

# Quality Recommendations for Finnish Subtitling

## Introduction

These quality recommendations for Finnish subtitling are based on the practices and principles in Finnish audiovisual translation. These guidelines have been developed as a collaborative effort of representatives of Finnish translators, translation agencies, television channels, streaming service providers, and the Institute for the Languages of Finland.

The recommendations concern audiovisual works for television, streaming services, and recorded media. Most instructions also apply to subtitles for cinema distribution. However, there are separate instructions for subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing.

This document gives recommendations on best practices in Finnish-language subtitling. There is a corresponding document for Swedish-language subtitling for Finnish audiences. In the examples given, English is used as the source language to make them accessible to as many readers as possible.<sup>1</sup>

These recommendations were created from the viewpoint of 1st translations or subtitle origination, but they should also be followed in 2nd translations or template-based translations, where applicable.

The structure of this document utilises Pedersen's (2017) FAR model developed to assess quality in interlingual subtitling. Professional terminology is used, and the key concepts are summarised in the glossary at the end of the document. Glossary terms are underlined whenever they are used for the first time in a section.

Subtitling practices arise from the audiovisual aspects and requirements of reception of the source text. They are further guided by the target language and culture. Subtitling practices are, naturally, also affected by the requirement of the target text to function as a subtitled audiovisual work. The practices described in this document are strong *recommendations*; the translator should always consider each case separately.

### **These Quality Recommendations aim to:**

- aid everyone involved in producing or utilising subtitles and, ultimately, to serve the viewers;
- harmonise Finnish subtitling practices;
- provide translators with a set of guiding principles;
- be recognised as a label of quality by those who purchase or order translations; and
- to consolidate professional terminology.

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: In the English translation of this document, further English examples have been added where the content of Finnish subtitle examples is relevant in order to provide the reader with both the source and target texts. Some examples have been translated back into English on the same basis. Additional source text examples or back-translations are not provided where the focus is, for example, on technical aspects not related to language.

## Interlingual Subtitles

Interlingual subtitles consist of multiple individual subtitles, i.e., one or two lines of text in an entity the viewer can immediately understand, usually displayed for a few seconds.

Interlingual subtitles are primarily intended for viewers who do not understand the source language of the AV work or understand it poorly. The purpose of interlingual subtitles is to help the viewer follow the AV work and engage with it in a way fitting for the particular genre.

When subtitling an AV work, its creators' intentions and its target audience should be considered. The message conveyed with subtitles should be interpreted keeping in mind the whole AV work, where information is communicated by picture, language, and sound. The message should be conveyed in a manner that fits the AV work's content, style, and rhythm.

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# 1 Linguistic Acceptability

In this text, *linguistic acceptability* refers to expressions that an ordinary language user can be expected to consider characteristic of the target language. Subtitles should be as suitable as possible for the situation in question. The translator should produce language in accordance with the grammar of Standard Finnish and use creative means if exceptions are required (see Section 3: Practices of Expression). Grammatical, idiomatic expression supports the viewing experience. For these purposes, valuable resources include e.g. *Kielitoimiston ohjepankki* and *Kielitoimiston sanakirja*, provided by the Institute for the Languages of Finland.

## 1.1 Grammar and Spelling

Subtitles should follow the grammar, spelling, and punctuation of Standard Finnish, including sentence structure. Exceptions should only be made for a good reason, such as stylistic purposes.

## 1.2 Natural style

Subtitles should use natural, understandable, idiomatic Finnish that matches the style and context of the source text.

Natural style can be lost in particular due to interference, i.e., the influence of the source language. Subtitles should follow typical Finnish syntax, sentence structure, and tense and pronoun use. The aim is never to translate word for word but rather to use expressions typical to the target language in accordance with the style and purpose of the communication. (Exceptions can be made for AV works if the intention is to draw the viewer's attention to how something is expressed in the source culture.)

EXAMPLE:

"He had problems with digestion."

CORRECT

Hänellä oli  
ruoansulatusongelmia.

INCORRECT

Hänellä oli ongelmia  
ruoansulatuksen kanssa.

# 2 Readability and Comprehensibility

Subtitles should be easy to read and comprehend. The viewer must be able to grasp the idea expressed in a subtitle by reading it just once, as a part of the rhythm of the AV work. This allows the subtitles to support the viewing experience as a whole.

Readability and comprehensibility are affected by the segmentation of the text into subtitles, timing, and technical practices of subtitling. Subtitles that conform with established practices give the viewer time to follow the AV work as a whole.

## 2.1 Segmentation of subtitles

The segmentation of subtitles can refer to both the segmentation within a single subtitle and between individual subtitles. The segmentation should support readability in the target language. Segmentation is affected by the available time, the purpose of the subtitle, the introduction and development of themes, the interaction between characters, and the visual aspects (in particular, shot changes). A subtitle will, thus, contain aspects with a shared purpose, theme, and structure. Furthermore, to help the viewer comprehend subtitles quickly, no more than two sentences and no more than the utterances of two speakers should be shown in a single subtitle.

### 2.1.1 Segmenting lines within a subtitle

A single subtitle comprises one or two lines of text. If there is only one speaker and the translation can be fitted on a single line, then the subtitle should only have one line. However, a single-line subtitle is not an ideal to be strived for in itself; it is more important to find an expression that best communicates the message (see also Section 3: Practices of Expression).

When a subtitle has two lines, the text should be divided so that interconnected words (e.g. parts of verbs, noun phrases, and proper noun elements) are on the same line, wherever possible. If the complete expression cannot be fitted on a single line, it should be divided as logically as possible (e.g. a person's title on the first line and their name on the subsequent line).

#### EXAMPLE:

"The commander of the police force [*poliisivoimien komentaja*],  
Erica Smith, joined us."

#### CORRECT

Poliisivoimien komentaja  
Erica Smith lähti mukaan.

#### INCORRECT

Poliisivoimien komentaja Erica  
Smith lähti mukaan.

#### INCORRECT

Poliisivoimien  
komentaja Erica Smith lähti mukaan.

When a subtitle has two lines, the most natural place to segment it is between clauses.

#### CORRECT

Isä opetti poikaansa,  
kun poika sairasti kotona.

