

# ŽMOGUS KALBOS ERDVĖJE

7

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*Mieli skaitytojai, Jums pateikiamas 7-asis tęstinio VU KHF leidinio „Žmogus kalbos erdvėje“ numeris. Šio leidinio straipsniuose atsispindi modernios šiuolaikinio mokslo tendencijos bei pateikiamos naujausios įžvalgos į tyrinėjamas problemas. Baltarusijos, Latvijos, Gruzijos, Lenkijos, Kazachstano, Čekijos, Vokietijos, Rusijos, Ukrainos ir Lietuvos mokslininkai šiame rinkinyje pristato šiuolaikinės filologijos tyrimų problematiką, aptaria aktualius teorinius ir praktinius klausimus lingvodidaktikoje, lingvokultūriniuose tyrimuose, moderniojoje lingvistikoje bei literatūriniame diskurse.*

*Rinkinyje pateikta tarptautinės mokslinės konferencijos „Žmogus kalbos erdvėje“, kurią 2012 m. gegužės 13-14 dienomis organizavo Vilniaus universiteto Kauno humanitarinio fakulteto Užsienio kalbų katedra, medžiaga.*

## PREFACE

*Dear readers, this is the 7th issue of a periodical collection of scientific articles “Man in the space of language”. The group of essays brought together in this volume reflect the trends and tendencies of academic research in a variety of fields in philology. The collection presents the insights of Belarusian, Latvian, Georgian, Polish, Kazakhian, Czech, German, Ukrainian, Russian, and Lithuanian scientists into theoretical and practical problems of modern linguistics, literature and didactics.*

*The collection contains the compilation of articles of the scientific conference “Man in the space of language” held in Kaunas (Lithuania) on 13-14 May 2012.*

## ПРЕДИСЛОВИЕ

*Уважаемые читатели! Перед Вами 7-ое периодическое издание сборника научных статей, выпускаемое Каунасским гуманитарным факультетом Вильнюсского университета. В этом издании освещены актуальные современные научные тенденции и отражены новейшие подходы к исследуемым проблемам. Ученые Беларуси, Латвии, Грузии, Польши, Казахстана, Чехии, Германии, России, Украины и Литвы представляют в сборнике панораму современной филологии и тем самым помогают читателю ознакомиться с новейшими исследованиями филологов своей страны. Исследователи посвятили свои труды актуальным теоретическим и практическим проблемам лингводидактики, лингвокультурологических исследований, современной лингвистики и литературного дискурса.*

*Традиционно в сборнике представлены избранные материалы международной научной конференции «Человек в пространстве языка», организованной кафедрой иностранных языков Каунасского гуманитарного факультета Вильнюсского университета 13-14 мая 2012 года.*

TURINYS  
CONTENTS  
СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

**ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ:  
СИНХРОННЫЙ И ДИАХРОННЫЙ АСПЕКТЫ**

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Вира Берковец (Бондаренко)</b> ( <i>Институт филологии Киевского национального университета им. Тараса Шевченко, Украина</i> ). Способы выражения императивности в украинских народных лечебных заговорах.....   | <b>13</b> |
| <b>Виктория Григораш</b> ( <i>Одесский национальный университет им. И.И. Мечникова, Украина</i> ). Особенности мелодического оформления речи представителей йоркширского диалекта (на материале радиointервью)..... | <b>21</b> |
| <b>Ирина Владимировна Каптюг</b> ( <i>Институт языка и литературы им. Якуба Коласа и Янки Купалы НАН Беларуси, Беларусь</i> ). Обращение в современном белорусском языке.....                                       | <b>26</b> |
| <b>Юлия Купчишина</b> ( <i>Житомирский государственный университет им. Ивана Ashirimpanka, Украина</i> ). К проблеме дифференциации остранения и выдвижения: диахронический аспект.....                             | <b>34</b> |
| <b>Марина Попова</b> ( <i>Московский педагогический государственный университет, Россия</i> ). Отражение категориальных различий слов в звуковой форме суффикса.....  | <b>40</b> |
| <b>Арина Фрумкина</b> ( <i>Одесский национальный университет им. И. Мечникова, Украина</i> ). Вариативность приступов немецкого вокализма в звучащей речи СМИ.....  | <b>46</b> |
| <b>Анна Хвостенко</b> ( <i>Новосибирский государственный технический университет, Россия</i> ). Когнитивные модели кровного родства и свойства в англосаксонском обществе и древнеанглийском языке.....             | <b>53</b> |

**PROBLEMS OF MODERN PHILOLOGY: LITERATURE AND CULTURE**

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Jurgita Astrauskienė</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ) Tennessee Williams's <i>the Glass Menagerie</i> : Symbols of Faith.....                                | <b>59</b>  |
| <b>Madina Ashirimbetova</b> ( <i>Suleyman Demirel University, Kazakhstan</i> ). National Component in Communicative Behavior.....   | <b>69</b>  |
| <b>Eglė Brasaitė, Algis Braun</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ) Conception of Time and Space: Post-Apocalyptic Chronotope.....                                   | <b>76</b>  |
| <b>Maija Brēde</b> ( <i>University of Latvia, Latvia</i> ). Characteristics of Publicistic Intonational Style in English and Latvian.....                                   | <b>86</b>  |
| <b>Aurelija Daukšaitė</b> ( <i>Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania</i> ). <i>Trauma Literature: Trauma in Pat Barker's war trilogy</i> .....                              | <b>96</b>  |
| <b>Mariam Miresashvili</b> ( <i>Sokhumi State University (in Tbilisi, Georgia)</i> ). The Tendencies in the Development of Georgian Literature in the Period of "Thaw"..... | <b>104</b> |
| <b>Inga Piščikienė, Birutė Ryvitytė</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ). Evaluation in Lithuanian Economic Book Reviews.....                                       | <b>109</b> |
| <b>Jūratė Radavičiūtė</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ). Reality Preceded by Simulacra in Salman Rushdie's Novel <i>Shame</i> .....                              | <b>116</b> |
| <b>Nino Tsereteli</b> ( <i>Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia</i> ). Several Aspects of the Development of Futurism in Georgia.....                       | <b>122</b> |

