

Czech Dubbing of the Film *Mamma Mia*: A Translation Analysis

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá, jak český dabing filmu *Mamma Mia!* přetváří původní anglické dialogy: nejen po významové stránce, ale také z hlediska rytmu, tónu a performativní funkce. Namísto pevného teoretického rámce se analýza zaměřuje na tři jazykové roviny, kde k posunům dochází nejvýrazněji: lexikální (s důrazem na metafory a idiomy), syntaktickou a pragmaticko-diskurzivní. Každá z nich odhaluje jiný typ změny v závislosti na tom, co si konkrétní scéna žádá a jak na to jazyk dokáže reagovat. Smyslem práce není hodnotit, ale porozumět: co se v překladu mění, jaký to má důvod, a proč výsledek často funguje i tehdy, když se formou odchyluje. Dabing je zde vnímán jako způsob kreativního převyprávění, kde překlad má svůj vlastní hlas, načasování i způsob. Výsledkem není kopie, ale vlastní verze, která rezonuje podle vlastních pravidel.

Klíčová slova: dabing, audiovizuální překlad, česká adaptace, metafora, idiom, syntax, pragmatika, Mamma Mia

ABSTRACT

This Bachelor's thesis explores how the Czech dubbing of *Mamma Mia!* reinterprets the original English dialogue: not just in terms of meaning, but through rhythm, tone, and performative function. Rather than testing a fixed theory, the work focuses on three levels where change tends to unfold most visibly: lexical (especially metaphors and idioms), syntactic, and pragmatic-discursive. Each level offers a different shift, which depends on what the scene demands and how language responds to those constraints. The analysis is not concerned with evaluation, but with insight: what happens when something is altered, and why it might feel right even if it is not "equivalent." As the thesis argues, Dubbing is less about direct transfer and more about creative alignment: a process where translation becomes voice, timing, and mood. The result is not a replica, but a version that resonates in its terms.

Keywords: dubbing, audiovisual translation, Czech adaptation, metaphor, idiom, syntax, pragmatics, Mamma Mia

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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, translation begins with a single word. Other times, it begins with complete silence: with the pause before a line is spoken, with the weight of a glance that does not need to be translated at all. In dubbing, translation moves beyond language. It becomes a performance. It must feel as though it was always meant to be there, even when it was not.

At first, it was the film itself that left me in awe—its rhythm, its voice, the fantasy-like world it created. This musical has such extraordinary power and almost a positive aura that it puts the audience at ease. However, it was not until I heard it again in my mother tongue that something deeper stirred. I knew the original by heart, yet the dialogue now carried a different weight. It was those subtle shifts that sparked the idea for this thesis.

The film *Mamma Mia!* had long been familiar to me. Yet, compared with the English original, I immediately spotted the differences. Something shifted in the tone, in the pacing, and in the way characters revealed themselves. It was about transformation that interested me the most—a process of carefully adjusting language to serve a new purpose in a new voice.

Dubbing holds a unique place in Czech media culture, with a tradition. Unlike subtitling, which preserves the original voice and adds a layer, dubbing replaces it entirely. It recreates the scene through different sounds, performed by different voices. When done well, it can be just as expressive and convincing. This thesis explores how that transformation unfolds, not in general, but in detail.

This work analyses how the Czech dubbing of *Mamma Mia!* transformed from the original English language. I focused on the three levels where shift tends to appear most clearly: the lexical level (with a focus on metaphors and idioms), the syntactic level, and the pragmatic/discourse level. These categories reflect the layered nature of dubbed dialogue, where each line carries not only semantic weight but also stylistic, cultural, and performative weight.

Although no exact hypotheses are posed, several assumptions guide the analytical approach. First, Czech dubbing often prioritises functional and emotional tone over lexical fidelity. Second, figurative expressions are very sensitive to cultural change. Third, pragmatic adjustments play a crucial role in how characters and their relationships are perceived by the audience.

This thesis contributes by tracing small, often invisible translation choices. By analysing them, it shows how dubbing operates not just as linguistic substitution but as interpretative and performative rewriting. In this process, translation becomes less about mirroring and more about resonance—about finding what sounds true, even if it does not sound the same.

I. THEORY

1 AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION (AVT)

Audiovisual Translation (AVT) does not only shift words from one language to another. It operates and moves through a layered environment, within a specific framework, that differs significantly from traditional text-based translation. Chaume (2013) explains that audiovisual texts communicate meaning through two simultaneous channels: the acoustic, which includes dialogue, soundtrack, and paralinguistic cues; and the visual, which conveys meaning through images, colour, and movement. These channels function through distinct sign systems that, when combined, create meaning (Chaume 2013, 106). This layered nature of audiovisual communication complicates the translator's task, as they are not simply interpreting words but weaving them into the already existing and synchronised structure.

As Munday (2001) points out, AVT, including dubbing, operates within a semiotic framework where language interacts with visual and auditory signs. In this context, translators need to pay attention not only to linguistic reshaping, but also to timing, how the performance feels, and how everything fits together across different senses (Munday 2001, 72-73)

Continuing with Chaume (2013), he begins by establishing a foundational typology of AVT, introducing a distinction between two principal modes: revoicing and captioning. This distinction, he argues, responds to the shifting and diverse nature of the audiovisual content formats. He then explains that revoicing involves inserting or replacing a soundtrack in the TL, as seen in dubbing, voice-over, or narration. On the other hand, Captioning refers to written translations on screen, including subtitles, surtitles, and SDH (subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing). As he explains, this division reflects whether the translation operates through the audio or the visual channel, as each one brings its own technical and interpretative constraints (Chaume 2013, 107).

These constraints directly influence the translator's approach. Literal translation often is not usable, not due to semantic conflict but because of spatial and temporal limitations. The translator is, therefore, required to restructure, condense, or rephrase the original line so that it preserves its intended function within the fixed audiovisual rhythm.

Newmark's (1988) distinction between semantic and communicative translation is particularly relevant here. Communicative translation, trying to create an equivalent effect, is favoured in AVT to fulfil the performative requirements (Newmark 1988, 45–48). Moreover, strategies such as idiomatic substitution, modulation, or even omission are

frequently used to preserve the pragmatic function of the original text (Dore 2019, 25; Golda and Mężyk 2021, 138–139).

AVT inevitably pressures the concept of linguistic equivalence, which is no longer taken as a priority once functional demands take over. For instance, Schäffner (2004) shows that metaphor translation often shifts toward paraphrase or cultural adaptation, prioritising function over form, to avoid misunderstanding in the target culture (Schäffner 2004, 1255). Similarly, Malmkjær (2019) emphasises that constraints can provoke creativity, such as the need to change culture-specific references, which can lead to creative solutions that help keep the text understandable and functional for the audience (Malmkjær 2019, 104).

Ultimately, AVT, at its core, is not only about transferring verbal content. It is about weaving language into an already moving, sounding, and visually encoded narrative. The translator's role is, therefore, not just interpreting the meaning but also actively creating a character's voice, a task that requires a deep sense of empathy and understanding of the character's context and emotions that belong in the particular scene.

2 DUBBING AS A FORM OF TRANSLATION

Dubbing is a method of translation that goes far beyond mere linguistic, straightforward transfer. It is a substitution of the spoken words of the primary language with translated words, which are synchronised with the actions and lip movements of the characters of the particular film or item (AIETI n.d). This shows that dubbing is a more complex task than subtitling, which differs in form and cognitive experience. Gottlieb (1994) in his work analyses the differences between these two methods, and states that both have their positives (Gottlieb 1994, 101-103). Although dubbing provides a more immersive experience for the audience than subtitles, their reception is not interrupted by the need for additional reading. That is why the subtitles are a less preferred option for a foreign audience. Dubbing fully provides everything necessary to enjoy the AV experience.

As Chaume explains, dubbing is not simply about replacing one language with another; it involves a complex negotiation of the technical, linguistic, and performative dimensions. Translators must preserve the rhythm and emotional tone of the original piece and the aim of the original performance while adapting the script to fit “new” linguistic limitations (Chaume 2013, 105–108).

