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TRANSLATING COMMUNICATIVELY COMPLEX
REGISTERS
IN YOUTH COMEDY

MA thesis

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present thesis is to find out which strategies have been used for translation of communicatively complex registers in an American youth comedy.

The theoretical part presents different views on translation, audiovisual translation and its specific features, translation of cultural references, and spoken language registers – slang, swearing, and teenage talk.

The empirical part analyses examples of subtitles that have been collected into a corpus and divided into different categories. The main translational strategies are discussed with the examples.
# Table of Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 4
1. Views on translation ........................................................................................................... 7  
  1.1. Literary translation ...................................................................................................... 9  
  1.2. The process of translation .......................................................................................... 9  
2. Audiovisual translation ..................................................................................................... 12  
  2.1. Subtitling .................................................................................................................. 13  
    2.1.1. The specificity of the medium .............................................................................. 14  
    2.1.2. The language of subtitles .................................................................................... 15  
    2.1.3. Downstream translation ..................................................................................... 16  
    2.1.4 Translating cultural references ........................................................................... 17  
  2.2. Audiovisual translation and translation theory ......................................................... 18  
3. Spoken language .............................................................................................................. 21  
  3.1. Slang .......................................................................................................................... 21  
    3.1.1. Translating slang ................................................................................................. 23  
  3.2. Swearing .................................................................................................................... 23  
    3.2.1. Taboo in slang and swearing .............................................................................. 25  
    3.2.2. Swearing in the Estonian language .................................................................... 26  
    3.2.3. Translating swearing ......................................................................................... 27  
  3.3. Teenage talk .............................................................................................................. 27  
4. Method and data .............................................................................................................. 29  
  4.1. Some thoughts on translating Superbad ...................................................................... 29  
  4.2 Data for analysis .......................................................................................................... 30  
  4.3 Translation strategies ................................................................................................. 32  
5. Analysis ........................................................................................................................... 36  
  5.1. Cultural references ..................................................................................................... 36  
  5.2. Colloquialisms and slang .......................................................................................... 44  
  5.3. Sexual slang .............................................................................................................. 51  
  5.4. Swearing .................................................................................................................... 55  
  5.5. Alcohol ...................................................................................................................... 59  
  5.6. Police ......................................................................................................................... 61  
  5.7. English loan words ................................................................................................... 63  
  5.8. Summary of the analysis .......................................................................................... 64  
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 66  
References ............................................................................................................................ 69  
Resümee ............................................................................................................................... 73
Introduction

For nearly a whole century, people have been able to enjoy various audiovisual products, of which television has been one of the most influential media that still holds a strong position.

Estonia is a mainly subtitling country, and subtitles are possibly one of the most common texts many people read since many programmes, especially films, either shown on television or watched on DVDs or in the cinema, originate from other countries, most often from The United States.

Sylfest Lomheim (2000: 9) reasons that if a person watches an average of one hour of subtitled television programmes per week (ca. 30 pages of text), ten months of a year, that would be a text mass of 1200 pages – corresponding to three or four average novels, which is more than the average person reads in a year. According to the April 2011 TV-audience survey, conducted by the market research company TNS Emor, the Estonian viewers watched on average four hours of television per day. However, most or maybe even all programmes in the top 20 of most popular programmes are in the Estonian language, which means that the amount of subtitles read per day could be marginal, but surely it would make up at least the one hour per week mentioned by Lomheim.

Certainly, everyone has come across unsuitable or inaccurate translations in subtitles, but most of the time, subtitles are read unnoticed. This of course, is more true if the subtitles are in neutral written language that we are used to seeing. But what happens if a film is not eligible for translating into that kind of neutral variety? What will the subtitler do? The objective of this thesis is to take a closer look into that, and try to find some answers.

The question is – how successfully and by which means a multi-modal product – a fictional film where highly colloquial language is used, has been conveyed for the Estonian
public. The aim is to categorise the elements that are most likely to cause problems from a communicative perspective. These are any types of words, expressions or references that make the translation process challenging, and the decisions made about these elements will affect the viewers' film experience substantially.

The empirical data is collected from the Estonian subtitles and the English dialogue of the American youth comedy *Superbad*, from 2007. The film is about teenage boys, who will soon graduate from high school and are interested in partying, girls and hanging out with friends. The target audience is most probably teenagers, who should be at least 14 years old since the dialogue is thick with swear words and coarse slang.

Colloquial language, slang and swearing cannot have exact equivalents in other languages, their equivalence and translation must be functional and based on pragmatic and communicative objectives. Therefore, translating informal language is always a challenge and depends heavily on the translator's intuition and knowledge of various registers. Also, the audiovisual medium sets its own specific limits for translation.

In addition to colloquial language, culture specific elements and how they are translated affects the film watching experience. Therefore, such references will be briefly analysed as well.

Considering the genre of the film, and the language used in the dialogue, some initial hypotheses on the subtitles are made:

- Much of the text has been omitted because the medium cannot convey the typically redundant colloquial language of the original.
- The attitudes that favour written register have influenced the translator, and therefore, slang and coarse language have been neutralised.
- As the spoken language of Estonian teenagers consists of many English words or loans, some of these are also represented in the subtitles.
Little or no domestication (making the content explicit or familiar to the target audience) occurs, mainly because of the influence of American culture, and thus, the recognition of numerous cultural elements.

The thesis consists of three main parts. The first part focuses on theoretical viewpoints and is based on the empirical data. The theoretical material is divided into three chapters. The first chapter gives a general overview of translation – of different approaches and attitudes. The second chapter discusses audiovisual translation, its special features, and also translating cultural references. The third chapter concentrates on spoken language, more precisely, on specific registers – slang, swearing and teenage talk. In addition, some perspectives on translating these categories are given.

The second part of the thesis presents some thoughts on translating Superbad, the method for collecting and categorising the data, and the definitions of translational strategies, that have been elaborated on the basis of the empirical data.

The third part is the analysis of the collected data. The data is divided into different categories and in each category the main strategies of translating will be given, and some examples of these analysed. Also, some illustrative examples will be given, and examples of more marginal strategies will occasionally be analysed. Finally, the main findings and further thoughts will be discussed.
1. Views on translation

“I assume that all translation is partly science, partly craft, partly art, partly a matter of taste.” (Newmark 1988: 189)

Translation is, as defined by Hurtado Alber and Alves (2009: 54), an act of communication as well as a textual operation and a result of the cognitive processing by translator.

Commonly, translation is considered to be conveying information from one language to another. Translation can also take place between different media, for example, from spoken to written form.

According to Sylfest Lomheim, translation is a type of linguistic communication. Translation is a process and an activity, and the result is a version. As many times as a text is being translated, as many versions of it exist. The goal of the translation is, first and foremost, to reproduce the message and the idea of the text into another language. The style of the source text should also be maintained. The translator must find a way to express the meaning of the source text in an equivalent, idiomatic, natural, and stylistically correct way in the target text. (Lomheim 1995: 16, 21-22, 31).

Equivalence can not be measured by comparing the source text and the target language version, but by comparing the audiences. Whether the semantical meaning of words is the same in both texts, is unimportant, what matters is whether the readership of the text experiences it in the same or equivalent manner. The translator should try and understand the relationship between the source text and the source language readership, then try to find a similar solution in the target language, so that the experience would not suffer. This also means that the translator should know both readerships well in order to produce good enough results. (Lomheim 1995: 72)

By comparing the empiric material – original texts and their translations – translation
theories are created (Lomheim 1995: 23). When an original is compared to its translation, it is possible to discover different strategies and techniques that the translator has used in order to recreate similar meanings in the target language. When translating, most people probably do not think about theories and possible techniques, they use their knowledge and any help they can get to find good solutions. But theory can certainly help translators to conceptualise what they are dealing with.

The language that a text is being translated from is the *source language*. The text that is written in the source language is most commonly called the *source text*. The language that a text is translated into is a *target language*, and the new text is called the *target text*.

(Lomheim 1995: 21-22)

A number of linguists believe that a *total transfer* from one language to another is not possible. Some loss in meaning occurs probably in all kind of communication since no two people have the exact same perception of the same thing. (Lomheim 1995: 27-28) According to Per Qvale, all translation is *fraud* or *distortion* – a completely new text. Yet, the new text is not a treason, if its *function* is *equivalent* to the source text. (Qvale 1991: 266-267)

Antin Fougner Rydning believes that if a thought can be uttered in one language, then it can be done in other languages as well. If it looks like it can not be done, then the reason is the incompetence of the translator and nothing else. (Rydning 1991: 252)

Lomheim believes that translational problems are caused by distance. He suggests that there are three types of distance: distance between individuals, between language systems, and between cultures. (Lomheim 1995:93) Eugene Nida has categorized translation problems that are connected to differences between languages and cultures according to the level of distance:

- close languages and cultures
remote languages, but close cultures

remote languages and cultures (Nida in Lomheim 1995: 95)

The closer the languages and cultures are to one another, the fewer problems with transfer there are, and vice versa.

1.1. Literary translation

“Literary translation is a form of art,” believes Niels Brunse (1994: 79). All texts can be principally divided into two: non-fiction and fiction. The function of these two types of texts is different: the intention of non-fiction text is to explain, guide, inform. Fiction is more aesthetic, the text itself is of importance, the aim is to affect readers emotionally.

Lomheim calls the language in fictional texts “The language of art”. The language of art has two levels: one to convey and narrate something, and the other is the language and the text itself as the objective. The language of fiction is a work of art. Besides, there are no absolute interpretations in the language of fiction, there can only be more or less reasonable interpretations. (Lomheim 1995: 109,124,126)

Lomheim considers subtitles of a film to be a part of literary translation (although with many extra conditions) and also subject to stylistically and grammatically deliberate choices, therefore, also quality. This shows that quality is not something fixed, but depends considerably, especially in subtitles, on the communicative aspect of the text. (Lomheim 2000: 13) Diaz Cintas (2009: 5), on the other hand, suggests that audiovisual translation is an entity on its own rather than a part or a subgroup of literary translation.

1.2. The process of translation

Lomheim (1995: 24-26) has divided the process of translation into three phases: reception > transfer > formulation. The physical side of the language can be called the outer form and the mental side – the content, inner form.

In the reception phase the translator is met by the outer form and tries to comprehend
the idea behind the words – decodes the meaning, tries to understand all the nuances and what they mean to the readership of the source text. In this stage, analytical competence, both on the linguistic and non-linguistic level, is most important (Lomheim: 37-38). Linguistic competence is a prerequisite for linguistic analysis, which allows to decode elements of language, what they mean and refer to. Non-linguistic competence is simply everything one can know about the world – knowledge about cultures, geography, literature etc.

Rydning (1991: 249) believes that the following factors can help to interpret the source text and to find its message:

- the topic of the text
- the time and place of the communicative act
- the translator's evaluation of who the author is, what kind of knowledge he or she possesses (the referential universe), what kind of a readership the author is writing for
- the objective of the text
- type of text
- how the topic is being presented for readers

The *transfer phase* is the most intricate one. It is here where the actual translation takes place as the translator transfers an idea from one language system to the other and tries to find the best equivalent in the target language. Lomheim calls this process the *code switch*. (Lomheim 1995: 49)

The *formulation phase* is usually the most demanding of the three. The translator has to come up with a form in the physical language for the idea he or she wishes to convey. "All translation problems finally resolve themselves into problems of how to write well in the target language"- Peter Newmark (in Lomheim 1989: 54). The ability to write well is crucial in this phase. Translators are writers themselves, perhaps not so good at expressing
their own thoughts, but they must have talent for writing. In a sense, it is more difficult to “rewrite” a text since the translator can not change anything, the only freedom he or she has is to find a suitable form for conveying the meaning in the text. (Lomheim 1995: 56)

An essential part of writing competence is the command of one's first language (or the target language, but most often it is the first language one translates into). Lomheim believes it to be quite common to take our first language for granted, as if it something that we have, which does not need any additional input. (Lomheim 1995: 60) But that, of course, is not true. Good translators are eager to approve their language. Especially when translating specific texts – then the translator must know, or get acquainted with the professional jargon, sociolect, slang etc. The better one knows the target language, the better are the chances of expressing the source language ideas without major losses. As Peter Newmark (1988: 3) points out:

“Bear in mind, however, that knowing a foreign language and your subject is not as important as being sensitive to language and being competent to write your own language dexterously, clearly, economically and resourcefully”.
2. Audiovisual translation

In audiovisual (AV) communication culture is expressed through both language and image. AV translator needs also a bi-cultural vision. The image on screen and the soundtrack with its audio signs can show what words do not express, they illustrate and give the spoken text different effects. (Pettit 2009: 44)

The first studies in the field of AV translation used terms like *cinema translation* and *film translation*, but as the field extended, the term *audiovisual translation* was introduced. Sometimes, *screen translation* is used. (Díaz Cintas 2009: 6) In this thesis, *film translation* is used to distinguish the translation of a fictional film from other types of AV products.