## АНАЛИЗ ЛИТЕРАТУРНОГО ДИСКУРСА

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Сауле Алтыбаева</b> ( <i>Казахский национальный педагогический университет им. Абая, Казахстан</i> ). Мифопоэтика современной казахской прозы: национальное и универсальное.....  | 127 |
| <b>Светлана Бозрикова</b> ( <i>Балашовский институт Саратовского государственного университета им. Н. Чернышевского, Россия</i> ). Нарративная журналистика в США и России.....  | 133 |
| <b>Анна Давыдова-Белая</b> ( <i>Донбасский педагогический университет, Украина</i> ). Одиночество, труд, молчание: поведенческие модели украинских символистов «второго поколения».....                                      | 139 |
| <b>Ирма Закарая</b> ( <i>Сухумский государственный университет, Грузия</i> ). Научно-технический прогресс и художественная литература.....   | 145 |
| <b>Борис Колымагин</b> ( <i>Российский институт культурологии, Россия</i> ). Человек в поэзии Всеволода Николаевича Некрасова.....   | 151 |
| <b>Зоя Кучер</b> ( <i>Черкасский государственный технологический университет, Украина</i> ). Реконструкция сюжетов и образов в поздней прозе Ф. Дюрренматта.....   | 157 |
| <b>Татьяна Марчак</b> ( <i>Каменец-Подольский национальный университет имени Ивана Огиенкоб Украина</i> ). Нарративные Поиски Гната Мыхайличенка в “Блакытном Романе”.....   | 164 |
| <b>Марина Орлова</b> ( <i>Черкасский государственный технологический университет, Украина</i> ). Немецкоязычная литература «новой субъективности» как реакция на студенческое движение второй половины 60-х годов XX ст..... | 172 |
| <b>Ирина Е. Прохорова</b> ( <i>Московский государственный университет им. М. Ломоносова, Россия</i> ). «О критике вообще и у нас в России» С. П. Шевырева в оценке В. Г. Белинского: идея и слово.....                       | 179 |
| <b>Олег Перов</b> ( <i>Вильнюсский университет, Литва</i> ). Особенности употребления абстрактных имён существительных в прозе Ю. Алешковского.....  | 184 |
| <b>Марина Родина</b> ( <i>Минский государственный лингвистический университет, Беларусь</i> ). К вопросу о понимании иностранными студентами имплицитной информации художественного произведения на русском языке.....       | 192 |
| <b>Инесе Сухане</b> ( <i>Даугавпилсский университет, Латвия</i> ). Типология образа пространства в прозе С. Соколова и Я. Эйнфелдса... ..  | 200 |
| <b>Алуа Темирболат</b> ( <i>Казахский национальный университет имени Аль-Фараби, Казахстан</i> ). Философско-эстетические аспекты современной прозы Казахстана.....  | 202 |
| <b>Олеся Тимченко</b> ( <i>Горловский педагогический институт иностранных языков, Украина</i> ). Мотив дома в романе В.Я. Брюсова «Огненный ангел».....  | 206 |

## SYNCHRONIC AND DIACHRONIC LANGUAGE APPROACHES

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>Giedrė Dubauskienė</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ) Some Aspects of Person Deixis in the Discourse of Advertising.....   | 219 |
| <b>Vytautė Pasvenskienė</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ). English and Lithuanian Bilabials in Terms of Visual Phonetics.....  | 227 |
| <b>Nadiia Govorun</b> ( <i>Kyiv Borys Grinchenko University, Ukraine</i> ). Verba Cogitanti in Middle English Texts: Semantics and Functions.....   | 233 |
| <b>Auksė Mockevičiūtė, Tatjana Solomonik – Pankrašova</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ) Pagan Germanic Perception of Death and Afterlife in the Anglo-Saxon Epic Poem Beowulf..... | 238 |

## LANGUAGE IN DIFFERENT DISCOURSES

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>Vita Balama</b> ( <i>Ventspils University College, Latvia</i> ). Language Issues in Career Building..... | 245 |
|---|-----|

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Vilma Linkevičiūtė</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ). Tony Blair's Conflict Communication Discourse: <i>Change Domain</i> .....                                 | <b>251</b> |
| <b>Marcel Pikhart</b> ( <i>University of Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic</i> ). ELF in Intercultural Management: The Space for Language in Current Business Communication..... | <b>258</b> |
| <b>Jurgita Kerevičienė</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ). Linguistic Modernization and/or Conventionalization.....   | <b>265</b> |
| <b>Dovilė Vengalienė</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ). On Some Features of Conventionalised Irony in News Headlines.....  | <b>272</b> |

### **АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ЛИНГВОКОНЦЕПТОЛОГИИ**

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Наталья Сивицкая</b> ( <i>Институт языка и литературы им. Якуба Коласа и Янки Купалы Национальной академии наук Беларуси, Беларусь</i> ). Социолингвистическая концепция детства в этнопедагогической стратегии белорусов..... | <b>279</b> |
| <b>Людмила Сукина</b> ( <i>НОУ ВПО Институт программных систем УГП имени А. К. Айламазяна, Россия</i> ). Понятие «самомышление» в русской книжности второй половины XVI – XVII века.....  | <b>285</b> |
| <b>Татьяна Коваленко, Оксана Цыбулько</b> ( <i>Донецкий национальный университет, Украина</i> ). Формализм и концептуализм в освоении семантического пространства: терминотворчество.....   | <b>292</b> |

### **АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ ЯЗЫКА И КУЛЬТУРЫ**

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Татьяна Бобко</b> ( <i>Минский государственный лингвистический университет, Беларусь</i> ). Языковая ситуация Беларуси и ее отражение в Интернет-коммуникации.....   | <b>300</b> |
| <b>Валентина Зразикова</b> ( <i>Институт парламентаризма и предпринимательства, Беларусь</i> ). К проблеме билингвизма в Республике Беларусь.....   | <b>307</b> |
| <b>Мака Качарава</b> ( <i>Сухумский государственный университет, Грузия</i> ). О соотношении языка и культуры (на материале анализа концепта «правда» в русском и английском языках).....   | <b>314</b> |
| <b>Ольга Крылова</b> ( <i>Институт лингвистических исследований Российской академии наук, Россия</i> ). Лексико-семантическая группа наименований верхней женской одежды в новгородских говорах.....  | <b>321</b> |
| <b>Анна Сергеевна Полищук (Шадчина)</b> ( <i>Институт филологии Киевского национального университета имени Тараса Шевченка, Украина</i> ). Балкано- кавказские параллели в языке и культуре (на примере образа героя в шкуре леопарда)..... | <b>329</b> |
| <b>Елена Николаевна Ремчукова, Алиса Владимировна Страхова</b> ( <i>Российский университет дружбы народов, Россия</i> ). Мужчина и женщина в рекламном «Зазеркалье» России и Франции.....   | <b>338</b> |
| <b>Сергей Рыбаков</b> ( <i>Уральский федеральный университет, Россия</i> ). Значение языка в процессе духовного освоения мира.....  | <b>342</b> |

