonomies and classifications are based on traditional approaches that primarily emphasized the aspect of an adaptation’s fidelity to the literary original, while neglecting broader formal, technical, creative, and medial dimensions, as well as the overall sociocultural context within which a given adaptation is produced and received.

In the Slovak academic context, the early foundations of adaptation theory are associated with the Nitra School of Translation and its founder and leading figure, Anton Popovič, who developed the so-called theory of metatexts. Popovič understood metatexts as all types of texts, including translations, characterized by the fact that their creation presupposes another text, the so-called prototext. Such texts represent the outcomes of text-generating transformations and have a modelling, sign-based relationship to the source text (Popovič 1978; Valentová 2017; Žilka 2020). However, this approach to metatext theory did not reflect the issue of adaptation as a transformation within the intermedial or multimodal framework, a topic that began to receive attention in the Slovak academic context only in the late 1990s and early 2000s, particularly within literary studies and aesthetics (Žilka 1995, 2006; Sabol 2014, 2021), film studies, film and theatre arts and media communication, (Macek 1992; Radošinská 2019, Inšitorisová 2020, 2024) and translation studies focusing on specific aspects of audiovisual translation (Perez 2015, Paulínyová 2017, Zahorák and Perez 2024).

As we have already mentioned, theoretical and applied approaches to adaptation have gradually evolved, and adaptation is no longer viewed solely in terms of fidelity or freedom in relation to the literary original, because its final form is significantly determined by the medium or channel in which it is produced, particularly through technical and formal constraints (in the case of dubbing, for example, constraints arising from the effort to maintain synchronization, as well as qualitative, quantitative, or rhythmic consistency in individual lines), means of expression, genre and media conventions, etc. However, adaptation is also shaped and influenced by the creative decisions of the agents involved in its production, including the screenwriter, director, dramaturg, distributor, and other members of the creative team. According to Hutcheon (2013), the success of an adaptation can no longer be determined by its fidelity to the literary original, and it is time to focus instead on its popularity, longevity, or even diversity and extent of its distribution as criteria for success.

When analysing a film adaptation, both the context and the adaptation process itself are crucial. The original literary work should not be perceived as something that the adaptation must faithfully reproduce, but rather as a text that can be interpreted and transformed in various ways. It is also essential to consider the cultural and aesthetic needs of the given period and of the specific genre (Aragay 2005).

In contemporary terms, adaptation can be defined as the transfer or transformation of one artistic text (type or genre) into another artistic text (type or genre), with the most common form being the transformation of a literary work into a dramatic, film, television, or radio production (Žilka 2020). Hutcheon (2013) understands adaptation as a process, or an act of

recreation, which results in an independent artistic work. She identifies three dimensions within adaptation: adaptation as a product (the final work); as a process (the transformation from one medium or channel to another); and as an act of reception (the audience recognizes the existence of the original source text). Hutcheon (2010), in defining the formal components of adaptation and its specific characteristics, mentions the shift from “telling” to “showing,” meaning that the information contained in a literary work, in accordance with the change of medium, is transformed into a certain action, movement, or gesture. In the case of film adaptation of a literary work – the focus of our interest – according to Hutcheon (2010), there may be a shortening of the length or a simplification of certain aspects, or on the contrary, an addition of plot motivation and characters, the enrichment of linguistic and stylistic elements in dialogues, the intensification of certain scenes, the build-up of tension, etc. An essential part of film adaptation is thus the representation of visual (physicality, props, costumes, settings) and auditory elements (voice, sounds, music).

When considering the specifics of adapting a literary work into a film (audiovisual) format, McFarlane’s concept (1996) of transferable and non-transferable codes is applicable. Transferable codes include narrative elements such as plot, characters, central conflicts, and the sequential unfolding of the story. These are codes that form the structural core of the story and function relatively independently of the specific medium (channel) in which they are rendered. Non-transferable codes include formal, technical and stylistic devices, and techniques specific to a given medium, e.g. internal monologue, flashbacks, visual metaphors, image composition, camera work, editing, musical composition, etc. These elements cannot be adapted without modification on the level of meaning and expression, because their effect is tied to the specific characteristics of the medium through which they are conveyed.

Since the process of adapting a literary work into a film represents a complex transformation in the mode of communication through a different medium, it involves a number of changes resulting from both objective and subjective factors (changes in means of expression, the specifics of film language, temporal, production-related, and technical constraints, the creative approach of the screenwriter, director, dramaturg, etc.) (Žilka 2020). In general, adaptation differs from the literary original in the application of the following changes and modes of transmission (Žilka 2020; Pavis 2004):

- elimination – involves omitting parts, elements, characters, or specific plot lines and descriptions; this is a common practice used when adapting a literary work into a film. When applied, the text becomes more dynamic;

- addition – involves expanding the original work with new elements, passages, characters, storylines, etc. It is a creative act in which certain specific parts of the work are developed, the text acquires a new artistic quality, etc;
- contamination – involves creating a new text from multiple texts, a phenomenon often reflected in relation to composition. The author uses multiple sources that form the basis of the new text;
- substitution – the replacement of a specific element (a character's name, a place name, setting the plot in a different geographical space, etc.) with another element. In translation studies, substitution as a mode of transfer can be approached in two ways: naturalization – which involves replacing elements with native ones – and exoticization – which consists of using foreign elements or replacing native elements with foreign ones.

This categorization is illustrated through examples drawn from the corpus of this study, the fantasy novel *Ein Mädchen namens Willow* (2020) by Sabine Bohlmann and its film adaptation of the same title, *Ein Mädchen namens Willow* (2025) (see the section *Transfer of Linguistic and Cultural Specifics in Audiovisual (Dubbing) Translation* for a more detailed characterization of the literary and audiovisual works from a linguistic and plot perspective). We shall focus only on those changes that, in our opinion, may contribute to the weakening or intensification of the semantic and expressive levels of the literary source text in the film adaptation.