Cultural adaptation plays a central role in this negotiation. Viewers expect characters to sound natural not only linguistically but also culturally. As Nord (2006) explains, dubbing often requires altering culturally specific humour, idioms, or references to be accessible and resonant within the target context. However, this risks what she calls “over-domestication,” where too much smoothing can erase meaningful cultural differences (Nord 2005, 176–189). Thus, the translator must not only navigate between fluency and foreignness but also between clarity and fidelity.

Regarding the process, dubbing relies on a high degree of multimodal synchrony. As Chaume (2004) mentions in his work, typically synchrony is distinguished at these three levels: phonetic synchrony (lip movements), isochrony (duration of utterances), and kinetic synchrony (alignment with gestures and facial expressions) (Chaume 2004, 45-46). These forms of synchrony are essential for preserving the illusion that the characters are authentically speaking the dubbed language, making dubbing not only a linguistic but also a performative, audiovisual act.

2.1 Unique challenges and limitations of dubbing

Dubbing presents a host of unique challenges and limitations. One of the most defining limitations lies in navigating between spoken dialogue and visual narrative. Unlike subtitling, dubbing must correspond precisely with what is going on the screen. As Chaume (1998) explains, the role of the translator is that they often encounter situations where the literal translation is unusable. Therefore, they must find functional substitutes (Chaume 1998, 18). As an example on the page 18, Chaume explains the a problematic with a metaphor translation in a cartoon dubbing, where “a horse of a different colour” had to be substituted for a more culturally specific idiomatic expression in Spanish and Catalan, the pun timing and visual were dependent on the obvious, and immediately visible change (Chaume 1998, 18). In such examples, the metaphor must be dropped in favour of, as Chaume calls, “the transgression of the set expression” (Chaume 1998, 19).

It also depends on the translator’s ability to manage three things simultaneously: what is said, what is shown, and what the function is. Chaume (1998) says this: the image is prioritised, then comes the function, and last comes the literal wording (Chaume 1998, 20).

Levý (2011) is relevant to this topic, even though his work does not explore the dubbing discipline. Although his work is mainly grounded in literal translation, he speaks about function and what a translator is meant to do with it. He says translation is not incorrect because it changes the words in the process. He says it is incorrect when it stops doing what the original did. It is not working correctly if the line does not push the story forward, create the proper emotional response, or trigger the reaction (Levý 2011, 60).

In dubbing, the translator cannot hold onto the structure if the scene demands something else, as the translation is for performance, not literal. Levý goes further, describing translation as a balancing act between two forces: staying faithful to the original and transforming it for the needs of the TL. Both forces are necessary (Levý 2011, 61). That logic fits the translation of dubbing perfectly.

2.2 Translation and originality

The topic of originality comes into play when we talk about dubbing translation. It is all about finding the right balance between staying true to the original language and working

within the constraints of audiovisual and performance elements. While many see translation as something derivative, Malmkjær (2020) argues it is fundamentally an original process. She points out that no two translations of the exact text are identical, as factors like language structure, cultural context, and personal stylistic choices shape each version in unique ways (Malmkjær 2020, 39). This perspective highlights that dubbing, like any other translation, is an adaptation that requires a creative touch to navigate new boundaries.

Malmkjær also stresses that translation brings something fresh by blending the original material with the translator's insights and language adjustments (Malmkjær 2020, 39). This aligns perfectly with the challenges of dubbing, where translators have to modify the language to match the performers' lip movements while keeping it culturally relevant and accurate to the original meaning. The need for functional equivalence instead of direct equivalence shows that translation, even in its most constrained forms, is still a creative act rather than just a simple reproduction (Malmkjær 2020, 40).

2.3 History of Czech dubbing

Czech dubbing has deep roots, and its evolution closely reflects the cultural and political shifts the country has gone through. The beginnings of Czech dubbing date back to the early 1930s when the film industry abandoned multilingual film versions in favour of more economical methods like dubbing and subtitling. According to Szczepanik (2011, 174-175), this transition reflected not only advancing technological capabilities but also specific political and cultural circumstances in, at that time, Czechoslovakia. The country typically followed established German or French practices while adapting to accommodate local linguistic and cultural preferences. At the heart of this budding industry stood Prague's Barrandov Studios, which soon became one of the key dubbing hubs in Central Europe (Česká televize 2013).

The 1950s brought significant change. Under the communist regime, dubbing became not just a tool of translation, but also of control. Foreign films were quietly edited to fit the ideological line, scenes were cut or modified without any indication, often shifting the meaning of the original (Chaume 2004; Bachová 2007; Šubrtová 2011). In television, live dubbing became a practical solution to the lack of resources. Actors would perform the translated dialogue live, sometimes even with improvised sound effects,

creating a raw but functional version of the original (Nováková 2008; Česká Televize 2013).

From the 1960s through the 1980s, Czech dubbing entered what many now call its “golden age.” Studios began to treat dubbing as a serious craft. They regularly cast the same Czech voice actors to represent specific foreign stars, aiming to match their voices, rhythm, and emotional tone. This consistency gave audiences a sense of familiarity and trust, and dubbing itself earned a reputation as an art form in its own right (Česká televize 2011).

3 AV TEXTS AND THE NATURE OF FILM DIALOGUE

Audiovisual texts cover a vast mix of genres. With every specific aspect that sets them apart from one another comes a whole spectrum of dubbing challenges. Each genre has its own manner of narration and rhythm, which the translator must interpret and navigate through, not just on the language level, but also the interplay of sounds, images and signs. Whether it is a television series, animated film, or film adaptation of a musical, each has its rhythm and style of expression, which is unique to it. Therefore, translators must navigate through the distinctive nature of each.

3.1 Types of AV texts

Regarding text genres for fictional feature films or television series, the dialogues are typically scripted to mimic unprepared, spontaneous speech while sticking to the narrative, stylistic and character-building functions. Sticking to these requirements represents a delicate balancing act for the translator. Although the dialogue may sound spontaneous, it is usually a well-crafted text. According to Baños and Díaz-Cintas (2018), film dialogue often presents a “prefabricated orality”, which is written in such a way that mimics the speech, but also operates within the requirements of audiovisual storytelling, where timing, atmosphere and flow are prioritised (Baños and Díaz-Cintas 2018, 313). These dialogues are therefore tightly bound to the performance, camera movements, and editing rhythm. In the next section, a few types of AV text are explored.

Animated films add yet another layer. As it may seem, the visuals might offer great flexibility when creating a lip synchronisation, but the actual challenges lie in cultural adaptation. As Valleriani (2020) shows in her analysis of the animated film *Zootopia*, these types of dialogues very often mirror the cultural stereotypes or exaggerated traits of their country of origin, such as accent or dialect (Kozloff 2000, cited in Valleriani 2020, 363). Also, the language used in animation is often exaggerated, direct and emotionally charged, as they are adapted for child audiences.

In comparison with fiction, documentaries speak in a different cinematic language. Documentary films, except mockumentaries, are strictly grounded in factual information, indicating a clear translation strategy, without many obstacles. However, that apparent clarity is not that bright. Nichols (2010) explores how documentaries, especially those taking

a performative approach, frequently incorporate techniques like voice-over narration, staged sequences and deliberate editing choices. Those methods transform the audience's experience from objective to a more crafted, subjective interpretation of events (Nichols 2010, 134). When translating such work, the translator must navigate through text that already reflects an edited narrative point of view. Such subjective and performative elements of the original documentary text must be maintained for the translation to be successful. This presents a challenge when preserving content and its performative and emotional qualities.

Film musicals are another example of AV text. This film genre, which is highly relevant to the topic of this work, uses very stylised language, as it integrates spoken dialogue with performance, such as dance or song. Musical films are hybrids, as they combine a theatrical way of storytelling and, at times, almost poetic or heightened speech. As Heldt (2013) explained, musicals do not just connect music to the dialogues; specifically in this genre, the lines gradually dissolve into the musical performance. In some instances, the transitions start with what Rick Altman famously described as a “supradiegetic” space, where the character, for a moment, leaves the logic of the story world and enters a kind of performative dream-like state (Altman, quoted in Heldt 2013, 139). These transition spaces dissolve the line between realism and show (Heldt 2013, 138-139). In this context, it is important to state that this thesis focuses on the translation of dialogues, not on the song lyrics.