There are two typical forms for AV translation: *spoken* and *written*. The spoken methods retain the language in oral form. *Dubbing* is a process, during which the original soundtrack is replaced by a new soundtrack, recorded by actors in the target language. The manuscript is written in accordance with lip movements, the length of the original text, and sounds. It is extremely challenging to achieve an authentic result in dubbing. In addition, it is expensive and time consuming. The other form of spoken translation, *voice-over*, is usually done by one person (sometimes more) who reads the translated dialogue, not synchronised with lip movements, and often, the volume of the original soundtrack is turned down, but remains audible in the background. The main written type of AV translation is *subtitling*. In this case, the spoken dialogue is converted into written form and the text is usually placed at the bottom of the screen. (Lomheim 2000: 13-14)

Linguistically, Henrik Gottlieb divides AV translation in two:

1. *Diagonal* or *interlingual* – translation from one language to another
2. *Orthogonal* or *intralingual* – translation into the same language as the dialogue self

(Gottlieb 1994: 190-191). If the second type is targeted at the hard of hearing, then the text is made more clear and explicit, and explanatory notes on sounds are added.
AV texts are of different genres just like all other types of texts are. A fictional film, for example, requires a very different translation than a news broadcast. Like with other types of texts, the AV translation has to consider the target audience (Pettit 2009: 57). The knowledge, age and expectations of the audience also set the frame for their need of explication, shorter lines for reading, specific vocabulary etc.

Depending on the objective of the text and the genre, Gottlieb (1994: 199) divides AV texts into three primary groups:

- Satires, comedies, and music programmes where word play, rhythm and references have a major role. The language itself is vital.
- TV-theatre, films, shows and portrait programmes where the person is central.
- News, sports programmes, and documentaries where the event or the subject is central.

2.1. Subtitling

Modern subtitles originate from silent films where there were texts in-between the scenes called *intertitles* (Lomheim 2000: 13).

Subtitling is characterized by a change of medium, the oral text is conveyed into a written form in another language, which appears on screen simultaneously with the spoken text. Thus, the viewer is met with two linguistic systems and hears the source text in the source culture context. (Pettit 2009: 44, 53).

Paralanguage, or the codes that support the spoken language, often help the translator to make semantical choices. (Perego 2009: 60) It is quite possible to imagine what harm can be done when a subtitler translates only the text without actually watching the AV product with the non-textual messages all around. Misinterpretations of various kind would be likely to occur. Jorge Díaz Cintas believes that the subtitler must be fully aware of the semiotic complexity of an AV product and the dangers of translating only the linguistic component. Translating without considering the other dimensions of film “would
certainly be a recipe for disaster”. (Díaz Cintas 2009: 9)

Erik Skuggevik (2009: 212) writes that the first task of the subtitler is to try and understand the communicative function of an utterance. Thereafter, other things should be considered, such as words or phrases to choose, cultural references or implications, but always bearing in mind the communicative function since this is the most basic equivalence that should be achieved.

Compared to other forms of AV translations, subtitling is most liable to evaluation and criticism, since both source and target texts are right in front of the audience to judge, which makes the subtitler's task ever more demanding. (Veiga 2009: 166) This is even more true if the audience understands the source language.

Lomheim (2000: 11-12, 55) points out that subtitling is partial communication, spoken and written language per se are examples of total communication. In case of a film, the sound and image stand for primary communication, to which subtitles have a supporting function – secondary communication, and subtitles are, therefore, a secondary text that does not have a value on its own. Also Skuggevik emphasises that subtitles “live a life of coexistence, not replacement” (Skuggevik 2009: 212).

The ideal for subtitles seems to be: as little as possible, as much as necessary. Subtitles should not be seen as something “unnatural” because they are supposed to be like that – a support for the viewer. However, it is common thinking that the best subtitles are those that viewers do not realise they are reading at all. (Lomheim 2000: 12, 15)

2.1.1. The specificity of the medium

Subtitlers are strongly limited by time and space (Perego 2009: 58). The text on the screen can have a certain number of characters per line, and is shown for a short time. Therefore, the text has to be legible for an average viewer within the few seconds it appears on the screen. Subtitlers can not use any explanatory devices like footnotes,
prologues or afterwords. Thus, the translators have no means to explain their choices and solutions (Díaz 2005: 11).

In the opinion of Lomheim, subtitles have two major flaws: shortening the dialogue and ruining the picture (Lomheim 2000: 16). For understandable reasons, omission or reduction are the most common strategies in subtitling when much of the spoken text goes missing. The more technical side of subtitling – placement of text on the lower screen – disturbs the visual experience.

Subtitles must also sit comfortably with what is heard, the two language forms are in a dynamic coexistence. For example, long dialogue turns should be somehow reflected in the subtitles, if the translation is too short, then the viewer might start wondering what else was said. (Skuggevik 2009: 209)

Skuggevik (2009: 210) calls subtitles a “one-way-street” – it is not possible to go back and read the lines again, instead, the text must be comprehensible and easy to read at a first attempt. This is true, for example, for television and cinema translation.

Other mediums for AV products, such as the DVD, offer a whole new world of extra materials in the form of commentaries, interviews, various versions of subtitles and dubbing etc. The viewer has a greater control over the entire experience. It is also possible to go back and re-read the subtitles (or hear the dialogue) if necessary. In addition to the traditional subtitles, versions with notes and explanations can also be added and chosen by the viewer who is interested in additional information. The different versions and extras create the best interactive product that is available with current technology. (Díaz Cintas 2005: 12-14)

2.1.2. The language of subtitles

Alexandra Assis Rosa (2001: 214, 215, 218) believes that the intersemiotic transfer from spoken to written language makes the subtitler hesitate over his or her choice of
register. The unconscious choice of often choosing “correct” written forms may be connected to values, prestige of the written form, and habit of writing in a certain conventional manner. The spoken language, on the other hand, can be seen as “incorrect” and therefore less accepted.

The reasons for using written register or more common forms in subtitles can also be explained with the attempt to simplify and clarify the dialogue (Hamaida 2007: 4). This applies especially to fast speech and complicated or unusual forms – the less time the viewer has to read the line, the simpler the text should be.

Typically, subtitles follow many rules of written language: concision, lack of redundancy, high textual organisation, high informativity, punctuation, cohesion and coherence, explicitness, disambiguation of pronominal forms, specification of referents, reconstruction of elliptical forms and accurate lexical choices. (Perego 2009: 64)

Also Assis Rosa (2001: 216) lists some typical features of written register in subtitles: stress on the referential function – ignoring emphatic and expressive markers; focus on content; focus on communicative rather than informative signals; focus on linguistic rather than paralinguistic signals; omitting overlaps, repetitions, reformulations, hesitations, ellipses, incompleteness, forms of addressing etc.; focus on the meaning in the text rather than meaning in the context; using a target language standard variety to correspond to source language non-standard variety. Colloquialisms, slang and taboo words are usually translated to less informal standard discourse.

2.1.3. Downstream translation

Henrik Gottlieb (2009: 24-27) brings out some aspects that guide and influence subtitlers in their work. The first thing that affects subtitlers and makes them want to stay loyal to the spoken dialogue is audience's good command of the original language. This is especially true with English. Second influence is the status of the source language. The
best example is again the prestigious English language. Translating from English into Estonian can be defined as downstream translation because the source language and culture are prestigious and well-known among the target audience, but not the other way around. Translating in the opposite direction is called upstream translation – translating into the more prestigious language and culture. Gottlieb believes that downstream subtitling requires less bridge-building efforts since many cultural references are already known to the target audience. He also believes that downstream subtitling triggers higher degree of fidelity towards the original dialogue. The third aspect is intersemiotic redundancy: the subtitler relies on the intersemiotic support – the non-verbal information – to get the message across, and therefore feels more free to omit things. Fourthly, subtitling is a “one-size-fits-all operation” and therefore the subtitler tends to choose common denominators that suit most part of the audience, which may not be the case in the original dialogue.

2.1.4. Translating cultural references

A culture specific item can be paraphrased or generalised to make it understandable to the target audience. Most strategies like that involve making the text longer, which causes new problems because of the time and space limitations in subtitling. This is why the subtitler has to balance between the need to mediate something successfully and by being imposed within the limits of the medium. When deciding on the mediation of a cultural reference, according to Jan Pedersen, the subtitler should think of the average viewer, assess their cultural literacy, and consider how many viewers actually are familiar with the cultural item. If there is a cultural reference in a film, which the viewer is not familiar with, and it is not clarified in the dialogue or the non-textual elements, then the item can possibly be monocultural (belonging to one culture only), and the subtitler should intervene to help the viewer. On the other hand, if the subtitler identifies a transcultural
item (that is shared by many cultures) as monocultural, and over-explains it in the dialogue, then the subtitler may be accused of “chewing the food” for the audience. (Pedersen 2009: 70-71, 74-75)

Pedersen points out that in Scandinavia, retention is very widely used and increasingly less cultural elements are explained in some way. It can be explained by the Anglophone influence, by which many cultural items have become transcultural. (Pedersen 2009: 77) This is probably true for many cultures, including Estonia, or any other place affected by globalisation. Also Díaz Cintas (2009: 7-8) emphasizes the fact that most of AV production comes from the US, which influences languages – usually via translation – and “the attitudes of millions of people across the globe”.

Juliane House (2002: 107-108) believes there is a tendency towards cultural universalism and cultural neutralism, which really means a drift towards Anglo-American norms, influenced by globalisation and internationalisation, including the usage of English as a lingua franca. In the future, much less cultural filtering will occur and many more culturally universal translations will be made – so-called “hybrid texts” that carry the Anglophone/Western cultural norms.

2.2. Audiovisual translation and translation theory

Díaz Cintas admits that many scholars are avoiding the field of AV translation as it remains undecided for many whether AV translation is translation or adaptation, the latter not being translation in the usual sense. (Díaz Cintas 2004: 51)

Many translational concepts and theories do not function when they are being applied to AV translation. This has lead scholars to research more traditional modes of translation rather than developing new theories applicable for AV translation. Scholars are not too eager to take up the less prestigious AV translation, which seems marginal in comparison to canonical literary works. (Díaz Cintas 2004: 51)
However, some theoretical point of views by Peter Newmark will be presented here to illustrate how AV translation and different methods are compatible.

Newmark (1988: 45) distinguishes eight types of translational methods, which can be divided into two, based on their emphasis:

a) Emphasis on the source language: word-for-word, literal, faithful, and semantic translation.

b) Emphasis on the target language: free, idiomatic, communicative translation, and adaptation.

The first four, which try to follow the source text as closely as possible, can be used with certain types of AV production, genres that comprise of rather formal or minimal spoken language, which can be translated very closely.

The second group, on the other hand, is very much applicable for the kind of AV translation that is relevant in this thesis – film translation.