In the film adaptation of the novel *Ein Mädchen namens Willow*, the following characters and elements were eliminated:

- In the literary original, the children of Willow's neighbour Gundula – Geraldina and Gideon – appear. Willow, the protagonist, views them extremely negatively, as demonstrated by the excerpt from the novel [...] *Willow warf die Tür so fest zu, dass es krachte. Gundula und ihre beiden Kinder waren die schlimmsten Menschen, die Willow je getroffen hatte* (2020, p. 58). In the novel, their relationship develops negatively; to Willow, they are unwanted visitors and she even gives them expressively ironic nicknames – *Sie beschloss, Gundula in Gedanken von nun an nur noch Blödkröte zu nennen. Den Kindern gab sie die Namen Wurstgesicht und Kratzbürste* (2020, p. 59). *Blödkröte* (literal translation: stupid toad) is an offensive and derisive term in German for a stupid, unintelligent person; *Wurstgesicht* (literal translation: sausage face) is a

colloquial, mocking term used to describe a person with a round, chubby face, and *Kratzbürste* (literal translation: wire brush) is a colloquial term used to describe a defiant, quarrelsome person. Since these characters are absent from the film adaptation, there is a complete loss of semantic and expressive specificity in this regard.

- Four animals – a fox, an owl, a turtle, and a squirrel – play a significant symbolic and characterizing role in the original novel; they are linked to the protagonists and serve as their magical guides. In the film adaptation, however, only the fox appears in the plot, accompanying Willow into the forest, which can be interpreted as a partial weakening of the motif linking the protagonists to nature.
- Among the fantastical elements that contribute to the plot structure of a literary work and represent its imaginative component, *Schlüsselbaum* (literal translation: key tree), from whose branches hundreds of keys hang, including one embossed with a fox head (linking to the magical animal) and the letter W (the initial of the protagonist), is notable. In the novel, Willow uses the key to open a chest containing a magic book; in the film adaptation, she places her hand on the book, which then comes to life, or rather, through film and visual effects, transforms into a specific character.

In relation to the method of addition, which allowed the development of an additional plotline and enriched the audiovisual text at various levels – verbal-visual, semantic, and expressive – it is worth mentioning the appearance of a central character in the audiovisual work, the magician and mentor Grimoor. While in the literary original he takes the form of a book that writes answers to the protagonist's questions on its pages, in the film adaptation he becomes a fantastical element (character) in the form of a wizard who fulfils several functions: he represents one of the traditional fantasy motifs (an old, experienced magician); provides a humorous element to hold the child audience's attention; plays a plot-driving role – he helps to advance the story – and significantly enriches the linguistic and expressive levels of the audiovisual work. Here we can also mention the sequences of the audiovisual work accompanied by visual effects, in which the protagonists learn to perform magic and control their elements – fire, water, earth, and air.

We observed substitution, for example, in the characters of the men called *Geier und Wiesel* (literal translation: Vulture and Weasel), who are trying to acquire the forest. In the film adaptation, they are replaced by the married couple *Geiers* (this is a so-called charactonym –

der Geier means vulture in German), who own a real estate agency and intend to build a shopping centre in the forest.

It is essential to emphasize that we understand film adaptation of a literary work as a complex, creative, and intertextual process, and for illustrative purposes, we have cited only the most striking examples of elements present (or absent) on the semantic and expressive levels. We recognize that individual changes along the literary work–audiovisual work axis may be influenced by the specifics of the film medium, production and dramaturgical adjustments, temporal compression of the plot, visual representation, etc., and therefore cannot be perceived as a negative phenomenon. On the contrary, they contribute to the interpretation, transformation, and development of the literary source and form an integral part of every adaptation.

Dubbing translation and dialogue adaptation: Specifics and constraints

As the primary focus of this study is the interlingual transfer of the given literary work through an audiovisual channel (German original vs Slovak dubbing), we shall devote particular attention to the theoretical overview of the specifics and constraints of dubbing translation and dialogue adaptation. Dubbing translation represents one of the key stages in the production of a new language version. It is a process in which the translator receives an audiovisual work in a foreign language and renders it into the target language in a natural and semantically adequate manner. This process involves using stylistic and linguistic means that sound natural in spoken language and avoiding complex syntactic structures or words that are difficult to pronounce. Dialogue adaptation involves adapting the translated dubbing script to the articulation, gestures, and facial expressions of the characters, so that the resulting dialogue appears natural and authentic (Paulínyová 2015). Díaz Cintas and Orero (2010) define dubbing as the replacement of the audio track with a recording that reproduces the original meaning and synchronizes the sound with the actors' lip movements. They also note that dubbing is an ideal solution for overcoming language barriers, especially for a child audience, as is the case with the corpus of this study, primarily intended for a child audience.

From the perspective of this research, it is important to consider the specifics of film adaptation of literary works on several levels: multimodal, involving adaptation through a different medium (image and sound); transfer (translation) within two distinct linguistic and cultural spaces – German and Slovak – and, finally, transfer reflecting audiovisual (dubbing) translation and dialogue adaptation. Dubbing translation and dialogue adaptation are characterized by a range of pragmatic, production-related, technical, content, and formal, and

linguistic and cultural specifics and constraints arising from the nature of audiovisual communication. Respecting these specifics and constraints is essential for adequately handling the audiovisual work in subsequent stages of the dubbing process. In our proposed categorization, we briefly characterize the individual types of specifics and constraints dubbing translators and dialogue adaptors frequently encounter in contemporary Slovak audiovisual practice.

Pragmatic and production-related specifics – these are specific requirements from the client and distributor concerning legislative, technical, or content-related conditions of the production. When applied to the dubbing translation and dialogue adaptation stage, this may involve working with additional materials that specify recommendations or specific methods and strategies regarding, for example, the transfer of slang and vulgarisms (including the recommended or required degree of expressiveness), the transfer of cultural references, names, titles, etc.