### **АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ЛЕКСИКОЛОГИИ**

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Наталья Бунько</b> ( <i>Институт языка и литературы имени Якуба Коласа и Янки Купалы Национальной академии наук Беларуси, Беларусь</i> ). Терминологическая лексика по чрезвычайным ситуациям: особенности структурно-тематической организации, происхождения и образования..... | <b>348</b> |
| <b>Валерия Колосова</b> ( <i>Институт лингвистических исследований РАН, Санкт-Петербург, Россия</i> ). Русские диалектные фитонимы на общеславянском фоне.....  | <b>355</b> |
| <b>Наталья Скиба</b> ( <i>Киевский национальный университет им. Т. Шевченко, Институт филологии, Украина</i> ). Актуализация фразеологизмов в газетном заголовке.....   | <b>362</b> |



**Елена Сьянова** (*Институт лингвистических исследований Российской академии наук, Россия*). Лексика крестьянского строительства: этнолингвистический анализ (на материале русско-украинских говоров воронежской области).....368

### **АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКОЙ СЕМАНТИКИ**

**Людмила Варпахович** (*Минский государственный лингвистический университет, Беларусь*). Номинация процессов: поиск исходных сем.....376

**Кира Коваленко** (*Институт лингвистических исследований Российской академии наук, Россия*) Наименования человека в азбуковнике 1596 г.....383

**Асия Ковтун** (*Университет им Витаутаса Великого, Литва*). Семантические обоснования сопоставления русского и литовского свадебного обряда.....393

**Елена Колосько** (*Институт лингвистических исследований Российской академии наук, Россия*). Прагматическая семантика устойчивых выражений разговорной речи.....399

**Татьяна В. Маркелова, Евгения Сергеевна Маликова** (*Государственное образовательное бюджетное учреждение высшего профессионального образования Московский государственный университет печати имени Ивана Федорова, Россия*). Трансформация семантической структуры компонента «медиа» в дискурсе современных СМИ.....405

**Лариса Миронова** (*Одесский национальный университет им. И. И. Мечникова, Украина*). Соматические фразеологизмы украинского и испанского языков в репрезентации эмоциональной сферы человека.....412

### **ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ КУЛЬТУРЫ ДИСКУРСОВ СОВРЕМЕННОСТИ**

**Хатуна Амаглобели** (*Сухумский государственный университет, Грузия*). Грузинская эмиграция и мультикультурное пространство.....420

**Ирина Бакланова** (*Институт лингвистических исследований Российской академии наук, Россия*). Наименования бус с основой соврул- (словообразовательный и этимологический аспекты).....427

**Мэри Габедава** (*Сухумский государственный университет, Грузия*). Языковая политика в Грузии и вопросы глобализации.....435

**Александр А. Житенев** (*Воронежский государственный университет, Россия*). Сетевой дневник как модель прозаического текста: стратегии стилеобразования.....442

**Ольга Каверина** (*Балашовский институт Саратовского государственного университета, Россия*). Есть ли нарративная журналистика в России?.....448

**Галина Кутырёва-Чубаля** (*Akademia Techniczno-Humanistyczna, Польша*). Наррация, инкантиция, пение: об энтропии песенного текста в белорусском фольклоре.....455

**Олег Поляков** (*Вильнюсский университет, Литва*). Мифы и мифологизация в гуманитарных науках.....463

**Дарья Тер-Минасова** (*Московский государственный институт международных отношений (университет), Россия*). Традиции британской монархии как основная составляющая ее имиджа.....475

**Татьяна Тернова, Анна Фролова** (*Воронежский государственный университет, Россия*). Литературная премия а. Белого как литературная институция: дискуссионное поле и формы самопрезентации.....482

## MODERN TRANSLATION STRATEGIES AND DIDACTICS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Jovita Daukšytė</b> ( <i>Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania</i> ). Acquisition of Social Competences Through Adults Learning Foreign Languages.....   | <b>491</b> |
| <b>Brigita Dimavičienė</b> ( <i>Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania</i> ). The Effect of Translated Literature on Lithuanian Literature for Young People.....                                       | <b>498</b> |
| <b>Andrii Kozachuk</b> ( <i>Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Ukraine</i> ). Lexicological Aspect of Ukrainian-English Translation of Short Prose of the Late 19th-Early 20th Centuries.....          | <b>505</b> |
| <b>Roma Kriaučiūnienė, Jolanta Karalienė</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Marijampole, Rygiskiu Jono gymnasium, Lithuania</i> ). Foreign Language Teacher‘ Approach to Values.....                        | <b>513</b> |
| <b>Inna Makarova, Olga Anisimova</b> ( <i>Sankt-Peterburgh State University of Service and Economics, Russia</i> ). Multimedia Project Instead of Traditional English Classes.....                    | <b>521</b> |
| <b>Ieva Rudzinska</b> ( <i>Latvian Academy of Sport Education, Latvia</i> ). Vocabulary Acquisition via Long Term Memory Activation with the Help of Musical Background and On-line Mind Mapping..... | <b>525</b> |
| <b>Goda Rumšienė</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ). Translation and Rendering of Culturally-Related Text in Advertisements.....  | <b>532</b> |
| <b>Loreta Ulvydienė, Gintarė Aleknavičiūtė</b> ( <i>Vilnius University, Lithuania</i> ). Subtitles of Films as a Means of Foreign Language Learning.....  | <b>539</b> |

## АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ ПЕРЕВОДОВЕДЕНИЯ И ПРАКТИКИ ПЕРЕВОДА

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Ольга Петриашвили</b> ( <i>Сухумский государственный университет (в Тбилиси), Грузия</i> ). Творческая деятельность И. А. Бунина-переводчика.....                              | <b>547</b> |
| <b>Живиле Немицкене, Ауксе Каклаускайте</b> ( <i>Вильнюсский университет, Литва</i> ). Ошибки перевода системы «Google translate» с английского на русский и литовский языки..... | <b>554</b> |

## АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ЛЕКСИКОЛОГИИ И СТИЛИСТИКИ

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Елена Акуленко, Вера Леонтьева</b> ( <i>Минский государственный лингвистический университет, Беларусь</i> ). Функционально-стилевой потенциал японизмов в современном русском языке.....                                      | <b>561</b> |
| <b>Раиса Козак</b> ( <i>Каменец-Подольский национальный университет имени Ивана Огиенко, Украина</i> ). Национальный характер экспрессивности эллиптических конструкций в восточнославянских языках.....                         | <b>570</b> |
| <b>Вера Астрэйка</b> ( <i>Институт подготовки научных кадров НАН Беларуси, Беларусь</i> ). Северо-западные зональные словообразовательные регионализмы белорусского языка как результат Славяно-балтских контактов и связей..... | <b>577</b> |

## FILOLOGINIAI IR DIDAKTINIAI TYRINĖJIMAI: PROBLEMOS IR SPRENDIMAI

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Teresė Aleknavičiūtė</b> ( <i>Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Humanitarinės srities mokslo populiarinimo diskursas multimodaliuoju aspektu.....  | <b>586</b> |
| <b>Gabija Bankauskaitė-Sereikienė, Eglė Petrauskaitė</b> ( <i>Vilniaus universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Populiarusis leidinys „Vapsva“ (1928 – 1932): ironiškoji literatūros, kultūros, visuomenės kritika..... | <b>593</b> |
| <b>Birutė Briaukienė</b> ( <i>Lietuvos sveikatos mokslų universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Lietuvių asmenvardžių kilmė ir vartosenos ypatumai.....  | <b>602</b> |
| <b>Živilė Dapšauskaitė</b> ( <i>Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Komunikacija mokyklinių atminimų tekstuose ir užrašuose ant nuotraukų.....  | <b>606</b> |
| <b>Jurgita Girčienė</b> ( <i>Lietuvos edukologijos universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Adresato įvardijimo raida.....  | <b>613</b> |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Daiva Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė</b> ( <i>Lietuvos edukologijos universitetas</i> ). Lietuvos 4 klasės mokinių pasakojimo ir laiško rašymo pasiekimai.....   | <b>622</b> |
| <b>Danguolė Kalesnikienė</b> ( <i>Ugdymo plėtotės centras, Lietuva</i> ). Skaitymo diagnostika.....   | <b>629</b> |
| <b>Jurgita Macijauskaitė-Bonda</b> ( <i>Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Vaikas destruktinės tematikos moksleivių eiliavimuose.....   | <b>636</b> |
| <b>Aušrinė Peleckienė, Loreta Alešiūnaitė</b> ( <i>Kauno kolegija; Kauno sveikatos mokslų universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Būdingiausios leksikos klaidos studentų kalboje: analizė ir taisymo metodika..... | <b>643</b> |
| <b>Virginija Jūratė Pukevičiūtė</b> ( <i>Vilniaus universitetas, Užsienio kalbų institutas, Lietuva</i> ). Įsiminimo strategijų taikymas mokantis užsienio kalbų: ugdymo projekto atvejis.....            | <b>651</b> |
| <b>Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė</b> ( <i>Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Šiuolaikinių etnologijos ir antropologijos terminų ypatybės.....   | <b>658</b> |
| <b>Dainius Sobeckis</b> ( <i>Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Žmogiškosios būties prasmingumas Leonardo Andriekaus poezijoje.....   | <b>668</b> |
| <b>Giedrė Šukytė</b> ( <i>Šiaulių universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Ko čia spardais kaip arklys dvėsdamas?: Žmogaus vertinimas pasitelkiant gyvūno įvaizdį lietuvių paremijose.....                           | <b>675</b> |
| <b>Gintarė Vaitonytė</b> ( <i>Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Suomų – švedų modernisto kūrybos aktualizavimo Lietuvos periodiniuose leidiniuose problematika.....                          | <b>681</b> |
| <b>Ingrida Žindžiuvienė</b> ( <i>Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, Lietuva</i> ). Traumos romanas: kolektyvinė trauma literatūroje .....  | <b>688</b> |

#### **LINGUISTIK, DIDAKTIK UND LITERATURWISSENSCHAFT**

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Harald Bichlmeier</b> ( <i>Martin-Luther-Universität, Deutschland</i> ). Einige Anmerkungen zu Typologie und Etymologie der Bezeichnungen für ‘Mann’ und ‘Frau’ im Urindogermanischen.....        | <b>696</b> |
| <b>Daiva Deltuvienė</b> ( <i>Universitāt Vilnius, Litauen</i> ), <b>Dalia Kačergienė</b> ( <i>Technische Universität Kaunas, Litauen</i> ). Zum Problem der Übersetzungseinheiten in Fachtexten..... | <b>706</b> |
| <b>Alma Imbrasienė</b> ( <i>Universitāt Klaipėda, Litauen</i> ). Struktur der primären Verbentsprechungen in den baltischen, germanischen und slawischen Sprachen.....                               | <b>713</b> |
| <b>Alena Josefova</b> ( <i>Universitāt Hradec Kralove, Tschechische Republik</i> ). Ethische Probleme des Multikulturalismus und Universitätssprachenausbildung.....                                 | <b>721</b> |
| <b>Laima Kuprienė</b> ( <i>Staatliches Kollegium in Klaipėda</i> ). Zur Struktur des Gesprächs: Eröffnungs- und Beendigungsphase.....  | <b>728</b> |
| <b>Danguolė Satkauskaitė</b> ( <i>Universitāt Vilnius, Litauen</i> ). Zum Problem von Deixis und Anaphorik in der Filmübersetzung.....   | <b>735</b> |
| <b>Valentina Talerko</b> ( <i>Universitāt Daugavpils, Lettland</i> ). Dialog mit dem Bild: Zur Wahrnehmung des Porträts in der frühen Prosa von Th. Storm.....                                       | <b>743</b> |

#### **СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ РАЗЛИЧНЫХ ТИПОВ ТЕКСТОВ**

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Екатерина Быкова</b> ( <i>Вятский государственный университет, Россия</i> ). Сказания о чудотворных иконах Богородицы в старообрядческой среде (по фольклорным и рукописным источникам).....     | <b>749</b> |
| <b>Николай Васькив</b> ( <i>Каменец-Подольский национальный университет им. И. Огиенко, Украина</i> ). Текст как самоизобличение: советско-финская война 1940 года глазами советской медсестры..... | <b>756</b> |
| <b>Юлия Давидюк</b> ( <i>Киевский национальный лингвистический университет, Украина</i> ) Эффект обманутого ожидания в структуре художественного текста.....  | <b>762</b> |
| <b>Нина А. Левковская</b> ( <i>Московский государственный институт международных отношений МИД РФ, Россия</i> ). Языковые и текстовые параметры современного политического эссе....                 | <b>768</b> |
| <b>Юлия Подлубнова</b> ( <i>Уральский федеральный университет, Россия</i> ) Характер автобиографизма в литературе урала 1930-х гг. (случай а. Коревановой).....                                     | <b>772</b> |

**СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ДИДАКТИЧЕСКИЕ  
ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ: ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА**

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Инна Андреасян</b> ( <i>Минский государственный лингвистический университет, Беларусь</i> ) Автономность студента и интерактивные технологии овладения иноязычным общением.....                           | <b>780</b> |
| <b>Елена Марченко</b> ( <i>Латвийский университет, Латвия</i> ) Парадоксы аутентичности: к проблеме обучения жанрам письменной речи.....   | <b>786</b> |
| <b>Юрий Машошин</b> ( <i>Даугавпилсский университет, Латвия</i> ). Повышение стрессоустойчивости учащихся.....   | <b>791</b> |
| <b>Юлия Молоткова</b> ( <i>Минский государственный лингвистический университет, Беларусь</i> ). Лингвистические особенности иероглифического письма как предмета овладения студентами языкового вуза.....    | <b>799</b> |
| <b>Ирина Радина</b> ( <i>Минский государственный лингвистический университет, Беларусь</i> ). Преимущества использования подкастинга в обучении студентов устному иноязычному общению.....                   | <b>807</b> |
| <b>Юлия Викторовна Ридная</b> ( <i>Новосибирский государственный технический университет, Россия</i> ). Жанр английской научной статьи как методическая модель обучения.....                                 | <b>813</b> |
| <b>Галина Токарева</b> ( <i>Ивановский государственный энергетический университет им. В. Ленина, Россия</i> ). Системный подход к преподаванию терминологии иностранным студентам в энергетическом вузе..... | <b>818</b> |
| <b>Виталий Чарторийский</b> ( <i>Российский Университет Дружбы Народов, Россия</i> ). Практика обучения письменной речи на начальном (довузовском) этапе.....  | <b>824</b> |
| <b>Мирослава Шевченко</b> ( <i>Киевский национальный университет им. Т. Шевченко, Украина</i> ). Разговорная речь в аспекте лингводидактики.....   | <b>829</b> |

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## **SUBTITLES OF FILMS AS A MEANS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

*Learning a foreign language ranks high on the priority lists of a number of people, with as many as 39 percent of people regretting not speaking additional languages and often wishing they could speak more languages. Yet, most learning is still restricted to devoted, goal-directed learners either through formal schooling or specialized multimedia aids. Casual learners, on the contrary, generally have lower levels of commitment and resources devoted to learning, and hence have limited means to acquire foreign languages. As intuition suggests, a top reason cited for difficulties of learning a foreign language is the “lack of time”.*

*Considering the fact that the original purpose of films (except educational material, e.g., documentaries) is to entertain the audience, the question of whether subtitles can be used as a means of foreign language learning arises. Thus, the aim of the paper is to review and analyse the main advantages and disadvantages of film subtitling as a means of learning foreign languages. Therefore, the authors discuss subtitling in relation to foreign language learning; review the role of film translators in relation to the quality of translated films; analyse “The Da Vinci Code” - as a tool for foreign language learning and cases of non-equivalence between the source (English) and the target (Lithuanian) languages and attempt to propose alternatives for the logical mistakes made in the Lithuanian translation of “The Da Vinci Code”.*

*Ultimately, the conclusion is drawn that subtitles are not suitable for learning single lexical units as there is no one-to-one relation between word and meaning; however, subtitles of films as a means of foreign language learning can improve skills of a person who has a command of a particular foreign language corresponding to intermediate level.*

*KEY WORDS: subtitling, foreign language learning, audiovisual translation, subtitling techniques*

### **Introduction**

Over the past decade, the need to know foreign languages has been increasing as languages play an important role in creating a global community and developing planetary citizenship. Europe’s vision for 2020 is to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy.<sup>72</sup> Improving the outcomes of education and training and investing in skills and the opportunity to acquire and develop skills throughout life are important prerequisites to achieve this goal. Thus, the New Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training<sup>73</sup> (“ET 2020”) supports the Europe 2020 strategy and calls for action to “improve the quality and efficiency of education and training”. It aims at ensuring that the assessment of future skill requirements and the matching of labor market needs are adequately taken on board in education and training planning processes (ibid.).

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<sup>72</sup> Communication from the Commission Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth COM(2010) 2020 final <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>73</sup> Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), OJEC C 119, 28/05/2009 P.2–10

Moreover, with the stress being laid on the importance of foreign language learning, still in 2008 in the report of the Business Forum for Multilingualism some clear messages were addressed to the education authorities: “We would like to see multilingualism being encouraged more actively at all school levels. First and foremost, the choice of languages needs to be widened. At higher levels, learning methods need to be more applied and practice oriented. Proper recognition should be awarded for language skills in school curricula and at a later stage in the assessment of job candidates. In a different context, language skills need to be acknowledged in an appropriate way in centrally negotiated agreements between the social partners.”<sup>74</sup>

Therefore, learning a foreign language ranks high on the priority lists of a number of people, with as many as 39 percent of people regretting not speaking additional languages and often wishing they could speak more languages<sup>75</sup> (in Sakunkoo, 2009). Yet, most learning is still restricted to devoted, goal-directed learners either through formal schooling or specialized multimedia aids. Casual learners, on the contrary, generally have lower levels of commitment and resources devoted to learning, and hence have limited means to acquire foreign languages. As intuition suggests, a top reason cited for difficulties of learning a foreign language is the “lack of time” or financial resources.