*Adaptation*, according to Newmark, is the “freest” form of translation, typical for plays and films. It rewrites the text (and the culture) of the original. *Free translation* reproduces some sides of the original, for example content but not the form, and sometimes it can not be called translation at all. *Idiomatic translation* is a lively natural translation, which reproduces the message, uses idioms and colloquialisms (also where there are none in the original), but tends to be unfaithful to the nuances of meaning in the original. *Communicative translation* is social, focuses on the readership, concentrates on the message, tries to stay brief, and use a natural style. (Newmark 1988: 46-48)

An *equivalent effect* is the desirable result of the translation, but not necessarily the *aim* of the translation. *Equivalent effect* or *equivalent response* is what sometimes is believed to be the purpose of a translation. The objective is to achieve the same or a similar effect on the readership of the target text, as has been achieved on the readership of
the source text. (Newmark 1988: 48)

Whether equivalent effect is only desirable or also essential, depends certainly on the text type. The text type of film translation requires, indeed, an equivalent effect, especially in the genre of comedy. At the same time, the text can not take any means to achieve that – the source text must be considered as well, especially because it is very present and sets the limits for the translation, not to mention the limits of the medium.

Newmark himself believes that only semantic and communicative translations fulfil the aims of translation: accuracy and economy. Semantic translation is individual, focuses on the author of source text, pursues the authors line of though, is precise in meaning, and tries to recreate pragmatic impact. (Newmark 1988: 47-48) The aim of a film translation is certainly economy, but not so much accuracy. Semantic translation refers to semantic accuracy, which might not produce equivalent effect.

The semiotic complexity and the genre of the AV product will determine which strategies and solutions can be used (Díaz Cintas 2009: 9). For film translation, probably a mixture of different methods should be used, but the four latter methods that concentrate on the target text are definitely more relevant. Only one method can hardly be used for any translation, especially since most translators work unconsciously, and methods are, in practice, mostly theoretical.
3. Spoken language

Central 20th century linguists agree that spoken language is different from written language and has priority over it. The terms spoken and written language refer not only to very different media, but also to relatively distinct systems of vocabulary, morphology, syntax and the organising of text. (Miller and Weinert 2009 : 4-5)

In this chapter, different varieties of spoken language will be discussed – slang, swearing and teenage talk. Although set forth here as distinct groups, in real life, they tend to overlap.

3.1. Slang

Geoffrey Hughes quotes the Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang from 1994, which admits that “no commonly accepted definition of slang has won much favour among linguists, who mostly regard the boundaries between slang and other levels of discourse as too insubstantial for analysis” (Hughes 2006: 437)

Also Anna-Brita Stenström (Stenström n.d.: 2, 4) agrees that slang is extremely difficult to define, and opinions differ not only in the range of words to be included, but also on the definition of slang.

Oxford English Dictionary gives the following three main definitions of 'Slang':

a) The special vocabulary used by any set of persons of a low or disreputable character; language of a low and vulgar type

b) The special vocabulary or phraseology of a particular calling or profession; the cant or jargon of a certain class or period.

c) Language of a highly colloquial type, considered as below the level of standard educated speech, and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense.

The definition of slang by The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics: “‘slang’ used especially of vocabulary specific e.g. to a particular generation of younger speakers; also, as in ordinary usage, specific to a group or profession (e.g. ‘army slang’), to colloquial
style, etc.”

Lexicographers dissent over which words should be categorised as “slang,” as there is no real distinction between related categories of “colloquial,” “informal,” “jargon,” and “cant.” (Hughes 2006: 437)

Andersen, Stenström and Hasund agree that slang includes words that are “below the level of stylistically neutral language,” and usually group-related, playful, metaphorical, innovative and short-lived. The last quality, however, has many exceptions in the form of slang words that have been around for centuries. (Andersen et al 2002: 67)

The origin of the word 'slang' is unclear. In writing, it occurred for the first time in 1750, and the meaning was 'cant' (slang of the underworld). From around 1850, the term slang is used for informal colloquial speech. (Partridge 1979: 2-3)

There are various reasons for using slang. Eric Partridge (1979: 6-7) enlists 15 main reasons, all of which will not be given here, but some of them are following: for playfulness and fun; for exercising humour; being different, shocking; to reduce the seriousness of a situation or a conversation; being on the same colloquial level with an audience; to ease social intercourse, to induce friendliness or intimacy, to indicate belonging to a group, to have a “secret language”.

In slang it is often emotion rather than idea that is communicated, this is especially true with “swearing and cursing, oaths and other profanities, exclamations and imprecations” (Partridge 1979: 18)

The only difference, argues Partridge, between standard speech and slang is that the desire for novelty operates more successfully – rapidly, freely, boldly – in slang. It is the desire to escape from the old and habitual, which brings about neologisms and figurative expressions. Nearly all slang emerges from old words that change form, or they are old words that have simply changed meaning. (Partridge 1979: 19)
Slang must be as old as any colloquial speech because it represents, for the most part, unconscious processes, and there has always been a human impulse towards the unconventional. (Partridge 1979: 37)

3.1.1. Translating Slang

Culture specific varieties, including slang, have rarely equivalents (i.e. comparable forms in meaning and scope) in another language. Mattiello writes: “Recreating the same effects in a different language community by means of an ‘equivalent’ slang formation is nearly impossible”. But the need for an equivalent effect demands for perseverance of “the lexical complexity of slang”. This should be done for socio-pragmatic purposes (i.e for creating intimacy, identification etc.). (Mattiello: 2) In other words – for creating similar response and effect.

Mattiello is convinced that non-standard varieties such as slang are problematic in transition. Cross-culturally it is difficult to find parallel social sets, linguistically similar modes of expression. Slang is meant to create effects which are a challenge for the translator. (Mattiello: 7-8)

3.2. Swearing

Even though many of us might think that we live in a time when foul language is all too commonly used, it is, in fact, no news. In the fifteenth century, the French referred to the Englishmen as les goddems (“the goddams”) because of their noteworthy habit of swearing. The modern English are apparently baptised les fuckoffs by the French. Since these medieval times, the English language has taken up ever more swear words, especially after the 1960's. (Hughes: 24)

Hughes, however, is not impressed with modern swearing:

There is no doubt that modern swearing, profanity, and foul language are characterized by a notable paucity of vocabulary and lack of invention. If the characters of Chaucer (who were created in religiously strict but comparatively uncensored times) or even those of Shakespeare
(who was subjected to the censorship of the ill-named Master of the Revels) were to mate-
realize among us now, we would surely be impressed by the remarkable power and range of
their oaths, profanity, and foul language” (Hughes 2006: 25)

The earliest recorded attempt to distinguish foul language was the term *shit worde*
from 1250, followed by *foul speech*, from around 1455 (Hughes 2006: 182).

In the medieval times, *cherles termes* (pleasant talk) was used, in the seventeenth
century *Billingsgate* (a fish market site in London). In 1934, Allen Walker Read used the
expression *four-letter words* in his article “An Obscenity Symbol,” in the journal
*American Speech*. (Hughes 2006: 183)

Initially, *to swear* meant 'to take an oath' or 'to give a solemn undertaking', and that
remained its only meaning until 1400. Hughes writes: “All the principal synonyms for
swearing, notably profanity, blasphemy, and obscenity, originally had strong religious
denotations.” Nowadays, it is true of only *blasphemy*. In British English *profanity* still
refers mostly to blasphemous language. In modern American usage the term *profanity*
denotes the broad category of “swearing”. (Hughes 2006: 362)

In case of swearing, the difference between literal and metaphorical meaning is much
greater than in many other forms of words. Swearing is a matter of fashion, and is rarely to
be taken literally. Expressions like “the hell it is!” or “we drove like hell” are established
idioms and can not be reduced to simple semantic analysis. (Hughes 2006: 17, 19)

Swear words demonstrate the semantic fact that words do not have fixed meanings,
they change and can have different meanings in the same basic speech community.
However, swear words are a special case since they are often emotive rather than
referential. (Hughes 2006: 252)

The conversational goals of the speaker determine the use of swearing. Usually,
swearing signifies emotions. Two-thirds of swearing is linked to expressions of anger and
frustration, which are probably the main reasons for swearing. Insults include name calling
and cursing or wishing harm on someone. (Jay 2009: 8-9)

Psychologists agree that swearing releases tension (Hughes 2006: 368). Hughes illustrates this with a quote from the play “The Constant Couple”, by the restoration dramatist George Farquhar (1678–1707) when a lady speaks:

Grant me some wild expressions, Heavens, or I shall burst. Woman’s weakness, man’s falsehood, my own shame, and love’s disdain, at once swell up my breast——Words, words, or I shall burst. (Farquhar 2010)

Timothy Jay (Jay 2009: 3) believes that “swearing is a rich emotional, psychological, and sociocultural phenomenon”.

3.2.1. Taboo in slang and swearing

The word *taboo* is relatively new. It was brought back from the Pacific by Captain James Cook in 1777, and came to refer to unmentionable things; nowadays, it is used of anything discreet or avoidable. (Hughes 2006: 151)

‘Taboo’ as defined by *Oxford English Dictionary*: “A total or partial prohibition of the use of certain words, expressions, topics, etc., esp. in social intercourse.”

According to Ereilt and Punttila (2002: 12), taboo is used to denote negative attitude towards activities, objects or phenomena that are either forbidden or unfavourable.

*Euphemisms* are socially more “comfortable” words used to denote taboos or any unpleasant, embarrassing topic. Although many euphemisms are self-evident like “go to the bathroom,” a large number are also unconscious, collective, contrived, and institutional. There is a tendency that euphemisms become direct or explicit, and as they have lost their “disguise” they need to replaced with something else. (Hughes 2006: 151,153)

Euphemisms are strongly connected to word magic, a primitive belief that there is a mystical relation between words and things they denote. The most typical devices of
Euphemisms are metaphors, the majority of people would prefer to say “to sleep with”, which is socially more acceptable than explicit language. (Hughes 2006: 151-152)

Even though slang and swearing often overlap, paradoxically, it is typical for swearing to employ taboo words, and for slang to disguise them with euphemisms. In addition, euphemisms, as mentioned before, can turn into taboo word themselves.

3.2.2. Swearing in the Estonian language

Erelt and Punttila (2002: 13) point out that there are three main taboo areas and swearing types in European languages: religious profanity, sexual, or anal-excrement type. Estonian, as well as Finnish and Swedish, is a strongly sacrum-culture, i.e., most swear words are connected to religion. To some extent, all these three categories are represented in all European languages. Expressions connected to less used taboo areas tend to have a stronger effect. In Estonian, words connected to genitals are therefore very vulgar. When trying to intensify swearing, words of different taboo areas can be bound together, preferably religious profanities with others, for example 'Kuradi raisk!' (Devil's cadaver). (Erelt 2002: 14)

The most common swear word in Estonian is probably 'Kurat' (Devil). It is used by both genders and virtually all ages and social groups in very different situations. It is also used as a filler in habitual swearing and as an intensifier in genitive form before nouns. Habitual swearing means using the swear word as a filler. It is not an emotional reaction, but an effect typical for speech in general. (Erelt 2002: 12, 17-18)

The main models for swearing in Estonian are the following three:

a) Simple exclamations: 'Kurat!' (Devil)

b) Addressed exclamations: 'Oh sa raisk!' (Oh you cadaver)

c) Forms of cursing and blessing from religious vocabulary: 'Kurat vôtaks!' (The devil should take), 'Püha jumal' (holy god). (Erelt and Punttila 2002: 18)
3.2.3. Translating swearing

Some swearing forms are common in many languages while others are language and culture specific. Translating swear words literally may result in most unnatural forms. These unnatural forms do not fulfil the communicative task, in other words: there is a great difference in being grammatically correct and being socially, culturally and communicatively correct. (Fernández Fernández 2009: 212)

María Jesús Fernández Fernández (2009: 213-214) is of the opinion that swear words should be translated, however intense or offensive they are, and that level of intensity should be communicated to the target audience. She notes that coarse language is often toned down in translations because it may seem too offensive and frighten viewers off. Also, swearing is still one of the least researched and problematic fields in AV translation. Unnatural and literal translation of swearing is common, and unfortunately, leads to communicatively unsuccessful dialogues.

3.3. Teenage talk

Stenström prefers to characterise teenage talk as slangy language or slanguage. This is done because defining and pointing out slang is not so easy, and in addition, teenage talk consists of much more than just slang. Stenström lists five linguistic categories of slanguage, based on The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT), conducted in 1993:

*Proper slang* is the largest category of words and expressions that matches best to the dictionary definitions of slang. There is general slang (booz ‘drink’), that does not belong to any group, and specific slang (junkie ‘drug addict’), that is typical for a group or a trend.