Technical, content, and formal specifics – include specific details regarding the content and form requirements for translating and adapting dialogue (marking of characters, sounds, emotions in speech, etc.) and maintaining synchronization (between the visual and sound components) through various types of adaptation. At the linguistic level, three basic types of adaptation are distinguished (Paulínyová 2017):

- **A qualitative adaptation** which is focused on articulation and lip synchronization. The following can be achieved:
 - absolute correspondence (place names or proper names);
 - partial correspondence (words with a similar etymological root or orthographically similar words);
 - zero correspondence.
- **A quantitative adaptation** which is focused on matching the length of sentences and individual lines to the original length.
- **A rhythmic adaptation** which is focused on aligning the rhythm of the lines.

In general, the dialogue adaptor always aims to preserve three key elements: the length of the line, the phonetic pattern, and the rhythm (Kozáková, 2013). In terms of phonetic structure, the sounds produced by lip movement are important for the dialogue adaptor, i.e. the bilabial consonants *p*, *b*, *m*, the labiodental consonants *f*, *w*, and *v*, and the prominent vowels *a* and *o*, to which Walló (1987) refers as non-substitutable components. On the other hand, sounds to

which such importance is not attributed in qualitative adaptation – because our lips do not move during their articulation – are called neutral components (ibid.).

Within the extralinguistic level, we recognize mimetic, gestural, and kinetic adaptation, all of which aim to achieve verbal and non-verbal consistency. These types of adaptation can be explained as an effort to synchronize the gestures and mimics of actors on screen with the dialogues (Zahorák and Perez 2024; Paulínyová 2017). Chaume's (2007) textual quality parameters of dubbing apply to the creation of dubbing translations and dialogue adaptations; these include adequate lip synchronization, natural-sounding dialogue, coherence between dialogue and image, fidelity to the original, and phonetic ease – that is, the ease with which words can be pronounced.

Linguistic and cultural specifics – these are factors related to the linguistic characteristics of the characters and the linguistic and cultural context of the original. In dubbing translation and dialogue adaptation, frequently occurring specific features include the characters' idiolects, which can be expressed linguistically through slang, dialect, vulgarisms, or other substandard forms; rhymed passages and songs; wordplay; so-called charactonyms; cultural specifics (realia, allusions), etc. We shall discuss in more detail a theoretical overview of approaches to selected linguistic and cultural specifics, which are analysed in the section *Comparative Analysis of Selected Linguistic and Cultural Specifics in the German and Slovak Dubbed Versions of the Film Ein Mädchen namens Willow*.

As idiolect – the set of expressive means that constitute a speaker's unique individual language – is one of the fundamental means of characterization, fulfilling a dramaturgical, informative, and aesthetic function in any type of translation – including audiovisual translation – it is necessary to preserve it as much as possible in dubbing translation as well. The character should ideally produce the same impression in the target language (the dubbed version) as in the original. To ensure that the functionality and naturalness of the dialogues are preserved in the translation, the translator should be able to convey the characters' personalities through their speech in the target language (Paulínyová 2017; Zahorák and Perez 2024). Therefore, it is extremely important for the translator to master the subtle semantic nuances between lexemes and individual synonyms, which may differ from one another in expressiveness, the chronological stratification of the lexicon, stylistic connotations, and origin. When translating slang, for example, it is necessary to preserve the expressiveness of the expressions and avoid overusing approaches that either weaken or intensify the meaning (Gavurová 2018). In texts intended primarily for child audiences, there is also an increased occurrence of diminutives, which form part of children's idiolects and serve to convey the childlike nature of the characters.

When transferring them into the target language, their frequency must be considered so that the text does not sound overly childish (*ibid.*).

A characteristic feature of our research corpus is the presence of rhymed passages; therefore, we consider it useful to mention the approach to their translation in works intended for child readers or audiences. Such translation requires a specific approach not only with regard to the target audience but also to domestic poetic conventions. When translating poetry (rhymed passages) for children, the adaptive approach proves to be particularly effective; this is understood as a form of indirect translation carried out in accordance with the translator's individual poetics, who is often also the creative author of the text. However, such a translation may result in certain deviations from the original text and a variable degree of preservation of its semantic and expressive levels (Vráblová 2015). Nevertheless, the adaptive approach enables a more intensive adaptation of the translated text to the context and expectations of the target culture (Gavurová 2018).

Another linguistic and cultural (and translation-related) specific is wordplay, which, in the case of audiovisual works, can also contribute to the creation of a character's idiolect. Wordplay presents a specific translation challenge, as its functionality depends on linguistic form, phonetic and semantic relationships, as well as cultural context. It can also be considered challenging in audiovisual translation, where its occurrence combines the visual and auditory elements, and the dubbing translator should try to at least approximate its semantic and expressive components in the target language (Zahorák and Perez 2024). Delabastita (2004) and Múglová (2018) distinguish the following approaches to translating wordplay into the target language, although these primarily concern translation in written form:

- The original wordplay is translated by using wordplay with the same meaning.
- The original wordplay is translated using a similar wordplay in the target language.
- The original wordplay is replaced in the target language by a phrase that does not involve wordplay.
- The original wordplay is replaced by other figurative expressions.
- The original wordplay is translated into the target language.
- A phrase without wordplay is translated into the target language with wordplay, as a form of compensation.
- The wordplay is omitted in the target language because it is untranslatable.

As we have mentioned, dubbing translation is a type of translation that faces numerous constraints on both linguistic and extralinguistic levels, since the translation of dialogue must simultaneously correspond to the length of individual characters' lines, their gestures, lip movements, and other contextual information (Chaume 2012). Schröter (2004 in: Camilli 2019) notes in one of his studies focused on the transfer of wordplay that, for this reason, up to one-third of the original wordplay was lost in the translation of a British audiovisual comedy, explaining that since the audience does not hear the original audio during dubbing, it is possible to omit the wordplay in the translation or even invent a new one in another place.