#### INCORRECT

Isä opetti poikaansa, kun  
poika sairasti kotona.

Splitting words onto two lines is not recommended. However, long compound words can be hyphenated between the constituent words if it does not make the word more difficult to comprehend. It may also be possible to fit the compound word onto a single line by changing the word order, bearing in mind that the naturalness, clarity and emphasis of the subtitle should not suffer as a result.

CORRECT

sivu-  
elinkeino

PREFERABLE

sivuelinkeino

INCORRECT

sivuelin-  
keino

When a subtitle has two lines, the first line should usually be shorter than the second one. This way, having read the first line, the viewer's eye will reach the beginning of the second line quicker.

CORRECT

Poliisipäällikön mukaan  
rikollinen on pidätettävä.

INCORRECT

Poliisipäällikön mukaan rikollinen  
on pidätettävä.

However, this practice is secondary to the other instructions described in this section.

EXAMPLE:

"The President of the Supreme Court [*Korkeimman oikeuden presidentti*] Pauliine Koskelo."

CORRECT

Korkeimman oikeuden presidentti  
Pauliine Koskelo.

INCORRECT

Korkeimman oikeuden  
presidentti Pauliine Koskelo.

### 2.1.2 Segmenting a sentence into more than one subtitle

If a sentence is divided across several subtitles, each subtitle should still communicate a clear, comprehensible thought. When possible, the sentence should be worded so that it can be divided between clauses. Even if this cannot be achieved, interconnected words (e.g. parts of verbs, noun phrases, and proper noun elements) should always be in the same subtitle.

EXAMPLE: "The commander of the police force, Erica Smith, says [*poliisivoimien komentaja Erica Smith sanoo*] that the culprit must be caught immediately [*että rikollinen on saatava välittömästi kiinni*]."

CORRECT

Poliisivoimien komentaja  
Erica Smith sanoo, -

että rikollinen  
on saatava välittömästi kiinni.

INCORRECT

Poliisivoimien komentaja  
Erica Smith sanoo, että rikollinen -

on saatava välittömästi kiinni.

When a noun phrase does not fit into a single subtitle, it should be worded differently, for example by using a relative clause.

CORRECT

Pihalla odotti pieni musta auto, -

joka kuului Hannahin  
entiselle poikaystäväille Mikelle.

INCORRECT

Pihalla odotti  
Hannahin entisen poikaystävän -

Miken pieni musta auto.

If a noun phrase cannot be shortened, the expression should be otherwise divided in a logical manner:

CORRECT

Paikalle saapui -

korkeimman oikeuden presidentti  
Pauliine Koskelon puoliso, -

entinen kuluttaja-asiamies  
Gerhard af Schultén.

INCORRECT

Paikalle saapui  
korkeimman oikeuden presidentti -

Pauliine Koskelon puoliso, entinen  
kuluttaja-asiamies Gerhard af Schultén.

INCORRECT

Korkeimman oikeuden presidentti  
Pauliine Koskelon puoliso, -

entinen kuluttaja-asiamies  
Gerhard af Schultén -

saapui paikalle.

For further information on sentences that are divided across several subtitles, see 2.3.1.1: Continuing a sentence in another subtitle.

## 2.2 Timecoding

These instructions on timecoding primarily apply to 1st translations, but are also recommended for use when translating with master templates. DVB subtitles are becoming more common in television broadcasts, meaning that subtitles are transmitted in their own stream instead of being burned-in. For this reason, the timing of subtitles experienced by the viewer may differ from that intended by the AV translator, as it may partly depend on the viewing device. Nevertheless, these instructions for timecoding should be used even if subtitles will not always appear as intended on every device.

Timecoding is based on segmentation and is affected by five kinds of rhythms: the rhythm of the target language, the viewer's reading rhythm, the rhythm of the source language speech or song, the rhythm of the visual image (especially in regard to shot changes), and the rhythm of the soundtrack and sound effects. The purpose of timecoding is to tell the viewer who is speaking and when. Moreover, timecoding is used to guarantee that the viewer has adequate time to read and comprehend every subtitle. The principles of timecoding in regard to the source language speech or song, as well as shot change, are explained in the following.

### 2.2.1 On-screen duration of a subtitle

Timecoding should follow the speech rhythm so that each subtitle appears at the start of the speech or, if an exception is warranted, no more than a few frames prior. Each subtitle should stay on screen at least until the end of the speech segment and for no longer than about one second after. The audio has priority over shot changes, and subtitles can be kept on screen over shot changes within the same scene. If the scene continues after the speech has ended, the subtitle should not be immediately removed. The viewer should be given adequate time to process what they have read.

The minimum interval between two subtitles varies from 2 to 4 frames. The minimum interval should be consistent throughout the programme. When speech continues without significant pauses during a scene, it is recommended that the subtitles be chained, i.e. only the minimum interval is left between consecutive subtitles. The repeated use of intervals that are only slightly longer than the minimum interval is not recommended, as it may make the subtitles seem rushed.

The minimum duration of a subtitle is 1.8 seconds (1 second and 20 frames (1:20) in PAL format). A subtitle of this duration should contain no more than a couple of words. The maximum duration of a subtitle is about 7 seconds. From the viewer's perspective, too short a reading time is worse than too long.

The maximum duration can be exceeded when translating songs or if a subtitle has foreign words or complex content, or if there are translated textual elements other than the subtitle.

### 2.2.2 Reading speed

In this document, "reading speed" refers to the technical reading time, determined with subtitling software, that specifies the reading speed required from the viewer to read the subtitle. When setting the reading speed, it is important to remember that the viewer will need time to take in the visual, too.

The maximum reading speed recommended for Finnish subtitles is 12–14 characters per second (CPS) with spaces included. In many countries, the reading speed is determined by words per minute (WPM), but this method should not be used for Finnish, where the length of words varies greatly and compound words, in particular, can be very long. Furthermore, reading a short subtitle requires relatively more time than reading a long one.

Since the reading speed determined with subtitling software is technical in nature, the AV translator must always consider whether the true reading speed is, in fact, slower. For instance, since there is a relative difference between the reading speed of a short and a long subtitle, short subtitles should be kept on screen for a relatively longer time. The reading time should be also increased if the subtitle includes many foreign words, special terminology or expressions that differ from Standard Finnish; if the content is ambiguous or otherwise difficult to understand; or if there is a lot of information on-screen at the same time.