3.2 Film dialogue as a form of translation

Unlike real conversation, film dialogues are not as spontaneous as they might seem. It is written to be spoken in that way and performed, timed and delivered with precision. Usually, as Nykänen and Koivisto (2016) point out, there are no filler sounds, no overlapping, no interruptions, which are characteristic of natural speech, unless they are scripted explicitly for a specific purpose, like signaling emotion or social dynamics, such as hesitation or nervousness (Leech and Short 2007, cited in Nykänen and Koivisto 2016, 7). On the same page, they also add that such dialogue is “shaped deliberately by aesthetic, narrative and performative conventions rather than the pragmatic needs of real-life communication” (Nykänen and Koivisto 2016, 7). As stated in previous sections, this also has the translator of dubbing keep in mind while reconstructing film dialogue into a foreign language.

4 ANALYSIS ON LEXICAL LEVEL: METAPHORS AND IDIOMS

The analysis starts at the linguistic level because the first and often most revealing shifts happen. Figures of speech are a natural part of everyday communication. We use them without thinking, often to make abstract things feel more tangible, or to say something quickly and vividly that would otherwise take many more words. Britannica defines them as “phrases or expressions that use words figuratively rather than in a plain or literal way” (Britannica Dictionary, 2024). They carry meanings that cannot always be reconstructed from the literal sense of individual words. In dubbing, though, that expressive layer becomes harder to preserve. Golda (2021) observes that phraseological units, including idioms, appear frequently in dubbed film dialogue and often require adaptation to fit the rhythm, tone, and naturalness expected in the TL. Her analysis shows that the TL version often contains more phraseological units than the SL version, suggesting that the translator actively seeks out idiomatic expressions that feel fluent and convincing in the dubbed version (Golda and Mężyk 2021, 137).

For the latter analysis, the focus narrows to two phraseological expressions frequently appearing in dialogue: metaphors and idioms. While they have things in common, both rely on figurative meaning and are often culturally specific, behaving quite differently in translation. Idioms tend to be fixed expressions that allow little or no variation, significantly limiting the translator’s options when modifying them in another language (Baker 2011, 65). When no direct equivalent exists, the translator must often use strategies like paraphrasing, using a different idiom, or omitting the expression altogether (Baker 2011, 74–75).

On the other hand, metaphors tend to be more flexible in surface structure, but their meaning is often grounded in deeper conceptual systems that vary across languages and cultures. As Lakoff and Johnson (2003) explain, our everyday thinking is mainly metaphorical, shaped by cognitive patterns that are not just linguistic but also cultural (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 4). Schäffner (2004) adds that these deeper conceptual structures pose specific challenges in translation, especially when metaphors are transferred between languages with different cultural and cognitive mappings (Schäffner 2004, 1254).

Looking at them side by side makes it easier to see how their different properties influence translation choices and how those choices, in turn, affect the tone, rhythm, and voice of characters in the TL version of the dubbing of *Mamma Mia!*

4.1 Metaphor

Metaphor is often associated with poetic or rhetorical language, but at its core, it is a fundamental feature of how language works. It helps us communicate abstract or complex ideas through something more tangible and familiar. In translation, particularly in dubbing, this becomes a challenge because the meaning of a metaphor rarely depends on words alone. It is often shaped by underlying conceptual structures that do not always translate easily across languages or cultures (Schäffner 2004, 1254).

This chapter does not deal with metaphor as a cognitive phenomenon. Instead, it frames metaphor as a translation issue, especially within the constraints of audiovisual media. Drawing examples from the Czech dubbing of *Mamma Mia!*, it explores how metaphorical expressions are translated, which strategies are used, and how these choices influence meaning, tone, and audience perception. The goal is to provide a compact, practice-focused foundation for the following analysis.

4.1.1 The Changing Role of Metaphor

Metaphor has long been recognised as a literary device, often appearing in audiovisual dialogue. The Britannica Dictionary defines it as “a word or phrase for one thing that is used to refer to another thing in order to show or suggest that they are similar” (Britannica Dictionary, 2025).

Historically, classical rhetoric saw metaphor as a stylistic flourish; something used for elegance or variation, but not essential to meaning. Aristotle famously defined it as “giving the thing a name that belongs to something else” (Poetics, 73), reinforcing the idea of metaphor as a deviation from literal speech. This so-called “substitution theory” treated metaphor as an extra, which could be paraphrased without losing meaning. Unsurprisingly, this view often led translators to replace metaphors with simpler, more literal alternatives (Torda 2014, 6).

That changed with the rise of modern linguistic theory. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* (2003) redefined metaphor as a basic structure of human thought. According to their Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), we understand abstract domains, like time, emotion, or relationships, through more concrete experiences, usually

rooted in the physical world. “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 4).

Kövecses (2002) further developed this idea by showing how metaphorical thinking tends to appear not in isolated phrases but across whole networks of related expressions. One example is how we talk about time or emotional investment using economic metaphors: “*spend your time wisely*,” “*save some energy*,” or “*invest a lot in the relationship*” (Kövecses 2002, 18). These are not just poetic flourishes; they are everyday expressions that shape our thinking and communication.

4.1.2 Metaphor in Dubbing

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) offers a valuable framework for understanding how metaphor operates in language, not just as a stylistic feature, but as a reflection of deeper conceptual structures. While this thesis does not engage in detailed domain analysis or theoretical modelling, CMT informs the broader understanding of metaphor as something embedded in everyday communication. This perspective is especially relevant when examining metaphor in audiovisual dialogue, where abstract ideas are frequently expressed through physical or culturally grounded imagery.

In the context of dubbing, metaphor presents specific challenges. First, a metaphor is often deeply culture-specific. What feels intuitive in one language might sound strange or unconvincing in another. An image that works well for English-speaking audiences may fall flat in Czech, where the cultural references differ (Schäffner 2004, 1254). Second, there is the technical side: dubbed dialogue must align with timing, lip movements, and natural rhythm, all while sounding spontaneous. That gives translators limited room to manoeuvre (Chaume 2004, 45-48).

Translators use various strategies to deal with these challenges, each with benefits and trade-offs. If a metaphor has a precise equivalent in the target language and suits the tone, it is usually preserved. For example, “break the ice” has a natural Czech counterpart in “*prolomit ledy*” (Newmark 1988, 108). However, the translator might settle on substituting, paraphrasing, or even omitting if no equivalent exists. These changes affect more than just the surface text; they shift the line's emotional texture and stylistic feel (Newmark 1988, 109–110).

In this thesis, metaphor is treated primarily as a linguistic feature deeply tied to the language itself, yet inevitably shaped by the technical and cultural pressures of AVT. The goal is to examine how metaphorical expressions in the SL version of *Mamma Mia!* were transformed into the SL dubbed version, and what these translation choices reveal about tone, meaning, and characterisation.

The following analytical section focuses on selected examples from the film. Each case is examined using a consistent structure. First, the analysis briefly introduces the metaphor in the source dialogue. Next, it compares this with its Czech equivalent. Then, the analysis classifies the translation strategy used (e.g., preservation, substitution, paraphrase, omission). Finally, the analysis offers a short evaluation of the translation of the results.

4.2 Idiom

Idioms are often said to be the trickiest parts of any language. Britannica (Britannica Dictionary 2025) explains idiom as: “an expression that cannot be understood from the meanings of its separate words but that has a separate meaning of its own.” They rely heavily on figurative meaning and shared cultural knowledge. In audiovisual texts, they are used to help create tone, suggest register, or hint at the character’s social identity. Their form is often rigid, and their meaning must be recognised from previous experiences, which makes them particularly difficult to adapt in dubbing.

Unlike more neutral expressions, idioms do not always have direct counterparts in other languages. As Baker (Baker 2011) notes, they are “frozen patterns of language” that allow little or no variation and frequently carry meanings that cannot be paraphrased easily without losing their stylistic function (Baker 2011, 65). That becomes a serious obstacle in dubbing, where meaning, rhythm, tone, and synchronisation matter. The translator is often left to decide whether to preserve the figurative image or to prioritise fluency and naturalness in the TL.