Not surprisingly audiovisual material has become an increasingly popular means for the encouragement of multilingualism mentioned above for a number of reasons. Firstly, as different surveys and project outcomes<sup>76</sup> witness, there is a significant demand for language learning delivered via TV; an EU report cites two surveys, one ‘revealed that 41% of those surveyed wanted more language tuition on television’ another ‘found that 28% of men and 22% of women were prepared to pay for more language tuition on television’. Secondly, language learning can make use of almost any material in the target language (i.e. it does not necessarily require tailor made content) consequently a huge amount of potentially appropriate raw content material that could be adapted to support language learning already exists in the form of films, TV series, documentaries, quiz shows, etc. This huge variety is in itself very significant as it potentially allows i.e. - TV language learning materials to cater for an enormous range of personal tastes and interests. Thirdly, as Alexander Nakhimovsky (1997) notes, perhaps “of all subjects foreign language instruction can benefit from multimedia materials most obviously. The most difficult task facing a language instructor is to show the deep semantic and cultural differences hidden behind dictionary equivalents. The movie and its script make that task much easier. Students can see the clash between their expectations and the realia of a different culture.” The rich narrative structure and visual context provided by TV programmes and films help the learner to form a deep understanding of the language to be learnt and its culture. Fourthly, for language learners TV material is genuinely authentic. As Liontas (2002) observes, this is material produced by and for the native speakers of the foreign language and for many language learners watching, understanding and enjoying TV and films in the foreign language can itself be a learning objective (Underwood, 2012).

Thus, *the aim of the research* is to review and analyse the main advantages and disadvantages of film subtitling as a means of learning foreign languages. For the aim of the paper to be achieved, the following *objectives* have been set out:

1. to review audiovisual aids in foreign language learning;
2. to discuss subtitling as a tool when learning foreign languages;
3. to discuss quality of subtitled films;
4. to analyze one of the most controversial films - *The Da Vinci Code* - as a tool for foreign language learning and cases of non-equivalence between the source (English) and the target (Lithuanian) languages proposing alternatives for the logical mistakes made in the Lithuanian translation of *The Da Vinci Code*.

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<sup>74</sup> Report from the thematic working group "Languages for Jobs" European Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET 2020) at [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/languages-for-jobs-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/languages-for-jobs-report_en.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Eurobarometer, 2001, <http://ec.europa.eu>

<sup>76</sup> There were a number of projects carried out supported by EU funds, e. g. Lifelong learning programmes, etc.

Thus, as the study conducted by European Commission (2011) announces, “in terms of language mastery, in countries with a tradition of subtitling, knowledge of foreign languages (and of English in particular) is close to that of the mother tongue of the population surveyed, whereas in countries with a tradition of dubbing the majority of respondents evaluated their skills at a level of 3 on a scale of 5,” *the hypothesis that subtitles, which provide lexical information and support perceptual learning about foreign speech help to learn foreign languages will be either approved or denied by the authors of this research.*

### Audiovisual Aids in Foreign Language Learning

The 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization has become the main reason for easier access to multilingual texts through media, the Internet and other channels of information. Consequently, foreign language acquisition for intermediate level (as opposed to foreign language learning at the beginner’s level) is taking on new forms, especially through audiovisual means. In this particular sense, the most valuable kind of audiovisual text is subtitling since both the original dialog and the translated text can be perceived simultaneously without one disrupting the other (unlike the other two common kinds of audiovisual translation – dubbing and voice-over). As Henrik Gottlieb (2005, 6) points out, the viewer processes the original dialog and the subtitles as ‘diamesic twins’, i.e. on the one hand, subtitles are used as an aid rather than the only source to access the meaning of a film; on the other hand, the viewer processes the two verbal channels in such a way that the dialog becomes a means to evaluate and criticize the translation. This implies that subtitles are chosen over dubbing or voice-over by those viewers who already have a grasp on a particular foreign language; therefore, the process of foreign language skill development to such viewers becomes accessible.

The combination of the acoustic and the visual channel together with the verbal and the non-verbal elements results in four basic components making up the audiovisual text: the acoustic-verbal (dialog), the acoustic-nonverbal (score, sounds), the visual-nonverbal (image) and the visual-verbal component (subtitles)<sup>77</sup>. The spatio-temporal relationships between the four components are portrayed in Figure 1, where the arrows represent the existing relationships in an audiovisual text and the dashed arrows represent the relationships established by the subtitle:

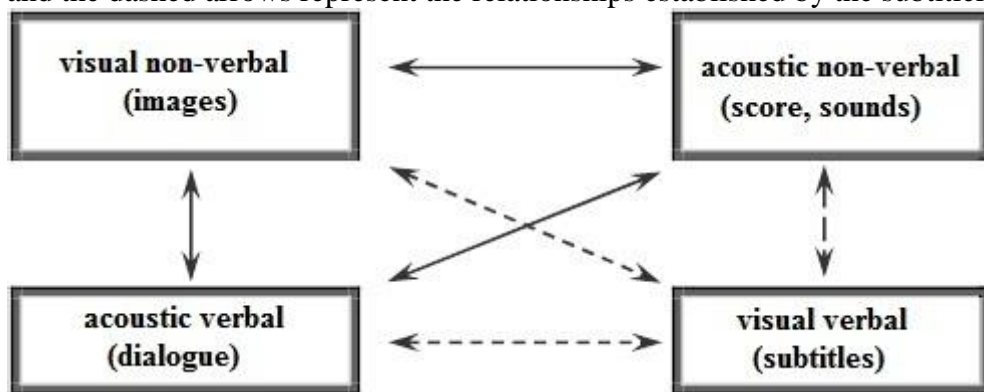


Fig. 1 Relationships between the basic components of the subtitled AV text. Source: Delabastita (1989, 101)

The requirement for synchrony between these components imposes certain time and space constraints, which make a literal, word-for-word translation impossible. Thus, the student/subtitler is liberated from the “requirement for faithfulness” and forced to focus on the core of the utterances heard. Moreover, in the case of audiovisual translation, the visual context (e.g. facial expressions or movements) is explicit and needs to be taken into consideration when translating (Stavroula, Sokoli 2006).

<sup>77</sup> Delabastita (1989: 101) calls these four basic components “four types of film sign: verbal signs transmitted acoustically (dialog), non-verbal signs transmitted acoustically (background noise, music), verbal signs transmitted visually (credits, letters, documents shown on the screen), non-verbal signs transmitted visually”.

## Subtitling as a Tool When Learning Foreign Languages

Subtitling is possibly the most suitable form of audiovisual translation for foreign language learning, since it allows one to listen to the original soundtrack without interference. In any translation, the source language has to be transformed due to the different structures of the two languages – the source language and the target language. When translating films, this transformation of the original language is influenced by the particularity of the techniques of translating as well. These techniques can be roughly divided into 3 main categories – omission, explicitation and transposition (Baravykaitė, 2007, 24). To be more precise, the techniques are as follows:

1. expansion (explanation of SL realia);
2. paraphrasing;
3. rendering;
4. repetition (imitation of certain SL constructions);
5. transcription;
6. transfer (modification of the SL semantic content);
7. compression (expression of the SL content by the lesser number of TL elements);
8. shortening (abbreviation/condensation of words/phrases);
9. elimination (deletion of information to save space);
10. omission (deletion of information for which there are no TL equivalents).