With children's programmes, the reading speed should be particularly unhurried. The maximum reading speed recommended for children is 10 to 12 characters per second. Programmes aimed at certain specific target audiences may also require increased reading times and slower reading speeds.

### 2.2.3 Shot changes

As a rule, a subtitle should not continue over a shot change when the scene changes. An exception may be warranted if more reading time cannot be arranged by, for example, changing the segmentation, merging subtitles, or shortening expressions. However, if a scene ends with a line that is dramatically significant, e.g. revealing a murderer's identity or the answer to a proposal, this information should not be revealed too early. In such cases, it may be necessary to carry the subtitle over the scene change. The subtitle should be kept on screen for the minimum of approximately one second after the shot change.

If the rhythm of speech and the reading speed allow it, subtitles should start or end at the moment of shot change. However, subtitles may be carried over a shot change in the same scene.

## 2.3 Technical Conventions

The purpose of technical conventions is to help the viewer read subtitles quickly and comprehend them immediately. They will make it easier for the viewer to grasp the ideas, clauses and sentences in the subtitles and to follow the dialogue. Thus, a single subtitle will contain aspects with a shared purpose, theme and structure.

### 2.3.1 Marking continued sentences and new speakers

#### 2.3.1.1 Continuing a sentence into another subtitle

When a sentence that started in one subtitle continues into the next subtitle, a hyphen is used as the continuation mark at the end of the first subtitle. There is a space between the last character of the first subtitle and the hyphen. Punctuation should follow the rules of Standard Finnish, including commas.

EXAMPLE:

Olisi erheellistä ajatella, -

että kykenisimme luomaan  
pilviä ja sadetta.

Very long sentences that have to be segmented across multiple subtitles should be avoided. Sentences that are longer than three subtitles should not be used. If a sentence continues onto the next subtitle, a short sentence can be included into the first subtitle.

EXAMPLE:

Tiedemaailma pysyy vaiti.  
Asiantuntijat toteavat vain, -

että he haluavat välttää  
ottamasta asiaan kantaa.

### 2.3.1.2 Indicating a new speaker

When there is another speaker within the same subtitle, this is indicated with a hyphen serving as a dialogue mark. A space is used after the hyphen. A subtitle should not have more than two speakers.

EXAMPLE:

Saako olla kahvia?

- Ei kiitos.

Ei sitten.

When a subtitle has two speakers, their utterances should only be on the same line if they cannot be fitted onto separate lines without leaving out something essential in regard to content, or if a two-line subtitle would obscure something significant in the picture.

EXAMPLE:

Otatko kahvia? - En yleensä,  
mutta tällä kertaa otan.

EXAMPLE:

Tiedän, ettet juo kahvia,  
mutta otatko silti? - Otan.

When a subtitle has two speakers, the sentence uttered by the latter may, if necessary, continue onto the next subtitle. The other sentences have to be in the same subtitle.

EXAMPLE:

Mitä teit eilen?  
- Kävin luennolla, -

minkä jälkeen tein  
täyden työpäivän iltavuorossa.

## 2.3.2 Layout

### 2.3.2.1 Subtitle alignment

In Finland, subtitles have traditionally been placed at the bottom of the screen, each subtitle starting from the bottom left corner. Centering all subtitles at the bottom of the screen is not recommended. When the subtitled translation of speech starts from the left, centering can be used to separate the translations of other elements, such as signs, headlines, etc., from dialogue. In addition, viewers will know where subtitles usually start from.

Subtitles can also be placed briefly elsewhere in order to avoid covering opening or closing credits or source language textual elements (see 2.3.2.2: Raising, moving and outlining). In such cases, too, consecutive subtitles should be placed in the same area, if possible, to make it easier for the viewer to follow them.

### 2.3.2.2 Raising, moving, and outlining

When subtitles that have been aligned normally would cover on-screen text, they should be raised above the text or moved to the right side of the screen, if possible. Covering the opening and closing credits or the face of the speaker should be avoided. In extreme close-ups, subtitles may cover the speaker's chin but not the mouth.

Placing subtitles at the very top of the screen is not recommended because they would be so far from the usual location that it would distract the viewer.

When subtitles are moved vertically or horizontally, their placement should be as consistent as possible so that the viewer knows where to expect the next subtitle. Sentences that carry over multiple subtitles should be placed in the same area on the screen.

If graphics or colours in the picture make it considerably harder to read subtitles and subtitles cannot be moved, they can be outlined with a black or grey box.

If necessary, translucent grey boxes can be used with all the subtitles.

### 2.3.2.3 On-screen textual elements

An AV work may contain on-screen signs, newspaper headlines, signs, etc. These should only be translated if the information they contain is relevant to following the narrative of the AV work. If there is speech at the same time, the content that is more relevant to following the narrative should be translated. Choosing to translate either the speech or the text is less confusing than having subtitles for both displayed for too short a time.

AV work may also have source language textual elements, such as the location of the scene or the name of an interviewee. The translation of these kinds of texts should be placed, for instance, above or below the text in a location where it does not cover the text or the speaker's face. If the same textual element is repeated, it should be translated only when necessary.

When translating textual elements, the whole text is usually capitalised and the translation is centred (see 2.3.2.4 Centring and 2.3.2.5 Capitalising). When translating name and title texts, each letter in the person's name is usually capitalised whereas the title, displayed below the name, is uncapitalised. If there are several words, capitalising is not necessary; italics can be used alternatively, if needed. A full stop is not used in either case, but exclamation marks or question marks can be used, if necessary.

EXAMPLE:

"Michael Smith, financial expert"

MICHAEL SMITH  
talousiantuntija

EXAMPLE:

"Beware of the dog!"

VAROKAA VIHAISTA KOIRAA!

#### 2.3.2.4 Centring

The title of the programme, the title of the episode, the translator's name as well as the translations of signs, newspaper headlines, etc. are usually centred. Other translated textual elements should also be centred if they cannot be placed near the source language text on screen.

#### 2.3.2.5 Capitalisation

Conventionally, the programme title is capitalised but the episode title is in lower case.