When a matching idiom exists in both languages and fits the cultural and narrative tone, it can be used with minimal change. However, the original idiomatic expression is often replaced with a functional equivalent or paraphrased entirely to fit the context. Newmark (1988) notes that when a metaphor does not carry over naturally into the target

language, whether because it is unfamiliar, obscure, or culturally inaccessible, it is often translated by reducing it to its sense. In these cases, the original metaphoric core may be lost, but the core meaning or function of the expression is preserved in a more neutral or descriptive form (Newmark 1988, 105).

Translators sometimes reformulate the idiom completely, dropping the image while maintaining its communicative purpose. Baker classifies this approach as paraphrase, which is used when the figurative language cannot be replicated idiomatically in the target language (Baker 2011, 75). Another frequently used strategy is cultural substitution, replacing an idiom or metaphor with a culturally familiar expression that may shift the image but preserves the intended stylistic or pragmatic effect. As Newmark (1988) explains, these cultural equivalents may not be accurate. However, they often substantially impact the target audience, especially in contexts where naturalness and tone are key (Newmark 1988, 83).

The idiom may be omitted altogether when no satisfactory equivalent can be found (Baker 2011, 80). This strategy is a last choice that avoids awkwardness but risks losing the expressive nuance.

This thesis treats idioms as expressive units that combine semantic meaning with stylistic and cultural weight. Their translation in dubbing is shaped not only by linguistic equivalence but also by performative and technical pressures. The following analysis focuses on SL idiomatic expressions in *Mamma Mia!* and their TL equivalents, asking how these transformations affect meaning, tone, and characterisation.

Each example is analysed using this structure: First, the analysis identifies the idiom in the English dialogue. Next, it compares this with its Czech equivalent. Then, the analysis classifies the translation strategy used. Finally, it briefly evaluates its effect on tone, meaning, or character.

5 ANALYSIS ON SYNTACTIC LEVEL

When speaking about translating dubbing, the syntax structure is not the usual shift that could be noticed immediately. Metaphors and idioms are usually straightforward to spot, but syntax tends to pass under the radar. While looking at the dubbing transcription, syntax is present in every line, whether one notices it or not.

Interestingly, even though it might go unnoticed initially, sentence structure shapes everything. When it comes to creating stress of some sort, for example, a specific rhythm, timing or sense of hesitation in the utterance, syntax influences it (Nord 2005, 137). This section approaches syntax structure within a text, which becomes more evident in the environment of dubbing translation. Unlike vocabulary or figurative speech, which can often be examined in languages in isolation, syntax operates in time. That means the sentence structure depends on the sequence in which words appear. As Jiří Levý reminds us, artistic language does not unfold in space but in time; its impact is shaped not only by what is said but also by when and how it is said (Levý 2011, 148).

From a translation perspective, syntax forms one of the core linguistic levels where decisions must be made to convey the meaning and maintain the illusion of speech of a specific character. Each sentence must mind the stylistic tone of the dialogue, too. As dubbing operates under strict timing and length limits, structure can not always be preserved in its whole, original state. As Nord (2005) notes, sentence structure interacts with the intonation, pitch and word order, which must be adapted to the prosodic and rhythmical conventions of the TL (Nord 2005, 131).

Syntactic shifts are rarely arbitrary in dubbing. The first example of a typical shift is syntactic condensation, a reduction of sentence complexity via merging or shortening clauses. This serves not only the need for time sparing but also to maintain sentence naturalness. Nord (2005) states that clause condensation and coordination directly influence the rhythm and flow of spoken delivery (Nord 2005, 232).

Another strategy is a syntactic omission, where a clause or a whole phrase is omitted entirely. This typically happens, where the presented information can be signalled differently, or is simply unimportant to the narrative. The translator's effort for communicative efficiency aligns with Levý (2011), who calls this a "minimax strategy", where he states that it is not a flaw, but a deliberate response to the constraints of the medium (Levý 2011, xviii).

Another pattern is clause merging, where two clauses are often initially expressed as separate sentences and merged into one sentence. This strategy is not applied just because it is time-saving, but also to shift the weight of the utterance, making the secondary sentence feel more intentional or deliberate. Nord (2005) points out in one of her examples that coordinating structures contribute to a smoother syntactic flow with fewer pauses (Nord 2005, 231). This is especially important in timed dialogue delivery.

A different type of strategy is syntactic transformation, where the syntactic structure is changed to modify the original sentence's tone. Levý (2011) calls this strategy a re-stylisation; the translator's task of reshaping the expressive and stylistic structure to suit the TL rhythm and communicative framework (Levý 2011, 47-48).

Finally, a distinct syntactic shift is a syntactic reordering, where the sentence order is rearranged without removing the sentence content. While the meaning remains unchanged, the reordering might affect the tone, rhythm, or communicative stance. Nord (2005) states that such structural shifts often reflect language-specific conventions for emphasis, focus, and information flow. Reordering is frequently necessary to preserve the natural delivery and clarity in translation (Nord 2005, 130-131).

Each example is analysed using the following structure. First, the analysis identifies the original SL sentence. Next, it compares this with its TL dubbed equivalent. Then, the analysis classifies the syntactic shift used. Finally, the analysis briefly evaluates its impact on tone, rhythm, or character interpretation.

6 ANALYSIS ON PRAGMATIC/DISCOURSE LEVEL

In film dialogue, there are many occasions where the meaning does not convey the literal sense. Sometimes, the way a line is conveyed is far more informative than what is being said. The audience not only registers the semantic content, but also the emotional tone, rhetorical intent or the weight of a line. That is the point at which pragmatics and discourse became central to the analysis. This level of analysis provides a framework that goes beyond the syntactic and lexical form, allowing one to understand the function of the utterance in context and how the audience understands the characters.

Sinha (2021) confirms that pragmatics focuses on the hidden, invisible meaning. This meaning might not be explicitly stated with words, but is derived from the context, especially in cases where what is understood is more than what is said (Sinha 2021, 30). For example, a character might utter a line that seems natural, but the irony with which it is said completely reshapes the original message. In such moments, the translator must be mindful of the intended effect while reproducing it for dubbing.

Kamalu and Osisanwo (2015) highlight that pragmatics can not be separated from the intention, as it is about how the meaning is shaped by the connection between the structure of what is said and the intention behind it. This framework matches the Gricean pragmatics concept they mention in this section (Grice cited in Kamalu and Osisanwo 2015, 176). This makes dubbing uniquely sensitive, as rhythm and intonation are carried by characters and visuals surrounding them, not just on the level of words.

As Kamalu and Osisanwo (2015) point out, discourse analysis is limited to examining formal language features and considers how language functions within the cultural and social context (Kamalu and Osisanwo 2015, 170). Discourse does not analyse the correctness but the logic of the social interaction.

Ifversen (2003) takes this even further. According to him, discourse is not just a tool for communicating but also a structure through which meaning is produced; one that influences how individuals are positioned, what roles they take on, and who is and how is allowed to speak (Ifversen 2003, 64-65).

When it comes to dubbing translation, adjustments are needed to help the content feel more natural for the target audience. One common adjustment is euphemism. As Wu (2021) explains, euphemism serves as a politeness strategy that helps to soften the directness of offensive or vulgar expressions and adapt them to fit specific cultural norms (Wu 2021, 399).

Another standard shift occurs while translating irony. As Jakić (2016) observes, irony rarely allows straightforward transfer. Its effect depends more on tone, rhythm, and shared cultural norms. Translators often paraphrase or condense ironic lines not to simplify but to preserve the ironic edge (Jakić 2016, 5-6).

Furthermore, lastly, speaking of tonal reframing, this type of shift refers to a slight modification in the emotional charge or attitude of the line, how a line is perceived, whether as playful or sarcastic, or even confrontational, can vary based on how it is interpreted in the dubbed version. According to Sánchez-Mompeán (2019), adjustment in tone, such as intonation, plays a crucial role in framing characters' intentions and relationships between them. Even a slight adjustment can change the communicative intention and alter the audience's perception of the character's emotional charge (Sánchez-Mompeán 2019, 140-141).