Another challenging aspect in the dubbing translation of an audiovisual work primarily intended for a child audience can be the names of characters and so-called charactonyms. According to Brezovská (2015), when translating names, it is important to know the character's gender, determine whether it is appropriate to keep the name or translate it, understand the character's personality, determine whether the character is comical or has an accent, how the name will function within the text, and whether it will appear, for example, in diminutives or wordplay, as well as to determine the target age group for the audiovisual work. Brezovská also notes that in dubbing practice, Slovakia is among the countries that do not tend to translate everything, and in her opinion, it is not necessary to translate all names, even if they contribute to characterization. However, in works intended for the youngest children, there is a greater tendency to translate names, as well as in cases where the names form part of the humour. In such cases, it is necessary to invent a funny and catchy name that also conforms to declension and other linguistic constraints of the Slovak language (ibid.).

Literary and audiovisual works intended for children and young audiences typically contain charactonyms that provide the readers or the audiences with evaluative information about the traits and characteristics of individual characters (Majtán 1983) while also evoking certain emotions (Kiššová 2009). These names may fulfil an informative function, a formative function related to the values represented by a given character, or an emotional, creative, diverting, or aesthetic function (Van Coillie 2006 in: Kiššová 2009). As for their translation, given that the author intends to embed the character's traits or characteristics within the name, it is advisable to clarify their meaning in the translation (Vilikovský 1984). The so-called method of recreation is used, which consists of preserving the original effect on the reader of the target text. This is one of the most creative methods, as the new name must preserve the semantic value of the original name (Fernandes 2006). In this context, it is worth mentioning the study done by Lakotová (2020), in which she analysed, among other aspects, the translation of charactonyms in the audiovisual work *Paddington*, translated by the renowned Slovak

dubbing translator Mirka Brezovská. In the dubbing translation, she translated the functional names into the target language, but in cases where their translation would sound unnatural, she left them in their original form. It is worth mentioning an example where the nickname of one of the characters remained untranslated, as it was tattooed on the character's wrists – translating the nickname would have created a discrepancy between the visual and auditory elements of the work, which only highlights the complexity of dubbing translation in many respects.

Transfer of linguistic and cultural specifics in audiovisual (dubbing) translation

The material basis of this research is the film adaptation of Sabine Bohlmann's book *Ein Mädchen namens Willow* (Thienemann-Esslinger Verlag 2020), titled *Ein Mädchen namens Willow* (Constantin Film 2025), and the Slovak dubbed version *Dievča menom Willow* [A Girl Named Willow] (Filmforum 2025). This research focuses on a comparative analysis of the selected specifics arising from the audiovisual translation of the original (German) and dubbed (Slovak) versions, both on the linguistic and extralinguistic levels. The primary object of our interest consists of linguistic and cultural specifics related to the embedding of the original work within a broader sociocultural context, characterization of the characters, and other expressive features reflected in the original version of the audiovisual work. We aim to demonstrate individual types of linguistic and cultural specifics (idiolect, wordplay, rhymed passages, charactonyms) using specific examples and to highlight possible translation methods and strategies applicable in the dubbing translation of an audiovisual work primarily intended for a child audience.

Ein Mädchen namens Willow by S. Bohlmann is a fantasy novel aimed at children and young adults. The protagonist is an 11-year-old girl named Willow, who returns with her father to the place where they once lived. She learns that her aunt Alwina has left her an inheritance – a forest, and she discovers that she has also inherited magical powers from her. She learns to cast spells, explores the world of magic, and looks for the three other girls with magical powers so that together they can save the forest and its animal inhabitants as they are in danger. The main themes reflected in both the literary and audiovisual works include ecology, particularly the importance of nature protection, the power of friendship, belief in one's own abilities, and acceptance of difference. The protagonists are Willow and the three witches, Valentina, Gretchen, and Lotti. From a linguistic perspective, both the novel and the audiovisual work are characterized by rhymed passages, which in the literary source text serve to compositionally separate individual chapters (in the audiovisual work, they form part of dialogues), verses (spells), and stylistic devices in the form of charactonyms or wordplay based on etymological

and semantic motivations, which contribute to the creation of humorous situations and a more detailed characterization of the characters.

Comparative analysis of selected linguistic and cultural specifics in the German and Slovak dubbed versions of the film *Ein Mädchen namens Willow*

In the following section of this paper, we focus on a comparative analysis of selected linguistic and cultural specifics excerpted from the original (German) and dubbed (Slovak) versions of the film *Ein Mädchen namens Willow*. For each example, we provide a time code indicating the start of the line, the character's name, and then the line in the original (German) version and in the Slovak dubbed version, including information on whether it occurs on-screen or off-screen, or whether it transitions from off-screen to on-screen or vice versa.

One of the most significant linguistic and cultural specifics in dubbing translation is the idiolect of individual characters. The speech of Grimmoor, who serves as the protagonist's mentor in the film adaptation, is characterized by frequent use of wordplay based on the transposition of individual letters and words, leading to humorous situations and a comedic effect. The transfer of wordplay in dubbing translation is determined by several linguistic and extralinguistic factors – the visual level (whether the wordplay in question, or a reference to it, is also represented visually), qualitative and quantitative adaptation (whether the character delivers the line on screen, or whether there is a close-up of their mouth), and finally, whether the wordplay functions in the given dialogue as a significant stylistic and expressive element. We demonstrate the aforementioned specifics and possible approaches to the translation of wordplay that respect the linguistic and extralinguistic specifics of the audiovisual work using selected examples.