The use of these techniques results *in greater modifications of the target language*. Also, there is no one-to-one relationship between word and meaning across languages (Baker, 1992, 10-11). Thus, while subtitles of films are not particularly suitable for learning lexical equivalents, they can be a great tool when improving one's listening skills and coherent comprehension of a particular foreign language.

To develop the point further, the source language of a film is usually a colloquial and informal speech which may contain a great number of fixed expressions and idioms. An idiom is a multiword construction that can be considered as a self-contained lexical unit since it has a fixed meaning, and its parts, if taken separately, lose sense (*Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 518). Idioms can be translated as a single word, as, for example, a colloquial idiom *to stick one's neck out* means *to adopt an attitude that invites trouble or unfavorable comment* and can be translated to Lithuanian as *drįsti, (su)rizikuoti*. However, some idioms are translated as phrases (e.g. proverbs) having more or less the same meaning but completely different lexical form, which is usually influenced by the cultural background. An example of such idioms can be a well known idiom *a blessing in disguise* and its most common Lithuanian translation *nera to blogo, kas neišeity į gera*.

As these examples suggest, subtitles cannot teach one all the lexical meanings of a word but rather, as it has already been mentioned, help one gradually develop the skills of listening and, most importantly, developing an ear for a particular foreign language. However, the quality of subtitles is a major factor determining the quality of the film viewing process in terms of foreign language learning. While the mistakes can only be noticed by someone who knows the source language very well, it might be misleading and confusing for a student.

### Quality of Subtitled Films

The quality of subtitles is a huge factor determining the quality of subtitled film watching as a process of foreign language learning. While the mistakes can only be noticed by someone who knows the source language very well, it might be misleading and confusing for a learner. Therefore,



translators play a crucial role because absent-mindedness, carelessness or even the lack of competence, which includes perfect skills of both source and target languages as well as good knowledge of the contexts of a particular film, position of the author etc., may not only be the cause of poor quality of the translation and representation of the cultural and linguistic environment of the film, but make the audience lose interest in the film itself.

Film dialogues are often evaluated in a wrong way: although they seem like a spontaneous everyday speech, in fact, the words are carefully written, developed, edited and shaped until the desired result is achieved. Besides that, film dialogues convey certain meanings, messages and ideas. Thus, it is essential to know the context of certain elements of the dialogues. According to B. Schwarz, “subtitles have to be read and understood in the few seconds they are visible on the screen. To interpret the text for the target language audience, the translator must ask about the content and purpose of the original work.” Therefore, in order to achieve cultural and linguistic adequacy, translators are advised to consult various additional sources such as encyclopaedias, dictionaries, manuals with technical terminology, glossaries, specialised thesauruses and the Internet (Schwarz, 2002).

The main task of the film translator is to adequately and clearly transform the verbal text into a written text. Although spoken and written texts have different functions, it is essential to provide the audience with naturally readable and coherent text, which is achieved by retaining the same style and mood (Schwarz, 2002) as in the primary text (“text” meaning the spoken source language as well as the visual channel). This requires not only rich vocabulary and good skills of perceiving how a particular language functions, but also understanding the characters and moods which are not always conveyed through the verbal channel.

To sum up, the translator’s role in the aspect of quality is of extreme importance. It is even more important speaking about watching subtitled films as a tool to improve the knowledge of a particular language because the aims of potential learners and those of a regular audience differ in a number of aspects.

To develop the point further, a case study of the English-Lithuanian translation of a popular film *The Da Vinci Code* has been carried out in order to prove the suitability of subtitles for foreign language acquisition.

### **Case Study: Lithuanian Subtitles in ‘The da Vinci Code’**

*The Da Vinci Code* is a screening of the best-selling novel under the same title written by Dan Brown. The scenario of the film is widely known. A famous symbologist Robert Langdon is called to the Louvre museum one night where a curator has been murdered, leaving behind a mysterious trails of symbols and clues. With his own survival at stake, Langdon, accompanied by the police cryptologist Sophie Neveu, reveals a series of secrets hidden in the works of Leonardo Da Vinci, all leading to a secret society committed to guard and protect an ancient secret – Jesus’ bloodline - that has remained hidden for 2000 years.

The Lithuanian translation of *The Da Vinci Code* includes examples of the basic methods of film translating as well as some mistakes which can be roughly divided into contextual non-equivalence, logical and grammatical mistakes. In some places, the style of the target language is different from the source language, i.e., the colloquial speech is transformed into formal. Therefore, the artistic reality of certain parts of the film is disrupted and the subtitles lose the ease of reading. The mistakes made can confuse learners of the English language about, e.g., lexical equivalents or the general use of certain grammatical constructions (tenses, clauses) etc.

Consider the following:

- (1) *SL: It’s a phrase. Doesn’t mean anything, not to me.*  
*TL: Ši frazė man nieko nereiškia.*

This is an example of compression – two sentences are contracted into one. However, compression here is not necessary as longer translation (e.g.: “Tai frazė. Nieko nereiškia, bent jau man.”) would not cause any particular harm to the space on the screen or timing of the subtitle, and the syntactic properties of the sentence that express the character’s confusion and contemplation about the *phrase* he is looking at would be retained.

Paraphrasation is not very frequent in the film. An example referring to Mona Lisa:

- (2) *SL: Her smile is in the lower spatial frequencies.*  
*TL: Jos šypsena švelni.*

Here the scientific style (the term “spatial frequency” is mostly used in visual arts, e.g., painting, photography etc.) is transformed into a neutral sentence but the meaning is retained.

There are cases in the film where single lexical units, tenses, other grammatical units or the whole semantic content of a sentence are non-equivalent. For this reason, learners of the English language may be confused about certain lexical meanings of words or usage of particular constructions. For example, the title of the book – *The Interpretation of Symbols* – is translated as *Simbolių vertimas*. Usually, the word *interpretation* is used in the meaning of *translation* when speaking about oral interpretation. In this case, and to make it sound more logical, it would be better to translate it as *Simbolių aiškinimas / interpretavimas*.