*Taboo words* consist of two categories. Some taboo words are regular slang words, that substitute accepted synonyms (to be pissed ‘drunk’). Some are also used as abusives,
intensifiers or reflectors (*dickhead, fucking crap*). Other taboo words are swear words used only for (emotive) swearing (*what the fuck, shit*).

*Vogue words* are standard language words which are used very frequently for a short period of time (*massive ‘impressive’*). They can often have a slightly different meaning or connotations.

*Proxy words* act for other words and consist of ‘quotatives’, which replace the verb 'say' to report what was said (*he was like I didn't do, I was like wow!*), and also ‘set-markers’, which replace and refer to previously mentioned ‘sets’ (*cookies and stuff (like, that)*).

*Pragmatic markers* consist of appealers (*and had dinner yesah*), hedges (*it’s sort of mad*), empathisers (*I met Alex you know and ...*), monitors (*...I mean that is a bit silly isn’t it*), and words 'just' and 'really'. (Stenström n.d: 10-12)

Pragmatic markers are very frequent in teenage talk, which illustrates the essence of their way of interaction well: “they are lively, expressive, engaged, and very keen on getting feedback” (Stenström n.d: 13).

According to the research by Stenström, Andersen and Asunder, slang words, taboo words and vague words (filler, markers etc.) are not distinct functional categories, but their functions are often intertwined. Thus, *slang* can hardly consist of only proper slang, but it also includes small words (like fillers) and taboo words, all of which can be challenging to categorise exactly, but they all are certainly part of a *slangy language* or a *slanguage*. (Andersen et al 2002: 64)
4. Data and method

This chapter presents, firstly, some thoughts on translating the film *Superbad*. Secondly, the collection and categorisation of data will be set forth. And thirdly, the definitions of translational strategies based on the empirical material will be presented.

4.1. Some thoughts on translating *Superbad*

The methods and strategies that a translator chooses depend on the material. The material that is discussed in this thesis is the text of the American youth comedy *Superbad* that has an extensive spoken register, in particular of slang and swearing, and some occasions of cultural references. These are the main categories of text in this film that are essential from a communicative point of view.

It is necessary to keep in mind that subtitles are a mere secondary text, which is meant to support the understanding, and to give compact, equivalent, functional, and informative representation of the original speech. In this thesis, 'equivalence' or 'function' denote an *equivalent effect*, i.e. that the target language viewers should be able to experience the film like (or similarly to) the source language viewers, the translation is natural and carries the meaning, message and connotations similar to the original.

From the perspective of functionality – what is the purpose of the subtitles for this film? The purpose is most likely not to mediate the literal meaning of all speech forms, neither is it to educate the viewers linguistically. Instead, the subtitles should convey the essential information and the manner of carefree teenage communication with a natural and idiomatic language. The likely target audience of the film are young people from 14 years and up.

When translating for teenagers, the age of the translator might be crucial as well. Experienced translators could have a good command of various registers and they may conduct their research well, but that does not necessarily mean that the result will be
credible. On the other hand, too young and inexperienced translators, who could express themselves in an adequately youthful way, might not be able to make pragmatically good decisions, focus too much on the source text etc.

4.2. Data for analysis

The empirical material was collected into a corpus from the dialogue list of the film and from the subtitles' file.

The dialogue list (the dialogue of the film and any additional information) of Superbad comes with in-depth notes on both linguistic and non-linguistic features, and is 217 pages long. The ideal dialogue list, in the opinion of Diaz Cintas (2001: 200), includes, in addition to the spoken text, metatextual information on socio-cultural connotations, explains word play and double meanings, colloquialisms, unusual terms etc. The fact that a subtitler receives a full and correct dialogue list is very important considering the narrow deadlines that are so common. The dialogue list should be able to help avoid problems caused by mishearing, and clear explanations should exclude misinterpretations. According to Diaz Cintas, a good dialogue list “makes the difference between a high quality product and an inferior one” (Diaz Cintas 2001: 200).

The data was evaluated and categorised on the basis of the Estonian subtitles. This means that there is no overview of how many times a word or an expression in the source text has been omitted or translated, and how. The material is, therefore, more focused on the actual decisions of the translator. For example, the category of swearing is comprised of all the Estonian phrases that have swear words in them, not the English phrases. All categories are comprised in this manner. The topic of each category was formed on the basis of the findings – the types of words or registers that seemed to have an importance from the perspective of understanding, or stylistically natural formulations – were collected into a corpus of 362 text lines (single and double). The categorisation is, of
course, somewhat arbitrary and many examples might belong to several categories simultaneously. The data was divided into seven categories:

1. **Cultural references**

2. **Colloquialisms and slang**

3. **Sexual slang**

4. **Swearing**

5. **Alcohol**

6. **Police**

7. **English loan words**

   *Cultural references* are mostly names and titles from the American (popular) culture. *Colloquialisms and slang* are all the examples of informal language that was not placed in any other category. *Sexual slang* involves all references to sex and the respective body parts. *Swearing* is a category of profanities that express strong emotions, it includes abusives (you dickhead), intensifiers (fucking stupid) and expletives (shit!). *Alcohol* and the *police* could have been put in the colloquialisms and slang category, but since these two semantic groups are represented with many examples they were placed in their own categories. *English loan words* is a small group with newer colloquial borrowings.

For the analysis of the translation examples, five types of resources have been used to evaluate and discuss the translational solutions: myself and my own perception of language, explanations in the dialogue list of the film, dictionaries and dictionaries of slang, the Internet, and a questionnaire of four pages, that was sent to year eleven students of two upper secondary schools in Tartu – these students are called *Informants*.

The dictionaries that are abbreviated in the analysis are *Eesti slängi sõnaraamat* – ESS and *Esimene eesti slängi sõnaraamat* – EESS (the data of EESS is mostly from late 80's to early 90's), and *Õigekeelsussõnaraamat* – ÕS¹.

¹ See *References* for translations
Internet searches have been made with Google search engine, usually searching specifically Estonian web pages.

The examples chosen for analysis are either typical or have some interesting features. For illustrative purposes, more examples are given than are analysed. Discussion can be longer and more thorough on examples with more complex background, like cultural references. And some strategies, like idiomatic translation, provide equivalents that are often self-explanatory and there is not much to be added.

4.3. Translation strategies

The empirical data was again divided into sub groups based on how they were translated, i.e., which translation strategies were used. The division based on strategies is quite challenging and always somewhat arbitrary. There are no strict boundaries between the strategies, and they can easily overlap and share features with other techniques.


As slang is said to be below the level of neutral language (Andersen et al 2002: 67) then it is possible to imagine a model and place neutral language in the middle. Formal and written language are above that level, while colloquial speech with slang and other sub-languages are below the level. This figurative image can be used for the two following strategies.

Neutralisation is a strategy when a word or an expression is translated with a more neutral equivalent, often the change of registry occurs – from swearing to colloquial slang, from colloquialism to formal language etc. The translation is on a higher level than the original.

Accentuation is the opposite of neutralisation. A word or expression is highlighted,
made more marked, the registry changes from a higher level to a lower.

Examples of accentuation are interesting since it is commonly believed that translators rather neutralise than accentuate. Lomheim (2000: 47-48) for example uses 'neutralisation' as a common translation strategy in his study. He also mentions its opposite strategy, which he describes as means for **preserving** the style, but also making it more marked. However, he does not give this strategy a name and says that it happens seldom.

**Synonymy** – a near equivalent, but in the context it is often stylistically or idiomatically questionable.

**Shift in meaning** – the shift is not too radical, and is often a change of perspective, which remains close to the original meaning.

**Recognised translation** - official, generally accepted or already existing translation (of for example, film titles).

**Reduction** – an expression is made shorter with either compression or omission, which can also lead to losses in meaning. **Compression** is a technique of summarising, and sometimes it is not easy to point out what was omitted. **Omission** will not be analysed as a separate translation strategy since it is so prevalent and occurs often in combination with other strategies. It will be mentioned briefly, though, in the beginning of the next chapter – **Analysis** – with some illustrative examples.

**Paraphrase** - Rune Ingo (1991: 69) counts paraphrase for a form of free translation that is too free. It is usually semantic, but makes big changes in form without really needing to. Newmark (1988: 90) says that paraphrase is something used for poorly written 'anonymous' translation.

In this classification, however, paraphrase means expressing something with other words while trying to preserve the meaning (or form, or anything that is primary from a communicative perspective).
Substitution means that an entity in the text has been replaced. Gottlieb (2009: 32) distinguishes three types of operations of substitution:

a) replaced by a more known foreign element
b) replaced by a shared foreign element
c) replaced by a domestic element

Explicitation is an explanatory translation done for various reasons. When a sender (author of a text, for example) and a receiver (readership) of the same language have a similar cultural background and knowledge, then their interaction can be called the channel capacity (Lomheim 1995:87-88). This means that it is not needed to explain every little detail the sender (the author) has in mind, he or she knows that the receiver will understand the meaning without over-explaining or too many words. But audiences of other languages and cultures might very well need explaining, and that, often, means more words.

Retention means transferring without translating. It is often used for cultural references like names and places.

Literal translation is close to word-for-word translation and the focus is strongly on words, but also on creating grammatically correct text. However, this strategy usually fails to convey the meaning of metaphorical and figurative expressions. (Ingo 1991: 67)

Generalisation – a word or an expression is given a more general or wider meaning. A typical example when translating culture specific elements, is replacing a localism or a name with a general term.

Specification is the opposite of generalisation – a word or an expression receives a more specific meaning.

Idiomatic translation – the same as equivalent translation, i.e., translation has provided the closest natural equivalent in the target language (Lomheim 1995: 31). The
word *idiomatic* is relevantly defined by the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*: “typical of the natural way in which someone speaks or writes when they are using their own language”. Therefore, in the context of this thesis, *idiomatic translation* is especially important in categories where the meaning of words is metaphorical or emotive – like with swearing. Also, there are usually a number of different possibilities to translate idiomatically, which is highly dependant on the translator's own perception of language, and preferably, the translation should stay in the same register.

It might be worth noting that as set out in chapter 2.5, Newmark (1988: 47) uses *idiomatic translation* to denote a translation method, i.e., an approach to the entire text.

*Naturalisation* is a strategy that adapts source language words into the target language system. They are written according to their pronunciation, and the rules of the morphology and orthography of the target language.

The concept of *domestication* by Lawrence Venuti is applicable for strategies when some elements in the text are either adapted into the target culture or made explicit, so that they seem natural in the target culture. The opposite – *foreignisation* - involves leaving the foreign element apparent, by, for example, not explaining or replacing it with an element of the target culture. (Munday 2008: 144-145)
5. Analysis

The empirical data discussed in this chapter is divided into seven categories: Cultural references, colloquialisms/slang, sexual slang, swearing, alcohol, police and English loan words. At the end of the chapter, a summary of tendencies of all categories will be given.

In each category, primarily the most frequent strategies will be mentioned. In addition, in every category there are also examples of less used strategies, problematic or unusual translations. After the examples in each group a brief summary and conclusion follows.

The original spoken dialogue is given in italics and the translation in single quotations. The words or phrases of importance are in bold type. Whenever needed or possible, English translation of the Estonian words or phrases are given in brackets.

But firstly a few examples will be given of omission. This is not a part of the analysis, but an illustration of the most common technique used for these subtitles. The examples include omitting words, parts of the dialogue, and even sentences. Statistically speaking, there are approximately 17 000 words in the original dialogue of Superbad. The amount of words in the subtitles file is slightly over 8000. This shows that approximately half of the text is not mediated, words and sentences are omitted or compressed. These numbers are rough (the files do not allow simple word count), but it illustrates the eminent role of omission in AV translation. Half, of what is said, is lost in translation.

- No. Miss each other? No, thank you. I don't, I don't miss each other.
  'Mida veel? Ei hakka!' (What else? [We] won't!)

- What, you can talk about her all day every day and the second I say one thing it's like blasphemy?
  'Sina võid, aga mina ei tohi?' (You can, but I can't?)