Original version 24:55 GRIMMOOR (to off-screen–from off-screen) Was? Mich? Ach, Papier-la-papp. **Ich bin nicht erschreckbar. Also mich erschrockt nichts. Schockt. Scheckt. Blblbl.** Wenn ich mich vorstellen darf: ich bin Grimmoor. Mit Doppel M und Doppel O. Ein Jahrtausende altes Hexenbuch. Und wer bist Du, wenn ich fragen darf, mh?

Slovak dubbing 24:55 GRIMMOOR (to off-screen–from off-screen) Čo? Mňa? **Ale čoby. Ja sa nebojím. Mňa nič nevydeší. Desí. Blll.** Rád sa predstavím. Ja som Grimóór. Dve em a dlhé ó. Kniha kúziel stará tisícky rokov. A ty si kto? Hm? [What? Me? **No way. I'm not afraid. Nothing dares me. Scares. Blll.** Nice to meet you. I'm Grimmoor. Two em's and a long o. A spellbook thousands of years old. And who are you? Hm?]

In the scene, Grimoor introduces himself to Willow. In his monologue, he uses the modified onomatopoeic expression *Papierlapapp* (from the German *papperlapapp*), which in German is used as an interjection in response to foolish, nonsensical remarks. In the Slovak dubbed version, the interjection is not used in the translation, but its semantic meaning is conveyed through the phrase *ale čoby* [no way], in accordance with the qualitative adaptation. The scene also features the wordplay *Ich bin nicht erschreckbar. Also mich erschrockt nichts. Schockt. Scheckt. Blblbl*, which is based on an incorrect grammatical variation of the verb *erschrecken* (meaning to startle or to frighten). Grimoor presents the verb in an incorrect form – *erschrockt* (the correct form is *erschrickt*) – and then corrects himself, using the rhythmically and phonetically similar verb *schockt* (from the verb *Schocken* – to shock) and the incorrect, phonetically similar-sounding verb *scheckt*. The wordplay is based on sound patterning and the use of incorrect verb forms, adding a comical effect to the line. In the transfer to the Slovak dubbed version, a wordplay with a broader analogous meaning is used, based on the phonetic similarity of the verbs, with one of them appearing in the incorrect form – *mňa nič nevydeší* (the correct form would be *nevydesí*). *Desí* [nothing dares me. Scares]. Since the actor's speech tempo in the German original is fast, the line was partially shortened in terms of syllables in the Slovak dubbed version – the six-syllable sentence in German *Ich bin nicht erschreckbar* is replaced by the five-syllable sentence *Ja sa nebojím* [I'm not afraid].

Original version 25:18 GRIMOOR (to off-screen–from off-screen) Eine Willow. Willow. Willow, Willow, Willow... da blättert doch was in mir. Ja natürlich! Diese Ähnlichkeit! Wie konnte ich das nur übersehen? Willow! **Du bist die große Klein-Nichte von... die kleine Großnichte von Walina, äh, Alwina. Entschuldige.** Meine Buchstaben sind noch ganz durcheinander. Freut mich sehr, Deine Bekanntschaft zu machen. Willow! Mhhhmhm...

Slovak dubbing 25:18 GRIMOOR (to off-screen–from off-screen) Takže, Vilou. Vilou, Vilou, Vilou. Listujem v sebe. No, jasné! Táá podoba! Ved' to je úplne jasné. Vilou! **Veľká malá neter, teda malá neter Valiny. Ehm, Alvíny.** Prepáč. Stále sa mi pletú písmenká. Veľmi ma teší. Vilou! Hmm... [So, Willow. Willow, Willow, Willow. I'm searching my memory. Oh, right! That resemblance! It's completely obvious. Willow! **A big little niece, I mean, Valina's little niece. Um, Alvina's.** Sorry. I keep mixing up the letters. It's a pleasure to meet you. Willow! Hmm...]

Another example that illustrates the use of wordplay that constitutes a significant element contributing to a character's idiolect. It is based on the illogical inversion of the semantic components of the words *groß* (big) and *klein* (small) – *die große Klein-Nichte*; *die*

kleine Großnichte – and on the phonetic substitution of sounds – *Walina* – *Alwina*. The Slovak dubbed version respects this specific feature and, in accordance with the qualitative adaptation, uses a wordplay based on the same principle, i.e. the illogical reversal of the words big and small – *velká malá neter; teda malá neter Valiny. Ehm, Alvíny* [A big little niece, I mean, Valina's little niece. Um, Alvina's]. In the scene, Grimoor even explicitly explains the reason for his peculiar speech to the child audience – *Meine Buchstaben sind noch ganz durcheinander*, in the Slovak dubbed version – *Stále sa mi pletú písmenká* [I keep mixing up the letters], which can be seen as a strategy of appealing to the child audience in an effort to ensure comprehensibility.

Original version 27:53 GRIMOOR (from off-screen–to off-screen) Dafür gibt es dann den „Hop-hop-alle Tassen zurück in den Zankschrauber“, äh „Schrank“-Zauber.

Slovak dubbing 27:53 GRIMOOR (from off-screen–to off-screen) **Na to je hop-hop kúzlo čarovná moc. Ehm, teda, moc.** [For that, there is the hop-hop spell magic pee. Um, I mean, power.]

In the given excerpt, Grimoor explains to Willow the nature of a spell called *Hop-hop-alle Tassen zurück in den Schrank-Zauber* (literal translation: Hop-hop, all cups back into the cupboard spell). However, he mispronounces it, resulting in the wordplay *Zankschrauber* – *Schrank-Zauber*, based on a rearrangement of the letters in the individual words – *Zank* instead of *Schrank*, *Schrauber* instead of *Zauber*. The Slovak dubbed version uses a substitution involving a wordplay with a different meaning: *Na to je hop-hop kúzlo čarovná moc. Ehm, teda, moc* [For that, there is the hop-hop spell magic pee. Um, I mean, power] which, however, achieves the same comic effect (the substitution of the semantically different but phonetically similar words *moč* [pee] and *moc* [power]) and synchronizes with the actor's articulation. This approach demonstrates that when transferring wordplay, in many cases, the translator (dialogue adaptor) must deviate from the original and find a creative solution that fits the communicative situation in accordance with the character's idiolect and, above all, with the linguistic and extralinguistic specifics arising from the dubbing translation.