EXAMPLE:

"The Investigations of Sherlock Holmes – The Hound of the Baskervilles"

SHERLOCK HOLMESIN TUTKIMUKSET  
Baskervillen koira

Translated newspaper headlines, signs and other texts are often capitalised if there is sufficient space.

EXAMPLE:

"London, 1650"

LONTOO VUONNA 1650

Headlines, signs and other textual elements can be in lower case, too, if centring is enough to separate them from the subtitling of dialogue.

EXAMPLE:

"London, 1650"

Lontoo vuonna 1650

Capitalisation should be consistent within the same AV work.

#### 2.3.2.6 Italicising

Italics are used for several purposes. Their use should be logical in order to help the viewer comprehend the AV work as a whole. Their purpose is to clarify the context for viewers who do not understand the source language.

Italics can be used to mark audio from a source that is not in the same space as the people present in a scene: e.g. a voice that is heard from behind a door, on the phone, radio, television, or a loudspeaker. Italics are not used when the speaker is in the same space as the listener but is not shown on screen.

Italics are not used at all, for example, in a telephone conversation where the camera cuts from one speaker to the other repeatedly in the middle of the dialogue.

Titles of art works, foreign words, and the narrator's speech can be italicised unless the amount of italicisation would be excessive.

Words are always italicised completely, suffixes in inflected titles included. Any punctuation immediately following the italicised word is italicised as well.

EXAMPLE:

"Didn't you like *Blade Runner*?"

Etkö pitänyt *Blade Runnerista*?

If a subtitle is italicised completely and it has words that would normally be italicised, these words should not be italicised.

EXAMPLE:

*Etkö pitänyt* Blade Runnerista?

Songs, poems, announcements, internal monologue, and flashbacks can also be italicised in order to separate them from other subtitled speech. If multiple languages are spoken in the programme, a changed source language can be italicised if italicisation would serve the same purpose as the presence of multiple languages in the AV work. If the non-primary source language of the programme is understood by only some of the people present in a scene, it can be italicised. However, if all the languages spoken have to be deemed primary languages in the programme, none of them should be italicised to avoid making one language stand out.

### 2.3.2.7 Colours

In Finland, different colours are not used in interlingual subtitles.

### 2.3.3 Punctuation practices

In general, Standard Finnish punctuation is used in subtitles, including commas. When a sentence ends within a subtitle, a full stop or other end mark is used. The translator should be aware of the risk of interference from any available script of the programme.

There are some practices that concern punctuation in the text type of subtitles.

#### 2.3.3.1 Exclamation and question marks

The exclamation mark has a strong effect in relation to the visual image, and it should be used cautiously. The exclamation mark is primarily used only in cases where not using it would conflict with the tone or volume of speech. For instance, a loud cry requires an exclamation mark in the subtitle.

A question mark alone will not change a clause into a question. Furthermore, Finnish does not have questions that are based on intonation only. An interrogative clause requires an interrogative word (such as *kuka* 'who' or *milloin* 'when') or else the interrogative suffix *-ko*, *-kö*. Depending on the style of the programme, the words *ai* or *vai* can also be used for this purpose.

EXAMPLE:

"Should we leave at three?"

"At three?"

CORRECT

Lähdetääänkö kolmelta?

- Kolmeltako? / Kolmelta vai?

INCORRECT

Lähdetääänkö kolmelta?

- Kolmelta?

However, repeating words as shown in the example above should be carefully considered. While repetition is natural in spoken dialogue, everything is emphasised when expressed in subtitles, and repetition, too, should be used for emphasis. For details on the use of repetition, see 3.1.5.

The combination of exclamation and question marks "?!" should generally not be used.

### 2.3.3.2 Colons and semicolons

The colon should be used sparingly. It is usually used before a direct quotation or a list of items.

The semicolon should be avoided in subtitled dialogue that simulates spoken language. It may be appropriate when the style of the AV text is formal or literary.

### 2.3.3.3 Ellipsis

The ellipsis "..." should be used with care and primarily for emphasis in cases where a thought was left unfinished unintentionally (due to, for example, hesitation) or deliberately (insinuation) or where the speaker was interrupted. Not every pause, moment of hesitation, or unfinished sentence should be emphasised with the ellipsis.

EXAMPLE:

"I hope you didn't go without permission..."

Ettet vain lähtenyt omin luvun...

EXAMPLE: "Now that everyone has their coat on..."

"Mum, I have to pee!"

Nyt kun kaikilla on ulkovaatteet päällä...

- Äiti, minulla on pissahätä!

When a sentence is cut with an ellipsis and continued within the same subtitle, a space is used after the ellipsis.

EXAMPLE:

"He is [pause] your father."

Hän on... sinun isäsi.

When a sentence that is cut is completed by another person, it can be marked with a space and ellipsis after the hyphen. There is no space after the ellipsis.

EXAMPLE:

Hän on...

- ...sinun isäsi.

If a sentence is interrupted rather than completed, an ellipsis should not be used.

EXAMPLE:

"He is..."

"Be quiet!"

Hän on...

- Ole hiljaa!

When a sentence is not continued but there is another sentence in the same or next subtitle, the following sentence should begin with a capital letter.

EXAMPLE:

"Why you..."

"I can't help myself."

Sinä senkin...

- En voi itselleni mitään.

It is uncommon to start a sentence with an ellipsis. However, it can be used if there is a cut to the news in the middle of the scene, for example. Nevertheless, starting a subtitle mid-sentence should serve some purpose in regard to the context.

EXAMPLE (television is turned on mid-sentence):

"...has caught three men suspected of the kidnapping."

*...on ottanut kiinni  
kolme miestä epäiltynä sieppauksesta.*

When there is an ellipsis at the end of a subtitle and the sentence is continued in the next subtitle, the latter should start with an ellipsis and without a space.

EXAMPLE:

"It's quite late already [pause] but I guess we can keep going."

CORRECT

Kello on jo aika paljon...

...mutta kaipa me voimme jatkaa.

INCORRECT

Kello on jo aika paljon...

mutta kaipa me voimme jatkaa.

However, the thought can often be expressed differently and in the way that the next subtitle can be started with a capital letter.