To summarise, film dialogue's pragmatic and discourse levels help us understand the hidden meaning of the characters' lines and subtle shifts, which often carry more weight than the words themselves. In the context of dubbing, translators must skillfully rebuild not only the original dialogue but also the characters' attitudes, intentions, and relationships towards other characters.

Each example is analysed using the following structure. First, the analysis identifies the original utterance with its pragmatic and discourse features. Next, it compares this with its dubbed equivalent in the target language. Then, the analysis classifies the pragmatic/discourse shift employed, which might include euphemisation, ironic reframing, tonal adjustment, or cultural repositioning. Finally, the analysis briefly evaluates how this shift affects the character's perceived intention, social positioning, emotional tone, or relationship dynamics within the dubbed version's broader cultural and social context.

II. ANALYSIS

7 METHODOLOGY

In this part of the thesis, I will describe the origins of the materials, how the needed materials were obtained, and the materials themselves. I will also discuss the usage of the provided creative work.

Mamma Mia! The movie, which premiered in 2008 worldwide, is the film adaptation of the original theatre production of *Mamma Mia!* The musical. The stage version premiered in London's theatre scene, the West End, at the Prince Edward Theatre in 1999. The musical is based on the songs of ABBA, a famous Swedish band known for their pop music, such as the song *Waterloo*, which won them first place at the Eurovision Song Contest in 1974. Catherine Johnson is the British playwright and author of the story, who also constructed the screenplay for the film. After the positive reactions from London's audience, the musical also appeared on the New York Broadway scene in 2001. As its success continued, the musical played on stages worldwide.

2008 was the year of the release of the movie adaptation. The British musical script underwent some changes to meet the needs of American audiovisual work, creating the script for the movie, which is the first key material of this work. The studio cast into the leading roles actors such as Meryl Streep, Pierce Brosnan, and Christine Baransky.

The second key material consists of the original transcript of dubbing of the movie dialogues in the Czech language (TL). These transcripts were provided by the Tvůrčí skupina Josefa Petráska (Josef Petrásek Creative Group), also called STUDIO PO.ET. A. This studio, which carries on a great tradition, specialises in creating dubbing and subtitles for the Czech viewers. Their creative work began in 1993, but the more significant year for this company was 1995, when the name Josef Petrásek Creative Group first appeared under their subtitling work. Since then, the production company has worked with multiple well-known distributing companies such as Paramount, Warner, Universal and Disney. Streaming platforms such as HBO and NBC are no exception when using their dubbing services. Their creative workers also cooperate with smaller distributors, such as independent film creators.

Our communication was handled over e-mail, where the author of the translation himself, Ing. Petr Finkous, willingly supplied the transcript along with other materials, which helped navigate the primary focus of the analysis. Petr Finkous is well known for his translation work on projects like *Star Trek* movies, *The Big Bang Theory* series, and *Mamma Mia!* Even though the original translation script also provided the translation of all songs,

which connect the movie's scenes, they will not be discussed as this analysis focuses merely on the dialogue transcriptions.

To establish the main corpus of this work, it must be said that although this piece is based on the qualitative approach, it is only natural that every author has a unique style and approach to creating a translation piece. I respect all authors' choices. This thesis is not trying to reshape or redo his work.

The method of choosing could be divided into three distinctive phases. The first phase consisted of observing the audiovisual variant and focusing on the dialogues to find intriguing examples for the practical analysis. The *Mamma Mia* movie is available on several online platforms. Despite the time-consuming aspect, this method has helped establish the earliest draft version of the main corpus.

The second phase included a side-to-side comparison of the original and translated transcription. The original script, by Catherine Johnson, was made accessible to the public via the internet website *Scripts*. After the second look, it became necessary to create corresponding categories for the selected phenomena analysis:

- Lexical level: metaphors and idioms
- Syntactic level
- Pragmatic/discourse level

Since the main aim of this thesis is to analyse the entire text, precisely the dialogues, it was appropriate to analyse this Czech version of the translation from multiple levels. As the Czech and English languages come from different language families, it was apparent that the differences in adaptation for dubbing will not be only on one level. Therefore, three levels of analysis were chosen for the overall analysis: Lexical, syntactic and pragmatic/discourse. These levels of analysis reflect the layered nature of dubbing translation itself. Each level captures a different type of transformation in the dialogue adaptation for a foreign language. The lexical level, focusing on metaphor and idiom, makes tracing subtle cultural nuances embedded in the original dialogue possible. The syntactic level, in turn, reveals how sentence structure shifts in translation to accommodate rhythm, tone, or dubbing constraints. Finally, the pragmatic and discourse levels allow for a broader interpretation of meaning, including shifts in tone, irony, or relationships between characters.

The following overview, in the form of table, presents thirty selected language items from the:

Lexical analysis: Metaphors	
English (SL)	Czech (TL)
(1) You have turned my world upside down	Celej svět jsi mi od základu změnila
(2) Everything will fall into place	Všechny dílky do sebe zapadnou
(3) The earth moved...	Země se zachvěla
(4) Let's draw a veil over last night	Za včerejškem je tlustá čára
(5) You shady lady!	Ty jedna nensytná!

Lexical analysis: Idioms	
English (SL)	Czech (TL)
(1) I need to get something off my chest	S něčím se ti musím svěřit
(2) We'll have to tighten our belts	Budeme muset utahovat opasky
(3) He's all mouth and no trousers	Má jenom plno řečí
(4) You go in there guns loaded	Vystřadiš je odsud
(5) A chip off the old block	Jste z jednoho těsta

Syntactic analysis: examples	
English (SL)	Czech (TL)
(1) I have a secret, and I can't tell anybody else	Mám tajemství, které nesmím prozradit
(2) I sent the invites. My mom doesn't know anything	Máma o ničem neví
(3) You just...you have no idea	Co ty o tom víš?
(4) I don't know what's going on. I just don't like it	Nevím, co se děje, ale rozhodně se mi to nelíbí
(5) Here come the boys!	Kluci jsou tady!

Pragmatic/discourse analysis: examples	
English (SL)	Czech (TL)
(1) Are you getting any?	Nechybí ti “to”?
(2) Backup girls, my ass!	Já ti dám křoví!
(3) Three complete strangers share a common thought	Tři cizinci — naprosto shodnou
(4) Gorgeous Greeks of independent means?	Božští Řekové s plnejma kapsama?
(5) Great couple of role models you two are for Sophie! A serial bride and a little hermit over here	Vy dvě jste pro Sofi rozhodně ten správnější vzor...Notorická nevěsta a poustevnice

8 ANALYSIS ON LEXICAL LEVEL: METAPHORS

In the practical part of this thesis, metaphorical expressions found in the original SL version of *Mamma Mia* are analysed and compared with their counterparts in the Czech dubbed version.

(1) Metaphor:

SL: You have turned my world upside down

TL: Celej svět jsi mi od základu změnila

[You changed my whole world from the ground up]

The phrase “You have turned my world upside down” might seem idiomatic at first, but in reality, it functions as a metaphor; one that still clearly draws from embodied experience. It rests on a spatial image: when the world is upright, everything feels stable and predictable; when it is upside down, we immediately sense disorientation or emotional chaos. In this case, the metaphor maps emotional disruption onto physical imbalance, meaning that someone else’s presence has overturned the speaker’s inner world.

In the Czech version, the line is translated as “Celej svět jsi mi od základu změnila.” The metaphor of inversion disappears, but the core idea, that everything has changed on a deep, fundamental level, is preserved. Instead of showing the emotional shift as a loss of balance, the Czech version takes a different angle. The meaning signals that the whole world has been rebuilt from the ground up. So, while the source metaphor evokes spatial disorientation, the Czech line offers a metaphor of transformation through structural change. The image changes, but the emotional impact, the sense of complete inner upheaval, remains intact.