- You gotta go to spin class, a farmers' market, pumpkin patch, given the time of year. Just somewhere social, non-threatening. You know, something like that.
5.1. Cultural References

RetentionPolicy

The most frequent strategy for translating cultural references is retention. It means that cultural references have been transferred without any changes (except for morphological changes when needed), explanations or additions.


'Jason Stone’iga, kes on nagu Zack Morris, ja Matt Muiriga!'

Zack Morris is one of the main characters in the popular US TV-series for teenagers Saved by the Bell, made between 1989-1993. In the 90's, the series was regularly watched by Estonian teenagers, therefore, the people who were in their teens 10 to 15 years ago know and recognise the characters, but today's teens most probably will not. The informants' responses show that the name 'Zack Morris' is not familiar to them. This could also be the situation in the US, unless the show has some kind of a cult status and/or at least the characters are known to teenagers. The name is directly transferred and no explanations are given. If the viewer does not know the character then the comparison remains completely unclear – was something positive or negative meant, and why this name was used at all. The implication is 'good-looking like Zack Morris'.

[2] That's like Charles Manson shit. What, do you think Becca's gonna be psyched that you brought a bottle of lube?

‘Sa oled nagu Charles Manson! Arvad, et Beccat erutab su libest?’

Another example of retention where the name is simply transferred and no explanation is given. Charles Manson is a notorious American criminal that is probably better known among adults, also in Estonia. The name is supposed to denote something 'creepy' or not
normal.

[3] Bought her a Binion’s. Complimented her on her tote bag.

'Ostsin talle Binioni.
Kiitsin ta käekotti.'

'Binion's' is an alcoholic drink, probably a made up name. Most alcoholic beverages in the film were fake and made up, according to an interview with the writers (Orange).


'Mark, see on tema! Johnny Cash!'

[5] Where's all the stolen liquor, Danny Ocean? You hide it up your butt?

'Kus varastatud alko on, Danny Ocean?
Pistsid pepusse peitu?'

Reduction

In the case of reduction, an expression is made shorter, either by compressing or by leaving something out. With this strategy, also the meaning can be reduced or left partial.

Examples with both retention and reduction:

[6] He's young, but the Force is strong with this one. Learning you are, young padawan.

'Noor mees, aga jõud on temaga.
- Sa võtad õppust, noor padawan.'

These references are from the US film series Star Wars. The expression 'is strong with this one' is used in the epic series, and the word 'padawan' denotes the young apprentice of a jedi master. The first expression is translated as 'jõud on temaga' (the force is with him), which is a good and equivalent translation, although the expression is reduced and the word 'strong' is omitted. 'This one' would have to be translated as 'him' anyway, and 'temaga' means 'with him'. If the expression is to remain poetic, then there is really no place or need for the word 'strong'. Literal translation would have been unsuccessful. It is possible that the translation is also used in the Estonian subtitles of the film (if there are any), but apparently it is not a popular quote used in the Internet – the search engine was
able to find 7 examples of the Estonian expression, and about 700 000 of the English. The film series has a cult status all around the world, but it is certainly more known in its home land than in Estonia.

The word 'Padawan' was simply transferred and set in italics to mark a foreign (made up) word.

 Yeah, you know, well, I'm sorry, Evan, that the **Coen Brothers** don't direct the porn that I watch. They're hard to get a hold of, okay?

> 'Kahju, et **Coenid** sellist ei tee.
> Neid on raske palgata.'

The 'Coen Brothers' are film directors Ethan and Joel Coen, who are used as the equivalent of 'talented filmmakers'. The word 'brothers' has been omitted from the translation, possibly since the translator thought it would not have made any difference. Most likely, only those interested in the film industry know who the Coen brothers are. Yet, the family name alone was transferred but no clues or explanations of these persons was given. Of course, not evenryone in the US knows the Coen brothers either, but the chances that the average viewer *does* know them, thanks to their blockbuster films, is bigger over there.

Also, the fact that part of the text was summarised, namely 'don't direct the porn that I watch' with just 'sellist ei tee' (don't make that) leaves unclear *what* they do not make.

**Recognised translation**

Recognised translation is an official or a commonly used equivalent in the target culture that the translator does not have to make up.

Examples with both **retention** and **recognised translation**:  


> *Seda ütles** Yoda**. – Tead** Yodat**?
> ●*"Kloonide rünnakust"?"*
This example is again from *Star Wars*. 'Yoda' is a character whose voice is being imitated in the scene, and explained as "s Yoda'. The name is simply transferred. The name of the film has been previously translated into Estonian, and therefore it is natural for the translator to use it.

[9] *Ouzo, bourbon, spiced rum, Goldslick*…

'Ouzo, burboon, maitsestatud rumm, Goldslick…'

'Ouzo' is a Greek liqueur, also known in Estonia, and 'Goldslick' is a made up name for a vodka with golden flakes inside. 'Burboon' is the recognised equivalent of 'bourbon', although, it must sound exotic for the Estonian audience, while in the US it sounds neutral. For functional reasons, simply 'viski' (whiskey) could have been considered.

**Literal translation**

In literal or direct translation, the elements are translated separately and directly.

[10] *Well, you'll have sex in college. Everyone does.*

'Küll sa kolledžis seksi saad. Kõik saavad.'

'College' is translated literally with the Estonian (dictionary) equivalent 'kolledž'. The only problem is that 'kolledž' is a loan word in Estonian, and it has very specific connotations, which are not the same as the American 'college' has. In American English, 'College' is virtually synonymous with 'university' (at least in colloquial use), and has the general meaning of any establishment of higher education. The Estonian 'kolledž' is either a part of a university, a vocational college, or the name for upper secondary school. The Estonian common word in this context would be 'ülikool' (university), which would have been a more functional translation for an establishment of higher education.


‘“Vag-tastiline reis”.'
'Vag-tastic voyage' – a pornographic website – refers to a 1966 film The Fantastic Voyage, which is most likely unknown to the average Estonian viewer. The first part of 'fantastic' has been replaced with 'vag', as in 'vagina', in Estonian 'vagiina'. The context of the scene is a discussion on pornographic sites, and 'vag' will probably be recognised, as 'vag-tastiline' imitates also the Estonian equivalent for 'fantastic' – 'fantastiline'.

Example of literal and/or recognised translation:


‘Tere tulemast Kõuekuplisse!’

According to the dialogue list 'Thunderdome' is music event, which refers to a wild and crowded party. The word has, in fact, many other meanings, of which maybe one of the most prominent ones is the US 1985 film Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome, translated into Estonian as Mad Max 3: Kõuekuppel, which is a literal translation. The average Estonian viewer is unlikely to know any of the references to 'Thunderdome' (it can mean more things than the two described here), but the actual word might create the connotation of a wild party.

Explicitation

An explanation or an additon – some kind of a clue is given to help the viewer understand the reference better.


‘Nagu Orson Welles, elu tippaeg verinoorena. – Just.’

Orson Welles was an American actor, director and producer (1915-1985) that became heavily overweight in his forties and had been most successful in his twenties. The previous line „Look, it was the peak of my ass-getting career and it happened way, way too early“ refers to the early peak of the life of Orson Welles. This translation of a cultural reference is different from most others since it is trying to reach a functional solution. The
explanation 'elu tippaeg verinoorena' (prime of his life at an early age) that is not found in the original tells the viewer at least why Welles was mentioned. An explanation like this could give the Estonian viewer an advantage if the American viewer does not know who Welles was.

**Generalisation** – a cultural concept is made more general, probably out of fear that it is not known to the audience.

[14] *Nice mullet, asshole.*

‘Ilus soeng.’

The specific hair style 'mullet', which is longer in the back and short in the front, must have been at the the peak of its popularity in the 80's. It has been replaced with the general 'soeng' (haircut). The informants did not know the meaning of 'mullet', however, Internet search shows quite frequent usage of the form 'mullet' in Estonian.

**Idiomatic translation**

Translations of the US currency from the colloquial 'bucks' is an example of idiomatically preserved cultural reference.

[15] *It's like thirteen bucks a month and you get access to a bunch of other sites. Like one's Latina, one's Asian.*

'13 taala kuus ja ligipääs näiteks latiinode ja asiaatide saitidele.'

'Buck' is the colloquial form for the US currency 'dollar'. The common equivalent for 'dollar' – slang word 'taal' – has been used in Estonian from the late 80's (ESS). There are three examples of this translation.

**Idiomatic translation with generalisation**

[16] *I mean, like (sighs) if I'm paying top dollar I want a little production value, you know.*

'Kui käin raha välja, tahan taset.'

The expression 'pay top dollar' (pay a lot of money) is translated as 'raha välja
käima' (pay out money). The translation looks like a generalisation of 'dollar', and if perceived as a cultural item then it has been generalised and turned into 'money', but from a functional perspective, it is an idiomatic expression, and 'raha välja käima' is a good equivalent. The paying 'a lot' of money does not reflect that much in the translation, but it is understood from the context.

**Accentuation**

On two occasions 'dollars' were translated with the aforementioned 'taala'. In this case there is a change of register into slang, and the translation is more marked than the original.


‘Suva see! Ma kaotasin sada taala! Julesi raha!’

**Substitution**

Substitution of a cultural item means replacing it with a more known or shared foreign element, or with a domestic element.

The only example of substitution in the whole corpus is the following example:

[18] *You guys on MySpace, or...?*

‘Kas teil reidikonto on?’

In this example, the third strategy has been used and the foreign element has been replaced with an Estonian counterpart. This, however, creates a funny connotation since the social network site 'Rate.ee' is Estonian and feels misplaced in the American context. 'MySpace' is probably known enough among Estonian youth since it has users from all around the world, and it would have been better left unchanged. The informants agree on this and do not like the replacement.

**Summary and conclusion**

Retention is the most common strategy for conveying cultural references. They are
not translated or explained in any way. This supports the claims of Pedersen, Díaz Cintas and House that Anglo-American terms are left untranslated since we are likely to be familiar with them. The other reason for retention can be simply the lack of time and space.

Some examples were, however, made explicit with the attempt to convey the connotations. Other strategies were literal translation, generalisation, reduction, idiomatic translation, accentuation and substitution.

Retention is also a form of foreignising – the target audience does not get any explanations or domestic substitutions, but the same information as the original audience. If the culture specific elements are known in other cultures, then this strategy makes sense, if not, then the audience is just left with names and words of no meaning. The opposite of this would be to replace all the references with items from the target culture. However, this kind of extreme domestication is unlikely to happen with current translation trends. Besides, there would be a substantial clash between what is read, seen, and heard in the film. The one case of substitution with domestication illustrates the latter clearly – the translation creates a bizarre effect and should have been left unchanged.

5.2. Colloquialisms and slang

Most examples in this group are either idiomatic translations or accentuations, approximately 40 occasions of both. Examples of neutralisation and synonymy occur each on more than ten occasions.

Accentuation


‘Rõve. Sa oled täiega loom.’

The slang word 'täiega' belongs to youth language and the most literal meaning of it is 'totally'. In this context, the translator has made the text more colloquial, instead of using
the word 'nagu', which means 'like' in this context. It is also possible that the word 'like' was interpreted as a hedge, and therefore translated as it was. The intensifier 'täiega' is one of the most frequently used words in the translation – 34 times. It has probably been used as a device for creating slangy or colloquial speech as it fits in almost everywhere to make the speech more informal.

[20] Um, Saturday was actually a crazy night for me.
   ‘Laupäev oli täiega hull õhtu.’ (Staurday was a totally crazy night)

[21] This is so disgusting. – Yes, it is. Yes.
   ‘Täiega rõve! – Rõve jah.’ (Totally disgusting!)

[22] I have your information. So, uh, put her there.
   ‘Inf on täiega olemas.’ (I totally have the info)

   This example is a contracted form of 'informatsioon' into the colloquial 'inf'. Also the intensifier 'täiega' has been used.

[23] You're the weird one, man. Don't make me feel weird 'cause I like porn.
   ‘Sina oled see kiiksuga tüüp.
   Ega pornovahtimine värduks tee.’