EXAMPLE:

Kello on jo aika paljon...

Kaipa me silti voimme jatkaa.

A combination of the ellipsis and either an exclamation mark "...!" or question mark "...?" should be used sparingly and with consideration.

#### 2.3.3.4 Quotation marks

Quotation marks are used to directly quote someone's speech, thoughts, or writing, or else when an expression is used in a way that is different from how it is normally used.

EXAMPLE:

"Daphne said: 'Let's go eat.'"

Daphne sanoi:

"Mennään syömään."



When a quotation is continued across more than one subtitle, quotation marks are used at the start and end of each sentence. Thus, they are not used only at the start and end of each subtitle, nor only at the start and end of the whole quotation. If the quotation is exceptionally long, the subtitles can be italicised or centred, for instance, instead of using quotation marks.

CORRECT

"Hei, rakas isoäiti."

"Aioin tulla käymään  
ensi viikonloppuna siellä maalla, -

mutta jäänkin hoitamaan  
sairasta kissaani."

INCORRECT

"Hei, rakas isoäiti.

Aioin tulla käymään  
ensi viikonloppuna siellä maalla, -

mutta jäänkin hoitamaan  
sairasta kissaani."

However, it is usually preferable to use an indirect expression that may be easier for the viewer to comprehend:

CORRECT

Äiti käski tulla syömään.

INCORRECT

Äiti sanoi: "Tule syömään."

### 2.3.3.5 Other punctuation marks

Brackets are not normally used in AV translation because they break the illusion of natural speech. Nevertheless, round brackets may be appropriate when, for example, there is a written message on screen in the source language with brackets and using them is relevant to communicating it. Brackets can also be used to express speech that is silent, in cases where the speaker's lips clearly indicate what is being said although their voice is not heard.

A dash is used to indicate spans or differentiation. A hyphen separated on both sides by a space can also be used.

EXAMPLE:

"from five to six kilogrammes"

5–6 kilon painoinen

OR

5 - 6 kilon painoinen

When subtitling dialogue, dashes are not used because they may be confused with dialogue or continuation marks, i.e. hyphens that indicate that the speaker changes or the sentence continues in the next subtitle. In formal or literary style, the dash can be used to indicate a conclusion, for example, as long as the context makes it unambiguous. A comma or a full stop can often be used instead, or the sentence can be reworded. The em dash "—" is not used.

EXAMPLE:

"We'll spread the mixture over the cooled-down cake. And we're done!"

Seos levitetään jäähtyneen  
kakkupohjan päälle – valmista tuli!

BETTER:

Seos levitetään jäähtyneen  
kakkupohjan päälle, ja valmista tuli!

OR

Seos levitetään jäähtyneen  
kakkupohjan päälle. Valmista tuli!

### 3 Practices of Expression

Practices of expression in interlingual subtitles serve readability and acceptability. A good AV translation is as unambiguous and comprehensible as possible and tailored for the target audience. Expression is concise, precise, and immediately understandable. The viewer is then also able to follow the picture and the subtitled AV work as a whole. However, the language should still be expressive and coherent, not quick and abrupt "telegraphic language".

#### 3.1 Textual Unity

A subtitled AV work should be a unified, consistent sum of its parts. Unity should be achieved on two levels: firstly within the AV translation between the subtitles, and secondly between the AV translation and **the picture or audio**.

In the following, the most important means for achieving unity are covered: coherence, cohesion, theme-rheme relation and emphasising.

##### 3.1.1 Coherence

Coherence refers to the consistency of the content, the underlying primary theme. Subtitles should be connected by their interpretation of the narrative of the whole AV work (whether an individual programme or a series) as well as its audio and visual elements at each and every moment. Coherence is created through the consistent use of terms, expressions, and tense, among other things.

### 3.1.2 Cohesion

Cohesion is created, for example, through the use of intratextual connective devices, such as conjunctions and adverbs. Tense, too, should be used consistently in the target language with the purpose of showing temporal relations between events. Pronouns should be used with care in order to avoid interference from the source language.

When using pronouns, care should be taken to make the reference clear. Clarification may be in order even if the pronoun is otherwise being used correctly. The viewer cannot go back to the previous subtitle.

EXAMPLE:

"Noel was thinking aloud, but Catherine said nothing. He felt left alone."

CORRECT

Noel ajatteli ääneen,  
mutta Catherine ei sanonut mitään.

Noelista tuntui,  
että hän jäi yksin.

INCORRECT

Noel ajatteli ääneen,  
mutta Catherine ei sanonut mitään.

Hänestä tuntui,  
että hän jäi yksin.

EXAMPLE:

"Bob is Jane's neighbour. He loves her."

CORRECT

Bob on Janen naapuri.  
Hän rakastaa Janea.

OR

Bob on Janen naapuri.  
Bob rakastaa häntä.

INCORRECT

Bob on Janen naapuri.  
Hän rakastaa häntä.

When a pronoun is used in the source language speech to refer to something in the picture, it is preferable to use the referenced noun in the subtitle unless the reference is meant to be unclear.

EXAMPLE:

"I hope you don't mind." (a reporter refers to a recorder at the start of an interview)

CORRECT

Toivottavasti nauhuri ei häiritse.

[I hope you don't mind the recorder.]

INCORRECT

Toivottavasti tämä sopii.

Cohesion should be maintained throughout the translation. If parts of it have to be condensed, words that create unity should not be omitted first. It may even be necessary to add more of them.

### 3.1.3 Theme and rheme

The theme–rheme relationship needs to be taken into account in AV translations, too. The theme–rheme relationship depends on the context and purpose of the message. Typically, information that has been mentioned earlier in the text or that the receiver is otherwise presumed to be familiar with (i.e. the theme) comes before the predicate verb.

EXAMPLE:

COMPARE

Silloin olimme jäädä tien päälle.

- Autoa piti vähän työntää.

WITH

Silloin olimme jäädä tien päälle.

- Piti vähän työntää autoa.

The theme can also be introduced via the picture: for example, when an animal that is the subject of a nature documentary has been shown earlier in the programme, the noun referring to the animal can be used before the predicate in the subtitles.

EXAMPLE:

COMPARE

Genetti on yöeläin  
ja toiselta nimeltään sivettikissa.