In terms of translation strategy, this is a clear example of substitution. The Czech version no longer uses the metaphor of an upside-down world but replaces it with one that fits the language more naturally. Even though the visual is gone, the emotional tone remains, and the line still lands effectively in the scene in a way that feels authentic to a Czech-speaking viewer.

(2) Metaphor:

SL: Everything will fall into place

TL: Všechny dílky do sebe zapadnou

[All the pieces will fit into each other]

The phrase “Everything will fall into place” might sound like a casual reassurance, but it is built on a metaphor that draws straight from physical experience. At its core is the image of disorder slowly resolving into order; a scattered mess that, with time, starts to make sense. It aligns the emotional sense of clarity with the physical act of fitting things together. Whether it is puzzle pieces or life events, the idea is that things will eventually align just as they are meant to, without needing to force them.

In the Czech version, the line becomes “Všechny dílky do sebe zapadnou.” The metaphor stays in place, but its shape shifts slightly. The abstract “everything” is replaced by “pieces,” bringing the puzzle imagery directly to the surface. What is implied in English becomes explicit in Czech; the act of things falling into place is now visually tied to a literal image. The emotional tone remains unchanged, but the metaphor feels more tactile, more grounded in something you can picture and almost touch.

Regarding translation strategy, this is a case of preservation through specification. The original metaphor is kept, but clarified in a way that makes it feel more immediate in Czech. The core message, that order will emerge, that things will settle, is just as strong. It lands with the same sense of quiet reassurance, but now in a slightly different way.

(3) Metaphor:

SL: The earth moved

TL: Země se zachvěla

[The earth trembled]

At first glance, this line is brief, even vague. However, its meaning is far from literal. “The earth moved” is a well-worn metaphor in English, often used to refer to a moment's emotional or physical intensity, typically romantic or sexual. It is a poetic way to convey the significance of an experience, suggesting that something so powerful happened, it felt like it shook the very earth. Despite its metaphorical nature, it relies heavily on physical sensation; another instance of embodied experience being transferred onto emotion.

In the Czech version, the translation “Země se zachvěla” keeps the structure and imagery almost intact. The verb “zachvět se” (to tremble or shiver) introduces a slight shift in tone, perhaps softer and less dramatic than “moved,” but still grounded in physical motion. The metaphorical meaning is preserved: something happened that felt like it disturbed the stability of the earth. The line acts as an emotional medium for intimacy or awe in both languages.

This is a clear example of metaphor preservation. The translator retained the metaphorical structure and meaning, only adjusting the verb to suit Czech usage better. The tone remains subtle, suggestive, and emotionally charged. Because the metaphor is relatively universal, based on a shared human sense of physical disturbance, it requires no primary localisation. The success of this translation lies in its simplicity.

(4) Metaphor:

SL: Let's draw a veil over last night

TL: Za včerejškem je tlustá čára

[There is a thick line behind yesterday]

This English metaphor is highly idiomatic and culturally loaded. “To draw a veil over something” implies hiding or forgetting something embarrassing or regrettable. It is a euphemism for discretion, suggesting a gentle act of covering up what does not need to be revisited. The metaphor's power lies in its delicacy; a veil is soft, light, and symbolic of tactful silence, but with a hint of the see-throughness of the past.

In Czech, the line is transformed as “Za včerejškem je tlustá čára”, literally meaning “There's a thick line behind yesterday.” The softness of the English veil gives

way to a much more decisive image in Czech: a boundary that marks the end of something, but also a possible fresh start. This is not about tactful silence; it is about finality. Instead of implying, it declares. The metaphor has shifted from covering to closure, and a possible new start without the acknowledgement of the past.

This is an example of metaphor-to-metaphor substitution. The translator abandons the original visual but replaces it with a culturally familiar one that performs a similar communicative function. The emotional tone shifts slightly from suggestive discretion to assertive separation, but the scene still reads as a turning point. Interestingly, the Czech line arguably lands with more force, which may better suit the rhythm and energy of the scene. It is not just an adaptation, but it is a re-characterisation.

(5) Metaphor:

SL: You shady lady!

TL: Ty jedna nenasytá!

[You insatiable one!]

This line is playful, loaded, and metaphorical. In English, “shady” implies moral ambiguity, secretiveness, or flirtatious mischief. It’s not an outright insult; rather, it implies a playful blend of charm and accusation. The rhyme and rhythm of “shady lady” also contribute to its humorous energy.

The Czech version, “Ty jedna nenasytá!” (literally, “You insatiable one!”), shifts the metaphor entirely. Rather than casting shade, it alters the woman as someone greedy or lustful. It is more direct, more expressive and arguably, more judgmental. The rhythm remains snappy, but the character tone takes a different turn: what was playful suspicion in English becomes bold provocation in Czech.

This is a case of metaphor shift with a greater focus on tone over literal meaning. The translator chose not to preserve the imagery but instead created a line that would deliver a similar level of expressiveness and energy in Czech. As a result, the metaphor may change the character's perception slightly, but it still works in the scene's context. The translation is not equivalent in imagery, but it is equivalent in dramatic function.

8.1 ANALYSIS ON LEXICAL LEVEL: IDIOMS

The following examples explore how idiomatic phrases in *Mamma Mia!* were rendered in Czech and the strategies employed to maintain their meaning.

(1) Idiom:

SL: I need to get something off my chest

TL: S něčím se ti musím svěřit

[I have something to confide in you]

This English expression is a classic example of an idiom built on metaphor. “Getting something off one’s chest” implies emotional relief; a burden being lifted. The image suggests a kind of pressure or weight being physically removed to allow the speaker to breathe more freely. However, while the metaphor is physical, the function is emotional: it marks a confession, a turning point, or a moment of vulnerability.

In the Czech version, the line is rendered as “S něčím se ti musím svěřit,” which roughly translates to “I need to confide something in you.” The idiomatic metaphor is dropped, replaced by a neutral, transparent expression of intent. While the visual of a chest burden is lost, the core function of the line is preserved. It still signals a personal revelation, and the tone of emotional honesty remains.

This is an example of idiomatic substitution using functional equivalence. The translator abandons the metaphor in favour of clarity and naturalness in Czech. While some poetic feeling is lost, the line succeeds in sounding emotionally honest and appropriately placed in the rhythm of dialogue. Interestingly, the Czech language has a very similar worded idiom, which can be translated as “A stone just fell from my heart”, which is used to convey the meaning of “I felt a great relief”. In this case, a metaphoric transformation could be used to preserve the line's idiomatic sense. For example, something within the lines “I need to throw the stone off of my heart”, in Czech “Potřebuju si shodit kámen ze srdce”. This is optional, but compared with the Czech translation, it does not effectively retain the feeling of natural speech. It is a good reminder that not all images must survive if the function and tone are carried through.

(2) Idiom:

SL: We'll have to tighten our belts

TL: Budeme muset utahovat opasky

[We will have to tighten the belts]

This is a rare example of unusual transferability of idiomatic expression. The phrase “tighten your belt,” typically referring to economic hardship or restraint, exists almost identically in Czech. The translated version, “utahovat opasky,” uses the same imagery, syntax, and connotation. It is a direct match, not only in meaning but also in tone.

What makes this moment interesting is that it shows how some idioms travel across languages with very little difference. The metaphor of restricting one's waistline, which means limiting one's spending, is intuitive enough to function in both English and Czech without modification.

Here, the strategy is simple preservation. When an idiom works naturally in both languages, the translator's job becomes a matter of fluency and rhythm rather than invention. This kind of match is rare in dubbing, and when it appears, it keeps the scene's emotional pacing intact.

(3) Idiom:

SL: He's all mouth and no trousers

TL: Má jenom plno řečí

[He has only lots of talk]

This British idiom, while humorous and colourful, does not travel easily. “All mouth and no trousers” depicts someone who talks a lot about doing something but does not actually back it up with action. The humour comes partly from its odd specificity: a combination of anatomy and clothing used to make a jab at cowardice or superficiality.

In Czech, this becomes “Má jenom plno řečí,” which translates to “He's just full of talk.” The core meaning is retained, but the vivid imagery disappears. The metaphor is

simplified into a neutral version. The line still criticises someone for being all talk and no action, but the cultural and comic nature of the original is lost.