   'Weird' is translated as 'kiiksuga' the first time and 'värdu' the second time. The quite common colloquial 'weird' is translated into the slang word 'kiiksuga', which has the same meaning. The form 'värdu' is unusual and comes obviously from 'värdjas' (freak), which carries a strongly negative tone and is used also as a swear word. The form 'värdu' actually softens the tone of the word, because the ending 'u' is a derivational affix that is used for making diminutive forms. This strategy is used for many words of children's language, and 'värdu' also sounds somewhat childlike. Internet search gives this form about 1000 results, so it is used to some extent, but not found in ESS. The informants dismissed this form as well. Both words were translated into more marked forms, which could have been done in order to create variation, colloquialism or compensation.
In the next lines the unusual 'värdu' is used again. Also, the frequent intensifier 'täiega' is used:

[24] **You're the weird one for not liking porn. I'm normal as shit.**

‘Sina oled värdu, kui pornot ei vahi.’ (You're a weirdo if you don't watch porn.)
‘Mina olen täiega normaalne.’ (I'm totally normal)

[25] **Like some editing, transition, something. Some music.**

‘Et oleks toimetatud, viisakad üleminekud ja musa.’

The formal and most commonly used word 'music' does not have popular slang or colloquial equivalents in English. Different musical sub-cultures certainly have their own forms, and there are slang words that are more marked, but colloquially, 'music' is most neutral and preferred. 'Musa' is a derivation from 'muusika' and is a popular colloquial equivalent. The word suits the context since it creates the feeling of a natural everyday use in Estonian.

[26] **And-and she got incredibly hot over last summer and she (on) obviously hasn't realized it yet 'cause she's still always talking to you and flirting with you and stuff.**

‘Temast on suvega kuum tibi saanud, –aga ta pole vist veel matsu jaganud, sest räägib ja flirdib sinuga.’

'Matsu jagama' (to understand, can not be literally translated) is a slang expression that is much more marked than the source text expression. The word 'mats' is also used in another slang expression 'kindel mats' (for sure) in the next example.

[27] **Certainly will. Thank you, Seth.**

‘Kindel mats. Aitäh, Seth’

The conversation in the scene is of an exaggerated and friendly tone, where the speakers are very polite to each other. This has been lost in the translation by translating the 'certainly will', said in a very lady like manner, into the sloppy and slangy 'kindel mats'.

In the following examples, neutral word forms have been translated into colloquial or slang words, probably to emphasise the overall colloquial tone of the text, and also since in
some cases they might sound too formal when translated literally.

[28] Here it comes. When I was a little kid, I kind of had this problem.

'Olgu, ma räägin.
Mul oli lapsena üks probla.'

[29] I got into some schools. Some pretty good ones. So, I'll be fine.

'Sain teistesse headesse koolidesse,
Kõik on jonkus.'


'Fogel, sa oled idikas.'

[31] To make you my girlfriend for the summer.

'Sind suveks oma prutaks saada.'

Accentuation with specification


'Miks sa auto õpside parklasse panid?
- Pea lõuad, Fogell.'

Firstly the neutral 'staff' is specified as 'õpetajad' (teachers), and secondly, the contracted slangy form 'õpsid' has been used.

Idiomatic translation

This is the biggest group in the corpus, with almost 50 examples. Many of these are metaphorical expressions or idioms, which should be translated idiomatically.

[33] I don't know what I'm gonna be into ten years from now.
- I'm just sick of all the amateur stuff, you know.

'Kes teab, mis mulle hiljem meeldib.
Mul on kodutehtud sopast kopp ees.'

'Sick of' meaning 'tired of' or 'bored by' is translated with 'kopp ees'. The Estonian colloquial idiom has also the meaning of being 'tired of' something.

[34] You guys know a guy named Jimmy? You totally look like his brother.

'Kas te Jimmyt tunnete?
Sa oled täiega tema venna nägu.'

In this example 'täiega' denotes its closest idiomatic and literal equivalent 'totally'.
[35] **Break yourself, fool!**

‘Pane end põlema, jobu!’

In a situation where a company is trying to destroy their car, both the 'breaking' in the original and the Estonian 'put yourself on fire' function in the context.

[36] **Yeah, I'm gonna get one. For sho. For sho. I'm getting that for sho.**

‘Jajaa, ma saan selle. **Kindel mats.**’

[37] **She's way smashed.**

‘Täis kui tina.’

[38] **Um, I didn't puke on you, did I?**

‘Ega ma sulle peale ei **ropsinud**?’

**Idiomatic translation and accentuation**

[39] **She starts crying. She flips out. And she rats me out to the principal.**

‘Ta pistis pillima, sai vihaseks, pani **direle kitse kandma.**’

‘Principal' is used both formally and colloquially in English. Instead of the Estonian formal equivalent 'direktor', the slang version, contracted 'dire' is used in the translation. The decision is logical since the contracted form is what student would use. The idiom about reporting someone 'rat someone out', is translated in the subtitles as 'pani kitse kandma' (literally untranslatable). This version, however, seems to be redundant – the word 'kandma' (to carry) is added, which is not the common colloquial use. Only 'kitse panema' (to put the goat) is, on the other hand, the very traditional colloquial version of 'telling on someone'. According to the research and corpus by Mai Loog (1989: 16), 'panema' (to put) is a typical verb that precedes and follows a direct object, and forms slangy verb phrases like 'pidu panema' (to party), 'jooki panema' (to drink) etc. However, only few of such examples were found in this corpus, among them the aforementioned 'pidu panema, and also 'ropsi panema' (to puke), in most other cases when 'panema' stands alone, or takes a person as the direct object, the meaning is 'to fuck'.

**Neutralisation** is the third largest group. Most examples have swear words in the
original, which have been neutralised in the translation, but other than that, they are highly idiomatic. The rest are examples of neutralising the register – translating into a more formal or "softer" form.

[40] *That's because of all the other fun shit I'm off doing.*

`Sest mul on muud lahedat tegemist.'

Such general adjectives like 'fun' can be translated with a number of idiomatically functioning counterparts as long as they are natural and function in the context. The translation 'lahe' (cool) is frequently used and is relatively natural, although it is more colloquial. But as the original is actually 'fun shit', then the expression together is definitely slang, which makes the translation a bit less marked, but it is still quite idiomatic.

[41] *Let me see it. Did you pussy out or what?*

`Näita välja, või lõid vedelaks?'

Expressions with 'pussy' in this text are mostly connected to the connotation of a 'wimp' – a cowardly person (man) or of being scared. And each time it is translated rather differently. This translation is slang like the original and idiomatically correct in the context, but the translated idiom is more polite, without a taboo word.

[42] *No? Well, if nothing comes up we can get shitfaced again, yeah?*

`Siis võiks ju londi jälle umbe tõmmata.'

[43] *Fogell, shut the fuck up. All right? And take off your vest, you look like Aladdin.*

`Pane karp kinni. Ja võta vest ära, sa oled sellega nagu Aladdin.'

The Estonian expression 'pane karp kinni' (shut the box) means simply 'shut up'. So it is a more neutral than the original with the 'fuck'. Also, just 'jää vait' (shut up) or 'pane suu kinni' (shut your mouth) would have been idiomatic and suitable, it is not always necessary
to come up with “more interesting” equivalents.

[44] *Don't ask me, 'cause I, I don't give a shit how pants look.*

‘Ma ei tea.
Ära küsi, mulle on see savi.’

[45] *Don't be such a vagine, man. I gotta get a Red Bull before class.*

‘Ära värisse, ma ostan Red Bulli.’

Being a 'vagine' is quite literally the same as being a 'pussy' – both denote cowardly behavior. The translation is given with a more neutral expression 'ära värisse' (don't shiver), meaning 'don't be scared', but the register has changed.

[46] *Get the, get the fuck outta here.*

‘Kao minema.’

The rude and angry original line has turned into 'kao minema' (get lost), which is somewhat more polite as it does not contain any swear words, but it still carries the angry tone of dismissal.

[47] *What the fuck?! – Help me.*

‘Mida tonti? – Aita mind!’

The very common English expression is translated into an interesting exclamation 'mida tonti' (what the ghost). It makes hardly sense that a person says something so "polite" when she is accidentally hit in the face. The expression could be used by someone trying not to swear, but feels the need to use the typical swearing formula 'what the X'. Any exclamation of this kind would probably be also expressed with a swear word in Estonian. Maybe the translator was simply trying to limit the use of swear words in the text. For one reason or another.

[48] *What the fuck?*

‘Mida värki?’

There are at least a couple of examples of this translation. 'Mida värki' (what the stuff) is much more polite.
So, I guess you guys are really gonna go crazy next year together.

‘Teil on järgmisel aastal kindlasti ilmatu vahva.’

In this example, the original is a colloquial expression, but the translation is more typical for written register. The word 'vahva' is certainly less colloquial than many other words of this type such as 'äge' (fierce) or 'lahe' (cool). Even if 'vahva' alone is quite all right, the the intensifier 'ilmatu' (enormous) used with something else might work too, the using them together creates an unnatural combination.

Synonymy

Hey, man, are you sure it’s cool that we’re here with you? – Oh, definitely, man.

‘Kas on normunn, et me kaasa tulime?
- Täiega.’

The response, if it is 'ok' to come with, is conveyed with a derivation of 'normaalne' (normal). Although, 'normunn' is an unusual version of 'normull' which is more common and also found in ESS. The informants had not heard the word 'normunn' but were familiar with the more common version.

I almost blew a load into my belly button.

‘Ükspäev pidi laadung äärepealt nabasse plûrtsama.’

The meaning of the translation is clear, the word, on the other hand, does not exist in any dictionary or even on the Internet. Apparently, it is just formulated similarly to other onomatopetic (sound imitating) words like 'lurts', 'plärts'.

5.3. Sexual slang

Idiomatic translation

The Vag-tastic Voyage is the one where they find like random girls on the street and they invite them into a van and then they bang them once they're all in the van.

‘Suvalised tibid viiakse kaubikusse ja neile pannakse seal ära.’
'Bang' is a slang word for 'have sex'. The expression 'ära panema' has probably the same meaning in Estonian slang, although the more common form is only 'panema' (to put).

[53] Yeah, well, at least you got to suck on your dad's *dick*.

‘See-eest sina said papsi vänta imeda.’

[54] *...but I'll tell you, it's like having two cocks.*

‘...aga tunne on, nagu oleks kaks riista.’

[55] *Pussies on the pavement, fellas. Come on!*

‘Vitud vastu maad!’

This translation is successful also because there is an alliteration in the translation just like in the the original (no matter if the alliteration was delibearte or not).

[56] *I got a boner.*

‘Mul läks kõvaks.’

[57] *Holy shit! Were you just getting laid?*

‘Kas sa said keppi? ’

[58] *Cool. So, uh...your mom's got huge tits!*

‘Lahe. Su emal on suured tissid.’

[59] *It's like a three thing. It's like ball, dick, ball.*

‘Ilus kolmik. Kera, till, kera.’

Neutralisation

[60] *Look, it was the peak of my ass-getting career and it happened way, way too early.*

‘See oli mu seksikarjääri tipp,’ (sex career) ‘aga kahjuks julmalt vara.’

[61] *...and draw pictures of dicks.*

‘ja joonistasin juurikaid.’

ESS defines 'juurikas' (veggie or rootie, from vegetable, literally 'root fruit') as an IT
term and as doing kitchen duties in the army. EESS gives the meaning of 'old man'.
Internet search does not give too many implications of the word 'juurikas' meaning 'penis'.
The informants thought the translation was not successful or understandable, though, naturally it was possible to derive the meaning from the context of the scene.

[62] *Because I fucking rule! Aw, we are so gonna get laid tonight!*

'Sest ma ruulin! Täna saame seksi!'

'Today we'll have/get sex' is something that teenage boys probably would not, especially in an enthusiastic mood. The choosing of neutral 'sex' is hardly justified.

**Neutralisation with reduction and generalisation**

[63] *You don't want girls thinking that you suck dick at fucking pussy. okay?*

'Tahad, et tibid peaksid sind äpuks?'