[The genet is a nocturnal animal that is also known as the civet cat.]

WITH

Tämä hämärässä liikkuva yöeläin  
on genetti eli sivettikissa.

[Moving in the dark, this nocturnal animal is the genet, i.e. the civet cat.]

New information (rheme), in turn, comes after the predicate.

EXAMPLE:

COMPARE

Nainen tuli taloon.

WITH

Taloon tuli nainen.

For emphasis, new information can also be introduced before the predicate.

EXAMPLE:

Voimme yrittää ratkoa ongelmaa  
monelta eri suunnalta.

Taikasauvaa meillä ei ole.

### 3.1.4 Emphasis

In clauses and sentences, too, emphasis depends on the context and purpose of the message. Finnish has its own way of emphasising what is important, and the translator should avoid interference.

Usually, 1st and 2nd person pronouns do not need to be translated unless the intention is to emphasise the agent.

CORRECT

En pidä porkkanoista.  
- Olet oikeassa, ne ovat pahoja.

INCORRECT

Minä en pidä porkkanoista.  
- Sinä olet oikeassa, ne ovat pahoja.

EXAMPLE:

COMPARE

A: Kaipaanko vaimoasi?

B: - Totta kai.

A: Minun vaimoni kuoli  
pian lapsemme syntymän jälkeen.

WITH

A: Kaipaanko vaimoasi?

B: - Totta kai.

B: Vaimoni kuoli  
pian lapsemme syntymän jälkeen.

### 3.1.5 Repetition

Since the viewer follows the subtitled AV work as a whole, repetition within the source text speech can often be used for a supplementary effect if the subtitles are meant for viewers whose hearing is not impaired. If the speaker repeats a name, word, or clause several times, it is usually unnecessary to subtitle each repetition.

Short, repetitive replies can also be subtitled selectively if the dialogue is particularly fast.

EXAMPLE:

A: Did you come home late last night?

B: Yes.

A: Had you been drinking?

B: Yes.

A: Are you hungover now?

B: Yes.

CORRECT (for example)

Palasitko myöhään?

Olitko kännissä? - Joo.

Onko nyt krapula?

- Joo.

INCORRECT

Palasitko myöhään?

- Joo.

Olitko kännissä?

- Joo.

Onko nyt krapula?

- Joo.

Furthermore, if the speaker repeats the words or sentences of another speaker, the repetition may be reworded or completely omitted if it does not seem necessary.

CORRECT (for example)

Löysin kadulta puhelimen.

- Niinkö?

INCORRECT

Löysin kadulta puhelimen.

- Puhelimenko?

### 3.2 Domestication

In subtitles, the level of domestication depends on the cultural distance between the source and target cultures and on the translator's assessment of the importance of communicating cultural aspects in the AV work in question. As a rule, expressions that are as idiomatic Finnish as possible are preferred.

However, to avoid any conflict between the subtitles and the depicted time and place, culture-bound expressions should not be replaced with expressions that refer to specific aspects of Finnish culture. For instance, if an American action hero says "You idiot!" and this is subtitled as "Senkin spede," using a highly culture-bound slang expression, then domestication has been taken too far. In addition, trademarks should not be domesticated with equivalents from Finnish culture. Excessive domestication draws the viewer away from the world and the culture shown in the AV work and should therefore be avoided. When the source text contains culture-bound elements that might not be familiar to the target audience, a safer option is to translate these using a superordinate or generic concept, for example.

EXAMPLE:

"Give me a Kleenex."

CORRECT

Anna nenäliina.

[Give me a tissue.]

INCORRECT

Anna Nessu.

EXAMPLE:

"She appeared on Saturday Night Live."

CORRECT

Hän oli vieraana  
Saturday Night Livessa.

OR

Hän oli vieraana  
suorassa komediaohjelmassa.

[She appeared on a live comedy show.]

INCORRECT

Hän oli vieraana  
Putouksessa.

Forms of address, too, tend to be culture-bound. For instance, the name of the addressee is often repeated in American English, but in Finnish this often feels less idiomatic. While it is important that the names of the characters are used in the translation where appropriate, unnecessary repetition should be avoided.

The choice between singular or plural 2nd person pronouns and verb forms when addressing a single person is influenced by Finnish social convention as well as the depicted cultural customs, period, and genre of the source text. The translator has to decide whether formal pronoun use typical to German or French cultures, for example, should be kept in the Finnish translation or whether it is preferable to reach a compromise, as direct forms of address tend to be avoided in Finnish. Depending on the genre and purpose of the programme, formal 2nd person expressions can also be omitted completely.

Sometimes the decision on the formal or informal address forms can be based on the presence of other characters in the scene (e.g. in a formal situation a subordinate may address their superior with the formal singular) or the absence of other characters (e.g. in a private conversation the subordinate and the superior may address each other with the informal singular). However, it is important to determine whether conveying these source culture aspects is essential considering the purpose of the AV work.

The titles *herra* 'sir' and *rouva* 'madam' are quite rare in modern Finnish. When they are used in source language speech, there is often no need to translate them as such. Sometimes, however, *herra* or *rouva* is appropriate, and the formal singular form is used. For instance, the English form of address used in the armed forces "sir/ma'am" is usually expressed as "herra/rouva + [rank]" in Finnish.

EXAMPLE:

In school: "Miss Brown, may I be excused?"

CORRECT

Opettaja, saanko poistua?

INCORRECT

Miss Brown, saanko poistua?

OR

Saanko poistua?

EXAMPLE:

At the poker table: "Mr. Harris, your turn."

CORRECT

Sinun vuorosi, Harris.

INCORRECT

Herra Harris, sinun vuorosi.

OR

Herra Harris, teidän vuoronne.

### 3.3 Vernacular, Dialects, and Slang

The use of any stylistic device should always be an informed choice: style is guided by the genre and the overall style of the AV work, the text type (e.g. dialogue vs documentary narration), the scene and situation, the character, and the purpose of the expression. The use of slang, dialects, or very local expressions requires careful consideration. They may not be universally understood in the target culture, and slang terms in particular may grow old quickly. It is safest to use expressions that are not in conflict with the overall style and purpose of the AV work, or do not otherwise shift the viewer's focus from the programme or film.