This is a case of idiom simplification through neutralisation. The translator prioritised comprehensibility and naturalness over preserving the quirky metaphor. While it works in terms of communication, it reminds us that some cultural essence may be sacrificed in the service of dubbing translation.

(4) Idiom:

SL: You go in there guns loaded

TL: Vystrnadiš je odsud

[You will eject them out of here]

The English line “go in guns loaded” suggests aggressively entering a situation, ready for confrontation. It is a bold, militaristic image that instantly raises tension.

In Czech, it becomes “Vystrnadiš je odsud”, which carries the meaning but loses the metaphor entirely. There is no mention of weapons, no implication of being ready for a gun battle—just a straightforward objective.

This is a reformulation with metaphorical loss. A practically oriented statement replaces the intensity of the original. The function remains somewhat intact, but the style and imagery are modified. It is a case of simplifying the meaning, for the sake of pacing or performative clarity.

(5) Idiom:

SL: She's a chip off the old block

TL: Jste z jednoho těsta

[You are made from the same dough]

The English phrase “a chip off the old block” refers to someone who strongly resembles a parent, typically in character or behaviour. It is a metaphor rooted in material imagery: a piece broken from a solid source. In Czech, this becomes “Jste z jednoho těsta,” which means “You are made from the same dough.”

This is another example of idiom-to-idiom translation, where the imagery changes but the metaphorical function remains the same. Both expressions suggest similarity, inheritance, or familial resemblance, but through culturally distinct metaphors, wood versus dough. The Czech idiom also adds warmth and familiarity, which fits well within the scene's tone.

This is a successful idiomatic equivalence via cultural substitution. The metaphor is entirely transformed, but the message is unchanged and perhaps even enhanced in its cultural naturalness. The tone fits seamlessly, and the emotional function is preserved. It is a subtle but elegant solution.

9 ANALYSIS ON SYNTACTIC LEVEL:

Unlike metaphors or idioms, syntactic structures often do not call attention to themselves. However, in dubbing, they become a significant part of adaptation, as the need to match timing and mouth movement often requires translators to condense, rearrange, or completely restructure the line. Although these shifts may seem primarily technical, they significantly affect how a line resonates, how emotionally charged it feels, and how well it matches the character's rhythm of speech. This section examines how syntactic changes in the TL dubbing of *Mamma Mia!* influence the audience's perception of the characters' original expressions.

(1) Syntactic Shift:

SL: I have a secret, and I can't tell anybody else

TL: Mám tajemství, které nesmím prozradit

[I have a secret which I must not reveal]

The original SL line is built from two coordinated clauses: simple, straightforward, and emotionally loaded. It stretches the moment of tension for a little. The TL version compresses the sentence into one relative clause: "které nesmím prozradit." The coordination disappears, along with some pause and emphasis.

This is a perfect example of syntactic condensation. The translator combines the sentences to fit the scene's pacing, which is likely to match lip movements or avoid awkward rhythm. The meaning mostly functions the same way, even though the timing changes. The SL indicates that there is no one else, but this person, who can hear the secret. The TL suggests that no one can hear the secret at all. Therefore, there is a slight shift in meaning, caused by the syntactic change. Condensation is primarily efficient and a typical solution that preserves the emotional weight, even if the syntax structure simplifies.

(2) Syntactic Shift:

SL: I sent the invites. My mom doesn't know anything

TL: Máma o ničem neví

[Mom knows about nothing]

Here, the TL consists of two short declarative sentences, but only the second survives in the SL version. The first clause, "I sent the invites", is completely omitted. This is not just condensation; it is a choice about the priority and importance of narrative information.

In dubbing, lines are often shortened when parts of the original are considered redundant or irrelevant to the audience's understanding. In this case, the fact that the invites were sent by character may already be implied by the underlying context. What matters is the mother's ignorance. The omission helps keep the pacing up and avoids cluttering the line with unnecessary information.

This is a case of syntactic omission, where a full clause is removed to serve timing, relevance, or flow. The remaining line is prioritised at the expense of previous redundant information. However, even with the shift, the emotional focus stays intact.

(3) Syntactic Shift:

SL: You just... you have no idea

TL: Co ty o tom víš?

[What do you know about it?]

This line is more emotionally complex than it might seem at first glance. The SL implies hesitation and ellipsis, suggesting that the speaker is overwhelmed or struggling to find the right words. The TL version, "Co ty o tom víš?" turns that searching for words into a sharp, provocative statement.

This shift goes beyond structure; it transforms tone. The shift happens as the tone replaces indirectness with confrontation. While the SL hesitates and softens, the TL cuts

straight to conflict. The emotional landscape changes: the speaker is no longer lost in thought but actively pushing back.

This is an example of syntactic and tonal transformation. It shows how the same scene can be interpreted differently in the TL, not because of mistranslation, but because of cultural or performative logic. It is a bold choice. One that redefines the character's voice in the moment. The choice of transforming the character's tone is optional. For example, a translated version such as "Ty o tom... nemáš ani páru" still preserves the original character's tone and does not make a significant syntactic shift. This example is just a subjective, personal suggestion. The original script translation still works, but subjectively, it is not as successful as possible.

(4) Syntactic Shift:

SL: I don't know what's going on. I just know I don't like it.

TL: Nevím, co se děje, ale rozhodně se mi to nelíbí

[I don't know what is happening, but definitely I don't like it]

The SL version of this example uses two short declarative sentences. The double usage of "I" and the rhythm of two separate clauses slow down the delivery, mirroring the characters' confusion and opinion-building based on the unpredictable situation. The second sentence, "I just know I don't like it," indicates that the opinion is built rather intuitively than based on deeper examination.

The TL line merges both thoughts into a single complex sentence: "Nevím, co se děje, ale rozhodně se mi to nelíbí." The shift happens in the structure: from two statements of gradual opinion building to one contrastive sentence with a clear emotional stance. The adverb "rozhodně" (definitely) suggests certainty, so the TL line seems more conclusive. It seems that the opinion is built based on emotion rather than instinct.

This is an example of syntactic merging of clauses. The translator chose to combine the two thoughts, perhaps for dubbing pacing, while compensating for the lost repetition through stronger wording. It is not just a practical change for dubbing rhythm but also a

stylistic upgrade. The TL line adds a layer of charm to the line, which may also shift or support the specific character's usual tone of speech.

(5) Syntactic Shift:

SL: Here come the boys!

TL: Kluci jsou tady!

[The boys are here!]

This particular example seems too simple, but structurally, it shows a syntactic inversion, or reordering. While the SL uses subject-verb inversion to emphasise the arrival, the TL version defaults to a subject-verb-complement pattern, which comes closer to matching the cultural idiomatic pattern of such an exclamation.

This shift also highlights the shift from doing to stating, from performative to declarative. This type of reordering is often used in dubbing to support the more natural delivery in the TL. Still, this inversion no longer marks people's entry as an event, but simply as a statement. This shows that the translator chose clarity and naturalness over the original dramatic rhythm. Nevertheless, this translation is still successful.

10 ANALYSIS ON DISCOURSE/PRAGMATIC LEVEL:

While syntactic shifts shape sentences, and idioms and metaphors convey meaning more interestingly, discourse and pragmatic choices define the scene. This level of translation concerns tone, emotional rhythm, comic delivery, and interaction between characters. In dubbing, even the slightest change in how a line is timed, delivered, or rephrased can reshape a character's voice or alter the interpersonal tension of a scene. The five examples illustrate how the TL dubbed version of *Mamma Mia!* adapts dialogue at the level of words, phrases or sentences, but at the level of relationships, pacing, and mood.

(1) Pragmatic/discourse shift:

SL: Are you getting any?

TL: Nechybí ti “to”?

[Aren't you missing “it”?]

This line cuts straight to the point while carrying a clear sexual undertone. In SL, it is a straightforward (and somewhat invasive) question delivered with a humorous tone. This expression, this way of suggesting, is so common that it leaves almost no space for misinterpretation. Rather than expressing the real sexual undertone, the subject is softened and reduced to a neutral version.