The meaning of the expression is 'not being good at having sex' and 'äpu' is derived from the verb 'to fail'. However, the whole implication of sex has been left out, the expression has been reduced significantly, and neutralised by eliminating all the coarse words. The message of the phrase is (partially) delivered, but the form, aesthetics, creativity and equivalent response is lost.

**Synonymy**

[64] *...I'm really sorry that I blocked your cock.*

'Vabanda, et rikkusin krõpsutegemise.'

'Krõps' denotes more commonly 'crisps', but dictionaries also claim that it is the word for sex. The example in ESS is taken from a mothers' (or family) Internet forum, which is not surprising – it is a word that seems to be used by someone who wants to refer to sex with a "funny" or innocent word. All the informants rejected this word.

**Shift in meaning**

[65] *My parents make me go see some therapist. And he's asking me all these dick questions.*
In this case there is a change in the meaning. The context was that the therapist asked questions from a 9-10 year-old boy, who had been drawing penises. Changing that into 'kepiküsimus' (fucking question) is maybe too much. These drawings do not indicate any kind of sexual activity, besides, the translation almost indicates that the therapist was asking some kind of inappropriate questions.

[66] *And I'm not gonna dance around it, she looks like a good fucker. – All right, I'm tired of you talking about her like that, man.*

‘Minu arust on ta täiega pandav.
- Ära räägi temast nii.’

The dialogue list explains: a good fucker: vulgar slang for 'skilled at sexual intercourse'. The translation means 'totally fuckable'. The shift in the meaning makes the girl passive, the one who is 'getting fucked'. It is possible, of course, that the shift was made because a suitable equivalent to 'good fucker' was not found.

[67] *And you got like two dozen hand jobs.
- Yes, and three-quarters of a blow job, but who's counting, Evan?*

‘Said tosin pihukat.
- Ja umbes kolmveerandi keelekat.’

'Blow job' is an act of fellatio. 'Keelekas' (tonguey) means usually a 'cunnilingus', i.e to perform oral sex on woman, this is also the meaning in ESS. Although rationally 'keelekas' can be anything performed with tongue.

**Accentuation and specification**

[68] *Yeah, but they don't really show dick going in, which is a huge concern. Plus, have you ever seen a vagina by itself?*

‘Seal ei näidata, kuidas sisse läheb.
Ja oled sa praost sisse vaadanud?’

The original expression seems rather simple and neutral, the translation on the other hand 'praost sisse vaatama' (to look inside the crack) is maybe created with too much fantasy. The word 'pragu' is a slang word and according to ESS, it is used mostly in
pornographic literature. 'Sisse vaatama' is too specific and peculiar compared to the original. The translation is probably triggered by the negative tone of the original phrase that is obvious from the context and the extra-linguistic information in the scene. The translation creates a rather anatomical and vulgar picture, which is the point of the utterance, but it seems too unnatural and unlikely for anyone to actually say that.

**Summary and conclusion**

On most occasions, idiomatic translation was used. The next strategy was neutralisation, which was expected for a taboo area. And thirdly, an unexpected strategy of shifting the meaning was used. All in all, surprisingly few words or expressions were toned down and neutralised, the larger part remained within the same register and were translated idiomatically.

5.4. Swearing

**Idiomatic translation** in swearing means finding an equivalent with a similar tone, strength and expressive function, depending on the meaning of the utterance – whether it is to denote anger, surprise, disappointment etc.

[69] *Oh, fuck me. Look at those nipples.*

‘Sa raisk!’ – Millised nibud!’

'Fuck me' is an emotive exclamation of “dismay or arousal“ according to the dialogue list. A number of translations could have been chosen here, since there can only be equivalence in saying a similar expression in a similar situation. The Estonian 'sa raisk’ (you carcass) is a good choice. 'Raisk' is probably one of the most frequent swear words in Estonian, it is derived from 'raibe' (carcass). The level of „seriousness“ is also similar, considering that both are quite strong and rude words. 'Sa' used in front of a swearing is common for addressed exclamations, this does not mean, however, that the exclamation is addressed to someone.
[70] No, that's why you picked a dumb fucking name! – **Fuck you.**

> 'Seepärast võtsidki selle lolli nime?
> - Käi persse.'

'Fuck you' is a dismissal. A number of equivalents could have been chosen here. 'Käi persse' (go in the ass) is also suitable.

[71] **What the fuck!**

> 'Vaata raiska!'

In the scene, the person who said it, was being vomited on. It was an exclamation of surprise and disappointment. The expression is said slowly in a manner that the meaning is 'I can't believe this'. In certain contexts this translation could have been functional, but in that specific scene a similar expression would have been much better, anything with 'Mida X!'.

[72] **Fuck me!** I can't...

> 'Kurat, ma ei saa…'

[73] **Ah. – Shit. – Fuck. – Shit. – Shit.**

> 'Raisk. – Kurat.'

[74] **Oh, shit!** Careful.

> 'Sa kurat! Ettevaatust!'

[75] **Oh, shit.**

> 'Kurat.'

[76] **What the fuck, man? – What the fuck, Seth?**

> 'Mida kuradit? – Mida kuradit?'

**Idiomatic literal translation**

[77] Hey, where is that **sack of shit,** Fogell? He said he'd be here after lunch.

> ‘Kuhu see sitakott Fogell jääb?
Ise pidi pärast lounat tulema.’

In most cases, literal translation does not work with slang or swearing. If it does, then it could be because of some universal constructions or borrowing. 'Sack of shit' means literally 'sitakott' and it is a completely natural and idiomatic equivalent.

[78] **Eat shit, bum!**
‘Söö sitta, pätt!’

This example illustrates again the rare possibility of literally translating swearing. However, it is not really literal translation, but idiomatic. In this case, however, they seem identical.

**Idiomatic reduction**

[79] *We're so fucked. We're so fuckked. This plan's been fuckked since Jump Street, man.*

‘Sellest ei tule sittagi välja!’

The three phrases of the original have been compressed into one utterance, which conveys the meaning idiomatically, without the repetitions and connection to the unfamiliar (for Estonian viewer) cultural reference.

**Paraphrase**

[80] *I don't want to sit here all by myself cooking this shitty food. No offense.*

‘Ma ei taha siin üksipäini sitta kokku vaaritama, ärge solvuge.’

The original expression is changed a little bit, though the main ingredients have remained the same. 'Sitta kokku vaaritama' (to cook this shit) is idiomatic and certainly a better version than literal translation would have been.

[81] *Come on, pussy. Get up, dude. – Oh, shit. I'm sorry, bro. I'm sorry, bro. I'm sorry, bro.*

‘Tõmba uttu, türa, raisk! Anna andeks!’

In this example, the two arguing men are fighting and one of them has fallen. 'Get up' is an order to get up and continue the fight. The Estonian translation means 'get the fuck out of here', which does not fit in the context. The final goal is to get rid of that person, but still it should have been translated idiomatically in the context.


‘Kas alkaritel on pohmakas?’
- Püha peeretus, need on nemad.’

‘Püha peeretus’ (holy fart) is something one might use in informal written register, it does not sound like a neutral colloquial form, and it is difficult to imagine the average young person swearing like that.

**Summary and conclusion**

Fernández Fernández (2009: 213-214) believes that swear words and their level of intensity should be communicated to the audience. This is the right method if the translator's objective is an *equivalent effect*.

The most frequent strategy for conveying swear words was idiomatic translation, which means that most swearing forms were translated in an equivalent manner. The next groups were synonymy, by which swear words were translated with a an expression of similar connotations, but the form was somewhat unsuitable; and paraphrase, by which swear words were translated with a different expression or construction.

Neutralisation did not occur, which is explained by the categorising of material based on the translated text – only the swear words that were conveyed into Estonian ended up in the corpus.

One of the most frequent words in the entire text of the film belongs to this category, namely – ‘fuck’. The stem 'fuck' occurs 235 times in the text, including derivations like 'fucking' or 'fucker'. This is not surprising since it is believed to be one of the most common (if not the most common) swear words in English. Edward Sagarin has described the word 'fuck' and its role:

> In the entire vocabulary of proscribed words, from slang to profanity, from the mildly unclean to the utterly obscene, including terms relating to concealed parts of the body, to excretion and excrement as well as to sexuality, one word reigns supreme, unchallenged in its preeminence. It sits upon a throne, an absolute monarch, unafraid of any princely offspring still unborn, and by its subjects it is hated, feared, revered and loved, known by all and recognized by none. (*Sagarin 1968: 136 in Fernández Fernández 2009: 215*).

There were 117 occasions of 'fuck' and its derivatives in the collected corpus. By
extensive omission, over a hundred cases have gone missing. Of these 117, most have been neutralised or omitted. The next most frequent swear word was 'shit' with 92 overall occurrences. The most frequent Estonian swear words were 35 occasions of 'kurat' and its derivations, and 'raisk' with 23 occurrences. Also this was expected since 'kurat' and 'raisk' are the most common and used swear word in Estonian, which form also idiomatic cursing forms such as 'kuradi X'. The difference in numbers between the occurrence of these popular swear words in the source and the target text, is certainly thought-provoking.

5.5. Alcohol

This category is made up of mostly different versions for denoting 'alcohol'. The English words used for this purpose are 'alcohol' (14 times), 'liquor' (14), 'booze' (13) and 'drinks' (3). There are also four occasions of 'beer'.

**Idiomatic translation**

[83] And I was like, "No, we should totally tell Fogell." And that way you could buy us **booze** now.

'Mina ütlesin, et räägime ikka.
Ja nüüd saad sa meile **alkot** osta!'

'Alko' is the most frequent equivalent for whenever alcohol is mentioned. The word is a shortened form of 'alkohol', and it is used in compound words, and is also a slang word according to EESS, ESS and some of the informants. Also Internet search shows colloquial uses of the word. For that reason, it has to be counted for as a slang/colloquial word, and therefore, in this translation example, an idiomatic equivalence. Other common equivalents could have been, for instance, 'alks' and 'jook', the latter being most popular among the informants.

[84] Yeah. I'll, sure, I'll buy the **booze**. Yeah, man, we're gonna get our drinks on.

'Muidugi ostan.
**Alkot** saab igatahes!'

[85] Can you get us **booze**?
'Kas sa saad meile alkot tuua?'

**Accentuation** – the more formal words 'alcohol' and 'liquor' have been replaced with colloquial forms.

[86] *Yeah. I can. I can get you guys alcohol. – Really? Seriously? Oh, that would be awesome. Thank you.*

‘Saan küll teile alkot tuua.
- Tõesti? See on täiega äge! Aitäh!’

[87] *You were buying some beer, some guys came in, punched you.*

‘Meil on niigi klaar. Ostad õltsi, tüübid tulevad annavad kolakat.’

'Õlu' (beer), has been translated with its colloquial derivation 'õlts'. In English, beer is the neutral and common form also colloquially.

**Explicitation**

[88] *Because, you know, we're worried about that. That would be great.*

‘Me olimegi alko pärast mures.
Küll oleks tore!’

'Alko' has been added to clarify the sentence, which might also have been done to make the written sentence more correct, or to simply clarify what was meant.

[89] *Me and the guys are gonna go to a liquor store after class.*

‘Me läheme poistega pärast tundi alkopoodi.’

'Liquor store' is always translated as 'alkopood' (alco-store). The expression is generally somewhat redundant in present day Estonia since every supermarket sells alcohol, and going to buy it would be therefore expressed in some other way. In the context, however, liquor store should be mentioned as it is physically there. Also, 'alkopood' seems to be used both in neutral written registry and colloquially. Another common word for liquor store is 'viinapood' (vodka store), which is a colloquial word. Internet search finds almost four times more pages with 'viinapood' than 'alkopood'.

**Summary and conclusion**
Whenever alcohol was mentioned or implied, the translation 'alko' was used 44 times, including the compound word 'alkopood'. Interestingly, alcohol is generally mentioned also 44 times, so there are a few cases of explicitation, when alcohol is only implied in the original sentence, but made obvious in the translation. The only synonym for 'alko' was 'kärakas' (booze), used three times, and on two occasions it was said by an older drunk, which seems to imply that young people use the word 'alko' and older people (or drunks) 'kärakas'. Other colloquial forms like 'alks' or 'jook' were not used.