If needed, an illusion of vernacular, slang or dialect can be created by scattering appropriate expressions throughout the translation. This creates an implied style instead of a translation that differs very much from standard language and is therefore harder to comprehend.

EXAMPLE: some stylistic devices

Word choices: "Moro, jäbä!"

Vernacular passive forms: "Me mennään bileisiin."

Subject-predicate incongruence: "Kytät on sikoja!"

Omitted possessive suffix: "Meidän äiti tekee teidän äitien ruuat."

See also 3.5 Foreign Languages and Dialects.



### 3.4 Expletives

When translating expletives, close attention should be paid to the criteria presented in section 3.2. Written swear words are stronger than spoken, and swear words and their use vary in different cultures. Moreover, the perceived strength of the same source language swear word, such as the English word "fuck", depends on the context and situation.

An impression of swearing can be created by implication: it is unnecessary to translate every single swear word, and a direct equivalent may not be the most fitting one in every context. In addition, swearing should seem natural in regard to the Finnish language. Even strong swear words can be used in a suitable context.

If swearing has been censored with a sound effect but is deemed necessary to be marked in the translation, three asterisks can be used.

EXAMPLE:

Charlie jätti minut.  
- \*\*\* mikä sika!

### 3.5 Foreign Languages and Dialects

Translation of lines that are uttered in foreign languages other than the primary source language may be italicised.

EXAMPLE

Tässä on ystäväni Michel.  
- *Hei. En puhu englantia.*

Foreign expressions that are used in the translation should be italicised. See also 2.3.2.6 Italicising.

EXAMPLE

*Ja voilà, se on valmis!*

Foreign proper nouns are to be inflected in accordance with Standard Finnish.

CORRECT

Tervetuloa Bordeaux'hon.

INCORRECT

Tervetuloa Bordeauxiin.

Proper nouns originally written with foreign characters, such as the Cyrillic script, should be transcribed in accordance with Finnish convention.

CORRECT

Gorbatšov piti puheen.

INCORRECT

Gorbachev piti puheen.

Regional or social dialects should be translated in an implicative manner, if at all, in order to avoid compromising readability. An unusual choice of words here and there is usually sufficient in creating an illusion of distinctive language. Translating foreign language dialects with Finnish dialects is not recommended.

CORRECT

Se sanoi, että homma on klaari.

INCORRECT

See sanos et kyl homma o klaari.

See also 3.3 Vernacular, Dialects, and Slang as well as 3.2 Domestication.

### 3.6 Songs and Poems

Song lyrics and poems should be subtitled in the same way as regular speech, including punctuation and hyphens.

CORRECT

Yhdessä kuljetaan  
päivän kirkkauteen -  
tiellä, jonka varrella  
kasvaa villejä lupiineja.

INCORRECT

Yhdessä kuljetaan  
Päivän kirkkauteen  
Tiellä jonka varrella kasvaa  
Villejä lupiineja

Translations of songs and poems that are heard in the background may be italicised. If the singer or reader can be momentarily seen on camera, none of the subtitles should be italicised. However, if the intention is to distinguish singing from speech, the subtitles or lines that include singing may be italicised or centred. However, it's essential to use the same consistent style in songs throughout the whole AV work, whether a single programme or a complete series. Bear in mind that if there is a lot of singing in a programme and most of the subtitles would be italicised, the italics may not serve a purpose.

Lyrics need not always be translated. As a rule, they should be translated if they are important to the storyline or the theme. The lyrics of theme songs are not usually translated.

Poems and songs often contain rhymes, which can be conveyed in the translation, too. However, rhyming does not carry well over multiple subtitles. The viewer is most likely to notice rhymes within a single subtitle. It is not always necessary to translate rhyming, translating just the content may suffice. If needed, a poetic impression can be achieved through word choices or changes to the word order.

EXAMPLE:

Miksi tulit tänään? --> Sa miksi tänään saavuit?

### 3.7 Letters and Messages

The way that letters, emails, messages etc. are subtitled depends on the situation.

When the content of a letter is shown on-screen but the letter is not being read aloud, it is subtitled as any other textual element (see 2.3.2.3 On-screen textual elements):

Rakas Lily,  
minulla on ikävä sinua.

When the writer is reading the text while writing it, it is subtitled normally and without quotation marks:

Rakas Lily,  
minulla on ikävä sinua.

When the writer is reading a letter they have finished writing, it is subtitled normally and with quotation marks:

"Rakas Lily,  
minulla on ikävä sinua."

When the voice of the writer is heard as an inner monologue while writing, italics without quotation marks are used:

*Rakas Lily,  
minulla on ikävä sinua.*

When the voice of the writer is heard as the recipient is reading a letter, italics without quotation marks are used:

*Rakas Lily,  
minulla on ikävä sinua.*

When the recipient is reading a letter aloud, it is subtitled normally and with quotation marks:

"Rakas Lily,  
minulla on ikävä sinua."

When the recipient is reading a letter silently, italics and quotation marks are used:

*"Rakas Lily,  
minulla on ikävä sinua."*

### 3.8 Abbreviations

Good subtitling simulates spoken language where abbreviations are not normally used. Finnish title abbreviations such as *tri*, *hra*, *rva*, *nti* etc. do not therefore belong in subtitles. Depending on the situation, they should be written in full or omitted. Furthermore, abbreviations such as *esim.*, *mm.*, and *jne.* ('e.g.', 'i.a.', 'etc.') should be spelled out in full.

However, many concepts that are often expressed with abbreviations, and many abbreviations that previously had to be capitalised, can now be written in lowercase: in Finnish, e.g. both AIDS and aids, and DNA and dna, are acceptable. *Kielitoimiston ohjepankki*, provided by the Institute for the Languages of Finland, is a useful resource for information on the spelling and inflection of abbreviations.

### 3.9 Expressing Time

When time is translated, interference from the script is common. In Finnish, the full stop is used to separate hours and minutes. Hundredths of a second are separated with a comma: 16.23,01. A leading zero is not usually used as the first digit, although it may be used for clarity for the early hours of the morning.

| CORRECT | INCORRECT |
|---------|-----------|
| 16.23   | 16:23     |
| 6.23    | 06.23     |
| 00.18   | 24.18     |

### 3.10 Numbers and Units of Measurement

It is recommended that the numbers from 1 to 10 as well as 100 and 1,000 are always written out in letters whereas greater numbers are expressed in digits.