In the Czech version, this becomes “Nechybí ti “to”?”, which means “Aren't you missing it?” The word “it” is euphemised and not stated outright. Quotation marks suggest that the “it” needs to be supported vocally, as it is not as clearly suggestive as the original SL line. The action in the scene also helps the audience correctly gather what is being conveyed.

This is a classic example of pragmatic softening through euphemism. The TL version softens the joke, possibly to align with cultural norms or broadcast constraints. The humour is preserved, but the tone is less straightforward and confrontational. This shift also affects how we perceive the character: not as direct and provocative but more reserved. It's still playful but a more discrete version of the original. The softening does

not fundamentally disturb the line; therefore, it is a functional, successful choice of translation.

(2) Pragmatic/discourse shift:

SL: Backup girls, my ass!

TL: Já ti dám křoví!

[I'll give you bushes!]

In this example, a mocking line with a minor vulgarism shifts to a slangy rebellion. In SL, the line uses the idiom “my ass” as a punchline; a sarcastic way to reject the narrative imposed on them. In this context, it is implied that the position of other members in a group is disregarded. The line is rhythmic and meant to be rude.

The TL version changes completely. The line modifies to “Já ti dám křoví! “, translated as “I’ll give you ‘backup’!” It is a Czech idiom used when one rejects something someone has just said. It has the same rhythm and level of fury, as it matches the vulgar tone via threat or disregard.

This is an example of humour domestication. The vulgar line is substituted for one that fits the rhythm and function of the scene but uses a different cultural reference. The term “křoví”, literally translated to “bushes”, is a familiar term from theatrical jargon. In stage and film environments, it is used colloquially to refer to background characters; those who stand silently, fill space, and have no narrative weight. The humour relies not just on rejecting the role, but on drawing from a local jargon expression that TL audiences would instantly recognise. Therefore, the term “křoví” is very well placed in this translation.

(3) Pragmatic/discourse shift:

SL: Three complete strangers share a common thought.

TL: Tři cizinci – naprosto shodnou.

[Three strangers – absolutely agree]

The SL line, sounding deeply ironic, is phrased in a way that sounds like the narrator is summarising a profound psychological truth. It is calm and oddly formal for what is actually being described. That is where the irony lies. The sentence is structured in a way that mimics the tone of some grand observation, while the content is absurd, in the context of three men who have never met, thinking of the same decision at the same time.

The TL line “Tři cizinci – naprosto shodnou” is a compressed phrase that disturbs the flowy nature of the original line and changes the rhythm. It is deliberately broken, and with that, the flow of the original psychological truth. The translator prioritised the essence of the meaning over preservation of the sentence tone.

This example could be a case of ironic condensation. The TL line is sharper and colder and delivered as a punch. It suits the moment, where irony comes from performance, not grammar. Here, syntax serves pragmatics: by reducing the sentence, the translation gives more room for the actor’s delivery to carry the joke.

(4) Pragmatic/discourse shift:

SL: Gorgeous Greeks of independent means?

TL: Božští Řekové s plnejma kapsama?

[Divine Greeks with full pockets?]

This line is a flirtatious exaggeration of a preferred fantasy, delivered half-jokingly. In the SL version, the humour lies not only in what is being said, but in how deliberately stylised the expression is. The phrase “independent means” evokes a specific social stereotype; not just someone rich, but someone whose wealth is old, discreet, possibly aristocratic. The formality of the phrase contributes to the irony: it invites the audience to imagine an idealised version of a possible romance. The line has a theatrical tone, as it plays with the register in a way that sounds intentionally as a part of the performance, in old-fashioned terms.

The SL version gives a different impression. “S plnejma kapsama”, which could be translated to “with full pockets”, is far more concrete and colloquial; it does not suggest wealth of a different form, as it signals more tangible, physical wealth than the imagery of

autonomy and self-reliance. The shift from euphemism to directness significantly changes the line's tone. This is a clear pragmatic shift, where indirectness is replaced with lexical explicitness, and the humour relies more on the visual image than on performative, old-fashioned register. The TL line does not reflect the idealised fantasy that well.

The meaning of “gorgeous Greeks” translated to “Božští Řekové” is retained, although the TL version adds a layer of depth, subtly emphasising the divine association of Greece with gods. With that, the implication of beauty is still intact, but the TL version is even more successful and original choice.

(5) Pragmatic/discourse shift:

SL: Great couple of role models you two are for Sophie! A serial bride and a little hermit over here.

TL: Vy dvě jste pro Sofi rozhodně ten správněj vzor. ...Notorická nevěsta a poustevnice.

[You two are for Sophie definitely the right role models. A notorious bride and a hermit woman]

The meaning of this line functions as a sarcastic comment, which is delivered in a humorous tone. In the SL version, the speaker uses this remark to mock the other characters, by comparing them to “serial bride and a little hermit”. Serial bride is slightly exaggerated but still light, and a little hermit sounds almost cartoonish. The irony works thanks to the rhythm and the choice of words, as it is not meant to hurt, but to tease.

The TL version keeps the structure but shifts the tone. “Ten správněj vzor” still reads as sarcasm, but it is more colloquial, sharper. The following comparison “notorická nevěsta a poustevnice” resonates more. The word “notorická”, literally translatable to “notorious”, gives a sense of habit, like a profound label for this character, and “poustevnice” sounds more like a diagnosis than a playful pun. The humour is still there but is more direct and less stylised.

This is a good example of pragmatic reframing through lexical sharpening. The SL version teases humorously, whereas the TL version calls the characters in this scene more explicitly. The tone becomes more judgmental, which is a change in comparison with the SL's more performative style. The irony is preserved, but the rhythm is more clipped, and

the punchline lands with more force. It's a successful translation, but it's noticeably blunter.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been concerned with how the Czech dubbing of *Mamma Mia!* reshapes the original film dialogue across different linguistic levels, namely lexical (focusing on metaphors and idioms), syntactic, and pragmatic-discursive. The aim was to look beyond the surface of translated dialogue and examine the specific shifts in the Czech version, paying attention to what changes, why they change, and how it still manages to function within the performative context of dubbing. Although the aim was not to evaluate quality in the traditional sense, the analysis inevitably revealed how carefully the dubbed version is constructed.

The results showed that the translator often steps away from the original wording on the lexical level, especially in cases where idioms or metaphors would feel forced or unclear in Czech. Many were substituted with culturally familiar alternatives, others paraphrased, and some simply omitted. Interestingly, even when the original imagery was dropped, the emotional tone was usually preserved. The translator aimed to make the dialogue sound natural, even if it meant leaving behind the more figurative layer of the source.

Regarding syntax, the changes were mainly guided by timing and rhythm. Sentences were frequently shortened, restructured, or merged, not just to match the mouth movements, but also to maintain fluency and clarity. In some cases, this led to small shifts in meaning or tone, but these were deliberate and often helped reinforce the character's natural speaking style. The analysis confirmed that sentence structure in dubbing is never incidental and always serves a purpose, whether stylistic or technical.

The pragmatic and discourse levels revealed the most interesting strategies. Here, the Czech version often altered the tone or energy of a line: softening directness, adjusting irony, or reframing emotional dynamics. These were not mistranslations but meaningful shifts, probably intended to make the line feel more natural in the Czech cultural context. Sometimes, the humour became more explicit, more subtle. Either way, the translator had to make linguistic and performative choices.

What can be taken from this work is that the Czech version does not try to copy the original line-for-line: it tries to recreate its effect. The translator works under limitations, but those limits do not restrict creativity; they shape it. The outcome is a dubbed version that speaks the same emotional language as the original, even if it uses different tools to get there. That is, in a way, the essence of dubbing: not to mirror, but to adapt in a way that still feels true.

If this work were to be expanded, it would be worth looking into the translation of the song lyrics, which were not covered, but play a key role in the film, as it is, first and foremost, a musical film. Another interesting path would be a comparison with another language's dubbing of the same film, to see how different translators respond to the same problems. What is certain is that dubbing does not just translate, but it rewrites, reshapes, and performs.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVT audio-visual translation

SL source language

TL target language