Original version 49:51 GRIMOOR (to off-screen–from off-screen–to off-screen) Eichenwinde, Eisenkraut, Rosenöl und Schlangenhaut. Sandelholz und Drachenblut, weißer Salbei, Seelenmut, Nebelweide, Schattenfarn,... Morgentau und Baldrian. Bringt der Kräuter allerlei, für das Ritual herbei..... und bringt an einen Ort sie dann, an dem Magie frei fließen kann. Und in der nächsten Vollmondnacht wird Eure Hexenkraft entfacht.

Slovak dubbing 49:51 GRIMOOR (to off-screen–from off-screen–to off-screen) *Kôra z dubu, verbena, olej z ruží, stačí neveľa! Dračia krv a biela šalvia, vrba, paprad', púpava, ruža, ľalia a fuksia! Hlina, voda a odvaha! Ranná rosa, byliny, ukážte svoj rituál neviny... Prineste ich tam, kde mágia nie je žiaden klam. A na ďalší krásny spln, nech sú razom všetky čary VOON.* [Oak bark, verbena, rose oil, just a little is enough! Dragon's blood and white sage, willow, fern, dandelion, rose, lily, and fuchsia! Soil, water, and courage! Morning dew, herbs, reveal your ritual of innocence... Bring them to where magic is no illusion. And on the next beautiful full moon, may all spells be cast at ONCE.]

Another significant linguistic and stylistic element is the use of rhymed passages frequently employed in Grimoor's speech. In this scene, he gives instructions to the young witches and lists everything they must prepare for the ritual that will awaken their magical powers. In the original version, the lexical level features the names of herbs and plants such as *Eisenkraut* (verbena), *Rosenöl* (rose oil), *weißer Salbei* (white sage), *Baldrian* (valerian), including words and phrases reflecting fantasy motifs – *Schlangehaut* (snake skin), *Drachenblut* (dragon's blood), etc. The decisive factor influencing the translation of this line is the preservation of rhythm and partial rhyme. The Slovak dubbed version takes a more flexible approach to the semantic level (*Kôra z dubu, verbena, olej z ruží, stačí neveľa[...]*) [Oak bark, verbena, rose oil, just a little is enough...], using the names of herbs and magical elements (*verbena, olej z ruží, dračia krv, biela šalvia, vrba, paprad', púpava[...]*) [verbena, rose oil, dragon's blood, white sage, willow, fern, dandelion...], while the entire passage maintains an appropriate rhythmic structure and a natural sound. This example demonstrates that the transfer of rhymed passages in a dubbing translation must necessarily be viewed as a creative act, in which preserving rhythm and rhyme often takes precedence over transmitting the semantic level in an absolute or identical manner.

Original version 31:19 WILLOW (on-screen) **Zeige mir was in dir steckt, die Wahrheit in uns wird geweckt.**

Slovak dubbing 31:19 WILLOW (on-screen) **Ukáž mi, čo je v tebe, všetku pravdu v sebe. [Show me what lies within you, all the truth within you.]**

The analysed audiovisual work also features rhymed passages in the form of spells, the translation of which is guided by the preservation of rhyme, melody, and the semantic and visual levels, in accordance with the specific types of adaptation. In the scene shown, Willow recites a spell intended to help her uncover the witches. In the German version, *Zeige mir was in dir*

steckt, die Wahrheit in uns wird geweckt (literal translation: Show me what lies within you, the truth within us will be revealed), a coupled rhyme is – *steckt–geweckt* – which is partially preserved in the Slovak version in *v tebe–v sebe* [within you–within you], retaining both the semantic and expressive levels of the original. The rhyme was preserved in accordance with quantitative adaptation – the original line has 15 syllables, the Slovak version uses 13 syllables, while similar modifications (shortening) are a common occurrence in the German-to-Slovak dubbing translation due to the relatively fast tempo of speech in German.

Original version 40:39 GRETCHEN (off-screen) **Was guckt ihr mich denn so an?**

Slovak dubbing 40:39 GRETCHEN: (off-screen) **Čo tak kukáte? [What are you staring at?]**

Original version 40:41 VALENTINA (off-screen) **Es regnet und sie wird nicht nass.**

Slovak dubbing 40:41 VALENTINA (off-screen) **Prší a ona je suchá. [It's raining and she's dry.]**

Original version 40:44 GRETCHEN (on-screen) **Normal.**

Slovak dubbing 40:44 GRETCHEN (on-screen) **Normálka. [Totally normal.]**

Given the linguistic and cultural specifics of the original, it is essential to mention the witch Gretchen, whose speech is characterized by excessive verbosity and considerable expressiveness, straddling the line between colloquialism and slang. Preserving her idiolect in the dubbed version is extremely important because, in addition to its communicative function, it also serves a significant characterizing function. In the aforementioned scene, Willow and Valentina meet Gretchen. It is raining and everyone except Gretchen is wet. Gretchen asks in surprise: *Was guckt ihr mich denn so an?* In her line, she uses the colloquial verb *angucken* (to stare, to glance), and a similar approach (the colloquial verb *kukat'* [stare]) is also used in the Slovak dubbed version – *Čo tak kukáte?* [What are you staring at?] Since the line is spoken off-screen, no detailed qualitative adaptation was necessary. We also identify the idiolect represented by the slang expression in the character's subsequent statement – *Normal* – translated as *normálka* [totally normal] in the Slovak dubbing, which is an appropriate solution based on respecting the common etymological origin of the word (*normal* – *normálka* [totally normal]), including the preservation of the character's linguistic characteristics.