EXAMPLE: "Should we get two or three tickets?"

| CORRECT                           | INCORRECT                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Otetaanko kaksi vai kolme lippua? | Otetaanko 2 vai 3 lippua? |

Numbers greater than one thousand are to be separated with a space into groups of three digits.

| CORRECT                                 | INCORRECT                             |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Mike voitti lotossa<br>2 300 000 euroa. | Mike voitti lotossa<br>2300000 euroa. |

The per cent sign "%" and the per mille symbol "‰" should be written out in dialogue. The symbols may be used when there are many numerical expressions or a lot of precise information to be shared in a science programme, for example.

Units of measurement for height, weight, or temperature, for example, should be converted to Finnish measurements, unless there is a specific reason to use the original unit.

EXAMPLES:

"It weighed 2 stone."

"Wind speed was 65 miles per hour."

| CORRECT             | INCORRECT           |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Se painoi 12 kiloa. | Se painoi 2 stonea. |

Tuulen nopeus  
oli 30 metriä sekunnissa.

Tuulen nopeus  
oli 65 mailia tunnissa.

When converting units, the degree of precision should be appropriate to the context.

EXAMPLE: "The shark was only 12 feet away."

CORRECT

Hai oli jo  
kolmen metrin päässä minusta.

INCORRECT

Hai oli jo  
3,66 metrin päässä minusta.

[The shark was only three metres away.]

As a rule, foreign currencies should not be converted to euros. This applies to drama, in particular. However, if it is necessary to convey the value of foreign currency in euros, for example in a documentary, it can be done in brackets after the original sum and currency: "*Tehtaassa kuukausipalkka oli 350 pesoa (16 euroa)*." See also 2.3.3.5 Other punctuation.

Currency symbols should be avoided in subtitles. The unit should be spelled out.

CORRECT

Maito maksoi kolme dollaria.

Maito maksoi kolme euroa.

INCORRECT

Maito maksoi \$3. / Maito maksoi 3\$.

Maito maksoi 3e.

### 3.11 Translator Credit

The translator has the right to be credited on screen: according to Finnish copyright law, the name of the author shall be stated in a manner required by proper usage. In addition, the translator credit shows that the translator stands by the translation.

An appropriate place for the translator credit subtitle is after the actual programme has finished, at the beginning of the closing credits after the names of the key production personnel, for example. When there is dialogue or some other type of speech during or after the closing credits, the translator credit should be shown as the very last subtitle. In this way, the viewer will know not to expect more subtitled speech.

The translator credit subtitle should be given the same reading time as any other subtitle in accordance with reading time recommendations.

The subtitle is usually centred. Appropriate forms include the following:

Suomennos: Leila Virtanen

Suomennos: Leila Virtanen  
Firma Oy

Suomentaja:  
Leila Virtanen / Firma Oy

If a translation by another translator (e.g. the translation of a poem, play, or literary work) has been used in the programme, the quoted translator should be credited prior to the translator of the programme. If the original translation has been edited, for example, to adhere to the reading speed requirements, it should be noted in the credit.

Direct quote:

Shakespeare-suomennos:  
Paavo Cajander

Suomennos: Leila Virtanen  
Firma Oy

Edited quote:

Shakespeare-suomennos  
Paavo Cajanderia mukaillen

[Translation of Shakespeare  
adapted from Paavo Cajander]

Suomennos: Leila Virtanen  
Firma Oy

## SOURCES

Pedersen, Jan 2017. The FAR model: assessing quality in interlingual subtitling. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*. No. 28, p. 210–229.  
[https://www.jostrans.org/issue28/art\\_pedersen.pdf](https://www.jostrans.org/issue28/art_pedersen.pdf)

# Glossary

**1st translation** – a timed AV translation created from scratch without a template, also called origination

**2nd translation** – a subtitled translation that has been created over a timed template or a 1<sup>st</sup> translation in another language, also called subtitling from a template or an EMT (English Master Template)

**AV work** – an entire audiovisual work, i.e. a work combining picture and sound; an audiovisual text

**Chaining** – timing consecutive subtitles so that they are separated only by the minimum interval

**Coherence** – the consistency of the content of a text; its unity

**Cohesion** – the internal connectedness of a text; consecutive words, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs are connected to each other, comprising a unified text

**Continuation mark** – a hyphen that is used after a space at the end of a subtitle to indicate that the sentence is continued in the next subtitle

**Dialogue mark** – a hyphen indicating that the speaker changes

**Domestication** – a translation strategy that is used to fade structures and expressions typical to the source language, or references that are foreign to the target culture, by substituting them for ones that the target audience is more familiar with

**Frame** – a single image in a video. The most common television broadcast format PAL has 25 frames per second. Other formats may have a different number of frames per second.

**Idiomatic** – an expression or stylistic element that is characteristic to a language and considered correct and natural by native speakers

**Interference** – interlingual influence; the translation reflects linguistic elements from the source text

**Master template** – a pre-timed subtitle file. It may be a first translation in a language other than the target language, an intralingual subtitle file, or a source language script that has been segmented and timed. The translation will be created over the template.

**Noun phrase** – a noun and its attributes

**Source language** – the language or languages used in an AV work that is being translated into the target language

**Source text** – an audiovisual text that is being translated

**Subtitle** – a single screen text of no more than two lines

**Subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing** – interlingual subtitles meant for the deaf and hard of hearing

**Target language** – the language used in an AV translation; the target language referred to in this document is Finnish

**Target text** – in this document: an audiovisual text that has been translated by subtitling

**Textual element** – 1) the translation of an on-screen text or 2) an on-screen text indicating time, place, or names and titles

**Theme and rheme** – the theme, usually at the beginning of a sentence, comprises information that is already known, while the rheme introduces new information later in the sentence; the theme introduces a subject and the rheme tells the reader something new about it

**Timecoding** – assigning timecodes to subtitles by determining the precise start and end times for each subtitle. Sometimes also called spotting or cueing.