When non-equivalence of meaning occurs in subtitles, it does not necessarily sound illogical; only by analyzing the context can the viewer realize that there is a lack of semantic equivalence, for instance:

- (3) *SL: - So dark the con of man.*  
*- No, it doesn't say that.*  
*TL: - Kokia tamsi žmogaus apgavystė.*  
*- Ne, ji ne tokia.*

This is an anagram that is referred to but the reference is made to the anagram in general rather than its content, i.e. *the con of man*. Thus, the translation should reflect that, e.g.: “*Ne, ne tai norima pasakyti.*”

Cases are observed when the meaning of the source language is completely changed for no particular reason, e.g., when the reference is made to *Mona Lisa*, the painting:

- (4) *SL: The horizon is significantly lower on the left than it is on the right.*  
*TL: Kairys lūpų kamputis/ gerokai žemiau nei dešinys.*

It is known that the actual skyline on one side of Mona Lisa differs from the skyline on the other to create an optical illusion, and this does not have any connection with the smile or lips of Mona Lisa.

The following example is one of the cases of incoherent – or illogical – interpretation of the source text:

- (5) *SL: So the Vatican issued secret orders to be opened simultaneously all across Europe.*  
*TL: Vatikanas išleido slaptą įsakymą vienu/ metu visoje Europoje įsiveržti pas juos.*

What follows after is: “The Pope <...> said God had charged him with cleansing the earth from [Knights Templar].”, which refers to the *secret orders*. The more accurate translation would be: “*Vatikanas vienu metu visoje Europoje išleido/įgalino slaptus įsakymus.*” In addition, there is nothing mentioned about “the invasion” in the source language. Therefore, “the invasion into a secret society, a group of people, *simultaneously all across Europe*” is an illogical translation.

Contextual non-equivalence can disrupt the coherent and consistent flow of the plot:

- (6) *SL: In London lies a knight a Pope interred.*  
*TL: Londone palaidotas riteris Popas.*

The knight who the clue refers to is Sir Isaac Newton, not the Pope. This is later clearly explained in the text: “A knight whose funeral was presided over by the Pope.” This mistake is repeated several times throughout the film. What is meant to say is: “Londone guli riteris, palaidotas popiežiaus.”

- (7) *SL: Your precious treasure was almost lost, and with it, my fortune.*  
*TL: Jūsų brangus lobis buvo beveik prarastas, o su šitais man pasiseks.*

After these words, the character gets money for what he has done; therefore, the translation should reflect that, e.g.: “*Jūsų brangus lobis buvo beveik prarastas, o su juo – mano turtas.*”

The distortion from the meaning of the dialogue of the source language is quite frequent in the subtitles of *The Da Vinci Code*. Some of the subtitles are inexplicably non-equivalent with no logical connection.

## Conclusions

Though according to the study conducted by European Commission (2011) subtitling helps to improve foreign language skills and can also create awareness and provide motivation to learn languages, in both formal and informal contexts, thus contributing to the creation of an environment that encourages multilingualism, the research carried out by the authors of this publication allows for the following conclusions to be made:

1. A translator's role in the aspect of the quality of subtitles is critical. It becomes even more important when subtitled films are watched to improve the knowledge of a particular language as the aims of potential learners and those of a regular audience differ in a number of aspects.

2. The subtitles of films as a means of foreign language learning can improve skills of a person who has a command corresponding to the intermediate level (at least) rather than provide beginner's knowledge of a particular foreign language. Thus, subtitles are not suitable for learning single lexical units as there is no one-to-one relation between word and meaning.

3. Even though a number of translation errors can be observed throughout the film, the messages in most cases remain fairly easy to grasp. Therefore the use of the subtitling techniques does not make much negative impact on foreign language acquisition when one already has a good command of the foreign language in question; however, translation errors that impair the quality of subtitles must be avoided.

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## KINO FILMŲ TITRAI KAIP UŽSIENIO KALBŲ MOKYMOSI PRIEMONĖ

Santrauka

Vertimas yra neatskiriama užsienio kalbų mokymosi dalis, todėl įvairių vertimo rūšių tyrinėjimas yra tiek pat svarbus, kiek ir pati vertimo teorija bei praktika. Viena tokių rūšių – kino filmų vertimas pasitelkiant titrus. Straipsnio autorės kelia klausimą, ar kino filmų subtitrai gali būti naudojami kaip viena užsienio kalbų mokymosi priemonių.

Titravimas kaip audiovizualaus vertimo rūšis unikalus tuo, kad originalus garso takelis išlieka švarus ir nepakitęs, todėl titravimas laikomas tinkamiausia audiovizualaus vertimo rūšimi užsienio kalboms mokytis.

Straipsnyje apžvelgiami ir analizuojami pagrindiniai subtitravimo, kaip kalbų mokymosi priemonės, teigiami bei neigiami aspektai atsižvelgiant į pačią vertimo teoriją, filmų vertimą bei vertėjo rolę vertimo procese. Iš praktinės dalies analizei pasirinkto „Da Vinčio kodo“ (originalo kalba – anglų, titrai – lietuviški) pateikti pavyzdžiai atspindi pagrindinius filmų vertimo metodus, neatitikimą (gramatinį ir reikšmės) tarp originalo ir vertimo kalbų, logines klaidas, kurioms siūlomos alternatyvos.

Teorinė titrų kaip užsienio kalbų mokymosi priemonės apžvalga bei vieno konkretaus pavyzdžio – „Da Vinčio kodo“ – analizė leidžia daryti išvadą, kad titravimas nėra tinkama priemonė mokytis užsienio kalbų pradedantiesiems, nes įvairios originalo kalbos modifikacijos, kalbos struktūrų pakeitimas, leksinis neatitikimas, ribotas laikas perskaityti ir suvokti titrus reikalauja atitinkamų žinių; kitaip žmogus, besimokantis tam tikros užsienio kalbos, gali būti suklaidintas, ir pats mokymosi procesas gali pasirodyti per daug įtemptas. Straipsnyje prieinama prie išvados, kad kino filmų subtitrai gali būti naudojami tik kaip viena iš užsienio kalbų mokymosi priemonių gilinant jau turimas užsienio kalbos žinias ir lavinant klausymo įgūdžius.

*REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI:* kino filmų titrai, titravimas, titravimo būdai, audiovizualinis vertimas, kalbų mokymasis