Original version 41:56 GRETCHEN (from off-screen) **Heiliger Bimbam. Ich glaub mein Hamster bohnert.**

Slovak dubbing 41:56 GRETCHEN (from off-screen) **No ty koki. Ja sa prepadnem... [Holy cow. Blow me down...]**

The witches introduce Gretchen to Grimmoor, and her reaction is, from a linguistic perspective, a typical example of a combination of substandard forms (colloquial expressions, slang) and expressiveness. The German colloquial phrase *Heiliger Bimbam* (literal translation: holy bim-bam), expressing surprise, amazement, or shock, is replaced in the Slovak dubbed version by the youth slang expression *No ty koki* [Holy cow], which has the same meaning. The idiom *Ich glaube, mein Hamster bohnert* (literal translation: I think my hamster is polishing/waxing) is used to express absolute surprise, amazement, or horror. In terms of meaning, it resembles the phrase *Heiliger Bimbam*, though in German it can be considered more expressive and at the same time more ironic. It originates from the Berlin dialect and it is often used in conjunction with other metaphorical phrases or expressions (Krumm, 2013). In the Slovak dubbed version, in accordance with the quantitative and qualitative adaptation of the line – the beginning of which occurs off-screen – an expressive inversion was employed, i.e. the functional relocation of the more expressive element to a different position in the translation. In dubbing translation and dialogue adaptation, this is a legitimate and relatively common strategy that stems from the need to maintain the optimal synchronization in accordance with the semantic and expressive levels of the line.

Original version 01:03:14 GRETCHEN (off-screen) **Da wird ja der Hund in der Pfanne verrückt.** Was machen wir denn jetzt?

Slovak dubbing 01:03:14 GRETCHEN (off-screen) **A máme po chlebe! Čo budeme robiť? [And we're out of bread. What are we going to do?]**

Original version 01:03:17 GRIMMOOR (on-screen) **Moment. Wir haben einen Hund in der Pfanne?**

Slovak dubbing 01:03:17 GRIMMOOR (on-screen) Hm. **Moment, my máme nejaký chlieb? [Hm. Wait a minute, we have bread?]**

Original version 01:03:19 VALENTINA (from off-screen) Gretchen meint damit, dass ... ähm, wie...

Slovak dubbing 01:03:19 VALENTINA (from off-screen) Ona chcela povedať, že... [She wanted to say that...]

Original version 01:03:22 GRETCHEN (on-screen) **Wie „ich glaub mein Schwein pfeift“.**

Slovak dubbing 01:03:22 GRETCHEN (on-screen) **Že si môžeme písať.** [That we can whistle.]

Original version 01:03:27 GRIMMOOR (from off-screen) Ah. **Das ist kein Schwein, dass da pfeift, das ist der Wind!**

Slovak dubbing 01:03:27 GRIMMOOR (from off-screen) **Och, to nie sme my. To píska vietor! [Oh, that's not us whistling. It's the wind!]**

An interesting situation arises when an idiom (or wordplay) is present in a dubbed translation not only on the auditory (verbal) level but also on the visual level. The German idiom *Da wird der Hund in der Pfanne verrückt* (literal translation: The dog in the pan goes crazy) is used to express astonishment, positive or negative surprise, or when something is considered absurd (Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache). In the analysed line, we identify a wordplay based on a literal or slightly modified transfer of the idiom – Grimmoor asks Gretchen: *Wir haben einen Hund in der Pfanne?* (literal translation: Do we have a dog in the pan?) In the Slovak dubbed version, a substitution is used with the help of the idiomatic expression *mať po chlebe* [to be out of bread], meaning to be in trouble or to have a problem, creating a subsequent comic effect based on an analogical, i.e. literal, understanding of the statement *Moment, my máme nejaký chlieb?* [Wait a minute, we have bread?] The line is realized on-screen and meets the basic requirements for qualitative adaptation. In the given scene, Gretchen reacts and tries to clarify what she meant, but instead of a clear explanation, she uses another idiom, *Ich glaub, mein Schwein pfeift!* (literal translation: I feel like my pig is whistling!), which conveys surprise, astonishment, or indignation at an absurd situation. In the analysed communicative situation, the visual level plays an important role alongside the acoustic-verbal one – in the scene, one can hear the wind howling; Grimmoor looks out the window, sees the wind shaking the branches, and says: *Das ist kein Schwein, dass da pfeift, das ist der Wind* (literal translation: It's not a pig whistling, it's the wind). The Slovak translation *Že si môžeme písať* [That we can whistle] and the subsequent reaction *Och to nie sme my. To píska vietor* [Oh, that's not us whistling. It's the wind] seem like adequate solutions in terms of preserving both the comic effect (idiomatic vs literal meaning) and the visual connection to the semantic level.

Original version 35:07 WILLOW (from off-screen) Darf ich vorstellen: Das ist **Frau Knollinger.**

Slovak dubbing 35:07 WILLOW (from off-screen) Zoznámte sa. To je **pani Hrbová**. [Let me introduce you. This is **Mrs Knobbly**.]

Original version 35:30 WILLOW (from off-screen) Aber **Frau Knollinger** traut sich nicht es ihm zu sagen, weil sie...

Slovak dubbing 35:30 WILLOW (from off-screen) Ale **pani Hrbová** mu to nepovie, lebo... [But **Mrs Knobbly** won't say anything to him, because...]

Original version 35:33 VALENTINA (off-screen) ...mit **Herrn Pilzmeier** verheiratet ist.

Slovak dubbing 35:33 VALENTINA (off-screen) ... je vydatá za **pána Hubáka**. [... she's married to **Mr Mushroom**.]

Original version 35:35 WILLOW (on-screen) Es ist eine Tragödie.

Slovak dubbing 35:35 WILLOW (on-screen) Je to tragédia. [It's a tragedy.]