'Beer' was translated with the colloquial 'õlts' on most occasions.

5.6. Police

This category is very limited and concrete, it involves only utterances that refer to the police or police officers. Many of the examples are colloquial or slang words, but they occur often and are specific, and therefore, were collected into a separate semantic category.

**Idiomatic translation** is the predominant strategy in this category. In eleven occurrences, 'cops' were translated as 'võmmid'. This is the colloquial equivalent that any dictionary would give for 'cops'. Other equivalents, especially the popular 'mendid' (from 'militia'), were not used at all.

[90] *Shit! The cops!*

'Raisk, võmmid!'

The next strategy was **explicitation**:

[91] *Blue guys!*

‘Võmmid!’

The implication of the color that police uniforms have was simply translated as 'võmmid'.

**Explicitation with a synonym**

[92] *Michaels here, uh, he's six months in.*
‘Michaels on alles pool aastat (Michaels has been a cop for just half a year) polla onud.’

The expression 'six months in' was made explicit in the translation and the word 'polla' from 'politsei' (police) was added. 'Polla' was used in more example. This example is grouped as synonym because it is hard to imagine a thirty-something male police officer using the word 'polla' in a neutral conversation.

There is also one example of neutralisation

[93] Get off the bus or I'm calling the cops!

'Minge bussist välja, muidu kutsun politsei.'

'Cops' has been translated as 'politsei', which is a formal word, but at the same time successfully used in colloquial conversations. This example is said by a bus driver, so the formal use makes sense.

Summary and conclusion

The main strategies in this category were idiomatic translation and explicitation. Nearly all examples of idiomatic translation are of 'cops' > 'võmmid' translation. Although ESS, for example, does not include this word. 'Mendid', however, was among the top most common words in a slang corpus collected by Mai Loog in 1989 (Loog 1992: 14). Yet, it is much used even 20 years later. In addition, none of the informants admitted to using or preferring the word 'võmmid', their unanimous preference were 'mendid', and in some cases 'politsei'. 'Mendid' seems to be, indeed, the colloquial use by teenagers, and therefore, the dominating translation of 'cops' with the cliché 'võmmid' is irrational.

5.7. English loan words

English loan words have been borrowed directly and their form has been changed according to Estonian orthography – naturalised. These are not creations of the translator, but loans that are already in use. With most of the examples, idiomatic naturalisation has
taken place.

[94] *That's where we chill-lax. It's like relax and chill all at once.*

‘Seal on hea läbustada ja tsillida.’

[95] *Hey, yo, Seth?*

‘Jou, Seth.’

[96] *Well, I don't, I-I, that's really messed up. Super gay.*

‘See on ikka tääega haige.
Supergei.’

At first, this example seemed somewhat suspicious, but the informants counted it for
good translation, which means they must be familiar with the slang meaning of the word
'gay'- foolish, stupid, socially inappropriate or disapproved of; ‘lame’ (*The Oxford
Dictionary of Modern Slang*).

[97] *I assume you all have guns and crack!*

‘Teil kõigil on muidugi tükid ja kräkk.’

[98] *You wanna hang out? I was, uh, gonna go to the mall.*

‘Lähme hängime natuke?
Tahtsin ostukeskusesse minna.’

[99] *Gangsters. What's up, guys? I was just walking down the hall and, uh, Nicola was
right in front of me.*

‘Kuidas kärab, gängstad?
Läksin ja Nicola läks minu ees.’


‘Bai. Gab! – Bai!’

According to ESS, ‘bai’ is not a new loan word. However, it is not clear why all of a
sudden use this translation. The reason was probably variation since another phrase with
'bye' was translated with the colloquial 'tšauki'. And for the most part, greetings were not
translated at all.

**Explicitation**
Bill, Bill! This kid's got period blood on his slacks.

‘Bill, tšekka seda! Tüübil on päevad, püksid on verised!’

In this example, the translator has added the English loan word 'tšekka' (check) to 'Tšekka seda' – 'Check this out'.

Summary and conclusion

Considering how much Estonian teenagers use English words, loans and modifications, it was surprising to see so few of them in this film translation. The few ones that were used were mostly idiomatic and functional in the context.

5.8. Summary of the analysis

The analysis shows that the dominating strategy applied was idiomatic translation, on 144 occasions of 362 examples in the corpus. The decision whether a translation is a natural equivalent to the original is highly dependant on the person who evaluates it. Therefore, many different opinions are eligible for determining translation strategies. But according to the analysis presented here, most examples in the corpus were translated in a fully functional manner that are likely to achieve an equivalent effect on the target audience.

The next strategy was accentuation with 65 examples. This could have been done for various reasons. One possible explanation is compensation – if something important was omitted or neutralised in the text, then the stylistic balance of the text was achieved with using a more marked word or expression somewhere else. Another explanation is the real colloquial use of words. In many examples with English where formal or neutral words are used colloquially, the Estonian equivalents are slang words, and the change of register might be necessary for creating a similar effect in a given context.

The third largest group was translations with neutralisation, on approximately 35 occasions. Neutralising is an expected strategy when transferring text from oral to written
form. If many television channels 'beep' someone who has used the 'f'-word', then it is a brave decision for subtitlers to use hundreds of 'f'-words' in their translation.

The fourth strategy was *paraphrasing* – usually when a phrase or a word was changed quite significantly but the meaning remained the same. The fifth strategy, used for over 20 examples, was *synonymy*. This strategy has a slightly negative tone to it, as it gives an equivalent that has the correct meaning, but the form might be stylistically inappropriate or marginal, even a cliché that is not much used in real conversations.

In comparison with real colloquial teenage talk, the subtitles of *Superbad* are without a doubt stiff and unnatural in some cases. But all in all, the translation is a success on *more* occasions.
Conclusion

In Estonia, a subtitling country, people are used to reading texts on the screen. Even if subtitles should be representing a spoken text, they tend to follow the rules of written language. It is common to perceive colloquialisms in written form as “incorrect”.

The aim of this thesis was to see how a film with highly colloquial language is conveyed into Estonian, by analysing the subtitles of a fictional film. The material used for this study was the American youth comedy Superbad – Ülikõva.

The theoretical part of the thesis was based on the categories that are important from a communicative perspective – whether an equivalent effect is achieved for the Estonian audience when translating complex registers.

The first chapter discussed different views on translation, also literal translation and the translation procedure. The second chapter concentrated on audiovisual translation and the emphasis was on subtitling – the type of audiovisual translation relevant for the present thesis. The chapter included topics like specificity of the medium, the language of audiovisual translation, downstream translation, translating of cultural references, and, finally, the relationship between audiovisual translation and translation theories, and whether they can be applied to subtitling.

The third chapter discussed certain types of spoken language, namely, the highly colloquial forms of slang, swearing and teenage talk. The chapter included also taboo words in slang and swearing, swearing in Estonian, and views on how to translate slang and swearing.

The fourth chapter presented some thoughts on translating Superbad, the methods for collecting the data and how it was categorised. This chapter included also definitions of translation strategies that were elaborated on the basis of the empirical data.

The fifth chapter was the analysis of the data. The collected corpus consisted of 362
single or double text lines. The original English dialogue and the Estonian subtitles were compared. The empirical data was divided into seven categories, based on what was important from a communicative perspective – whether an equivalent effect was achieved in the subtitles. These categories were cultural references, colloquialisms and slang, sexual slang, swearing, English loan words, and two semantic categories – alcohol and the police – separated from the rest of colloquialisms since they were represented in such volumes that separate analysis seemed rational.

*Cultural references* were mostly untranslated, i.e., they were left in their original form without any additional explanations. These were typically names and titles. However, other strategies were used evenly, but in much fewer cases.

*Colloquialisms and slang* were one of the largest categories. The most typical strategy for translating colloquialisms and slang was idiomatic translation. This means that a stylistic and functional equivalent that had a similar meaning, was found. Many examples were also accentuated – the translation was of a more marked register.

In the category of *sexual slang*, idiomatic translation was mostly applied again. The other often applied strategy was neutralisation – the sexual words were made more polite or neutral.

The category of *swearing* was, again, mostly translated idiomatically. Other strategies were paraphrasing and synonymy. On both cases the meaning of the translation remained predominantly same, but the form or style of the phrases or words was changed, and, therefore, in some cases the translation did not give an equivalent effect.

The examples with *alcohol* and the *police* were translated with few synonyms, and in both categories the predominant word for either 'alcohol' or 'police men' was colloquially maybe not the best choice.

The last category of English loan words had only few examples, of which some are
frequently used among Estonian teenagers. The translation was mainly idiomatic.

Omission was not a separate strategy used in the analysis, but it certainly was the predominant strategy used in the translation. The original dialogue consisted of approximately 17,000 words, the Estonian subtitles of about 8000. Over half of the words had been omitted. This agrees partially with the hypothesis set in the introduction that much of the text has been omitted because of colloquial redundancy. Although, what kind of words have been left out is not clear. This can be, however, seen both from the few examples of omission given in the beginning of the analysis, in chapter 5. And of course, a large part of the examples that are analysed in chapter 5, are also typical examples of omission.

To some extent, coarse language and slang have been neutralised, but it is not the predominant strategy. Nevertheless, in the categories of sexual slang and colloquialisms/slang, neutralisation is either the second or the third most frequent strategy.

English loan words are frequent among Estonian teenagers and there are some loan words in the text, but they are very few and do not represent the actual usage of such words.

Fourthly, the hypothesis that little or no domestication occur in the translation is true. There was only one example of a cultural substitution, when an American item was replaced with an Estonian counterpart. (MySpace > Rate.ee)

In conclusion, the subtitles of Superbad are relatively bold and creative, most expressions in the analysed categories have been translated idiomatically and functionally. However, there is plenty of room for improvement since an equivalent effect was not achieved on a number of occasions. This is also why: “We should remember that the audience reaction to a funny line is far more important than any literal fidelity to the original sense”. (Whitman in Gottlieb 2009: 23)
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Secondary Sources:


RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOOL
INGLISE FILOLOGIA OSAKOND

Veronica Tank

Translating Communicatively Complex Registers in Youth Comedy
Kommunikatiivselt keeruliste registrite tõlkimine noortekomöödias

Magistritöö
2011
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Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärk on analüüsida USA noortekomöödia “Superbad – Ülikõva” subtiitriid ning selgitada välja kuidas on kommunikatiivselt keeruliste teemade või registrite keelekasutust tõlgitud.

Töö teoreetiline osa koosneb kolmest peatükist: esimene peatükk käsitleb tõlkimist üldiselt, teise peatüki teema on audiovuaalne tõlge ja selle eripärad, kolmas peatükk käsitleb kõnekeele erinevaid registreid: slängi, vandumist ja noortekeelt.

Neljas peatükk defineerib käesolevas töös kasutatavad tõlkestrateegiad ning esitab empiirilise materjali põhjal koostatud kategooriad: kultuurispetsiifilised viited, kõnekeelsus ja släng, seksuaalsusega seotud släng, vandumine, ning semantilised kategooriad – politsei ja alkohol ning inglise laensõnad.

Analüüs keskendub iga kategooria puhul enim esinevatele tõlkestrateegiatele, kuid näiteid on toodud ka vähem kasutatud strateegiate kohta.

Analüüsi tulemused näitavad, et peamine tõlkestrateegia on kõikide kategooriate puhul idiomaatiline tõlge. Teised sagedasemad strateegiad on markeeriv strateegia (accents) slängi puhul ning neutraliseeriv strateegia (neutralisation) seksuaalsusega seotud ja ka tavalise slängi puhul. Kogu korpus raames (362 näidet) on kasutatud esialgle klassifikatsiooni järgi 17 strateegiat, analüüsi jõudsid aga ainult sagedasemad või huvipakkuvad. Subtiitrite teksti ei ole nii palju neutraliseeritud, kui esialgne hüpotees välja pakkus. Tõlkes esineb aga ka ohtralt näiteid ekvivalentse efekti (equivalent effect) ebaõnnestumise kohta.

Märksõnad: subtiitrid, tõlkestrateegiad, släng, noorte keel, vandumine