Original version 35:37 VALENTINA (on-screen) Weil **Herr Pilzmeier** wiederum für diese vornehme Dame schwärmt.

Slovak dubbing 35:37 VALENTINA (on-screen) Lebo **pán Hubák** stále sníva o tejto dáme. [Because **Mr Mushroom** still dreams of this lady.]

Original version 35:41 VALENTINA (on-screen) **Fräulein Harfe**.

Slovak dubbing 35:41 VALENTINA (on-screen) **Slečne Harfovej**. [**Miss Harp**.]

The audiovisual dimension can play a significant role in audiovisual translation, including in the transfer of charactonyms, which we also observed in the analysed audiovisual material. Here, Willow takes Valentina into the forest and shows her the trees. The visual dimension of the audiovisual work complements the charactonyms – *Frau Knollinger* (from the German *knollig* – bumpy, knobbly) is a tree with an uneven, bumpy surface resembling a face, *Herr Pilzmeier* (German *der Pilz* – mushroom) is a tree on which mushrooms grow, and *Fräulein Harfe* is a tree whose branches resemble a harp. The translation of these character names in the Slovak dubbing respects the motivation behind their creation based on characteristics and visual similarity – *pani Hrbová* [*Mrs Knobbly*] (*hrb* in Slovak means a hump or bump), *pán Hubák* [*Mr Mushroom*] (*huba* in Slovak means a mushroom), and *slečná Harfovej* [*Miss Harp*] (in Slovak, there is a word of Germanic origin, *harfa*). These translation solutions use the suffix “-ová” to indicate the feminine gender and, in accordance with the stylistic

adaptation, preserve the concept of charactonyms, including their visual and semantic associations.

Original version 36:01 WILLOW (from off-screen–to off-screen–from off-screen) Und das ist **Waldtraut**. Die Mutter des Waldes. Sie ist der älteste Baum hier. Siehst Du ihre Wurzeln? Sie erstrecken sich durch den ganzen Wald. Kannst Du Dir vorstellen was sie schon alles erlebt hat?

Slovak dubbing 36:01 WILLOW (from off-screen–to off-screen–from off-screen) To je **Lesmíra**. Matka lesa. Je tu najstaršia. Vidíš jej korene? Tiahnu sa cez celý les. Predstav si, čo všetko zažila. [This is **Forestia**. The mother of the forest. She's the eldest here. Do you see her roots? They run through the entire forest. Just imagine everything she's seen.]

The example illustrates a charactonym created using the method of recreation. It refers to the tree *Waldtraut* (from the German *der Wald* – forest, *traut* – familiar, close), which serves as the narrative voice in the audiovisual work. In Slovak, the nouns *strom* [tree] and *les* [forest] are masculine, but since *Waldtraut* is voiced by a female voice in both the original and the Slovak dubbed versions, it was necessary to find a feminine equivalent that would convey the original effect while preserving the semantic level and, at the same time, harmonize with the character's articulatory movements (in the analysed line, shots alternate between on-screen and off-screen; thus, no detailed qualitative adaptation was necessary). The neologism *Lesmíra* [Forestia], formed from the noun *les* [forest] combined with the suffix *-míra* typical for some female proper names of Slavic origin, fully meets the above criteria.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the issue of intersemiotic adaptation of the fantasy novel *Ein Mädchen namens Willow* by S. Bohlmann (2020) and the subsequent interlingual transfer of the audiovisual work of the same title, *Ein Mädchen namens Willow* (2025), into the Slovak dubbed version titled *Dievča menom Willow* [A Girl Named Willow] (2025).

We have summarized theoretical approaches to understanding adaptation from a diachronic perspective in both the international and Slovak contexts. We understand adaptation as the creative transformation of a work from one sign system to another, which, within the framework of a new medium (in the case of a film adaptation of a literary work, this involves a shift from a verbal medium to an audiovisual medium), exhibits changes and differences in form, in the manner of communication with the recipient, and on the semantic and expressive levels. As we primarily focused on the specifics of audiovisual (dubbing) translation and

dialogue adaptation, we summarized the specifics and constraints typical for this type of translation, and categorized them into three groups – pragmatic and production related specifics; technical, content, and formal specifics; and linguistic and cultural specifics – within which we specifically identified the transfer of idiolect, wordplay, rhymed passages, and so-called charactonyms. Then, we demonstrated translation methods and strategies applicable to the translation of different linguistic and cultural specifics with a comparative analysis of the original and dubbed versions of the film *Ein Mädchen namens Willow*. In the case of wordplay, which significantly contributes to the linguistic characterization of the characters and is present exclusively on the acoustic level of the audiovisual work, it is possible to use wordplay with a similar or even different meaning in the translation, provided it functions on an analogous principle (onomatopoeia, the use of grammatically incorrect forms or phonetically related words, changes in the order of syllables or sounds), whereas if the wordplay is also present on the visual level, this is the decisive factor in choosing a translation strategy. In the case of rhymed passages, it is essential to preserve the rhyme, rhythm, and melody of the original line, including its basic meaning, which may, however, be modified and handled more freely. Within the idiolect, which is based on the use of substandard forms of language (e.g. colloquial expressions, slang), it is necessary to preserve them and, in accordance with the qualitative and quantitative adaptation, choose semantically and expressively adequate equivalents in the target language. Finally, for charactonyms, it is necessary to respect the original motivation behind their creation (similarity based on internal characteristics and traits of the character or based on external resemblance) and to use a functional equivalent or, if necessary, a method of recreation.

We acknowledge that these are not the only universally applicable translation methods and strategies that can be used to convey the aforementioned linguistic and cultural specifics (idiolect, wordplay, rhymed passages, and charactonyms) in the dubbing translation of a work primarily intended for a child audience. However, the demonstration of the presented methods and strategies can serve as a guide on how to approach their transfer and what constraints and specifics must be taken into account.

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