REPRESENTATION OF SPEECH DISORDERS IN FILMS (BASED ON THE ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN MATERIALS)

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Articolul abordează reprezentarea tulburărilor de vorbire în filmele anglofone și traducerea acestora în limba rusă prin dublaj și voice-over. Sunt analizate strategiile utilizate în transferul tulburărilor de vorbire, precum păstrarea fonetică, substituirea semantică și omisiunea. Studiul evidențiază provocările traducerii audiovizuale și necesitatea unei abordări echilibrate între fidelitatea față de original, coerența vizuală și percepția publicului.

Speech and language are not only tools for communication, but also indicators of identity and cognitive ability. When disrupted, as in the case of speech and language disorders, these systems deeply impact an individual's interaction with society. The present article, based on the Master's Thesis entitled *Representation of Speech Disorders in Films*, explores how such disorders are portrayed in English-language films and how these portrayals are rendered in the Russian translations.

The theoretical part of this research lays the foundation for understanding the complex nature of speech and language disorders, both from a medical-linguistic perspective and within the context of human communication and cinematic representation. The act of speaking integrates neurological, anatomical, linguistic and psychological elements. This process requires real-time coordination of respiration, phonation, articulation, prosody and timing, and when any component is impaired, speech disorders ensue. These disorders range from articulation issues (such as **lisping** or **rhotacism**), to fluency disruptions (**stuttering**, **cluttering**), to motor planning disorders (**verbal apraxia**) or neurological conditions (**dysarthria**) [1, p.246]; [2, p.275].

Thereof, in the theoretical part, the thesis discusses aspects regarding the classification of speech disorders, dividing them into:

1) *organic disorders* (caused by structural or neurological damage);
2) *functional disorders* (with psychological or idiopathic origins);
3) *developmental disorders* (emerging in early childhood, often without clear aetiology).

The work further differentiates speech disorders from language disorders – a distinction rooted in both linguistics and cognitive science. Speech disorders affect the mechanical and acoustic aspects of spoken language, while language disorders (such

as aphasia, developmental language disorder or pragmatic language deficits) affect the comprehension, formulation or structure of messages. Drawing from scholars like J. DeVito and R. E. Owens, the work highlights how language disorders reflect “deep structure” impairments, while speech disorders affect “surface structure” [4, p.151]; [7].

Additionally, the theoretical discussion includes a sociolinguistic perspective on how disability is constructed. Drawing on L. J. Davis’s disability studies framework, this concept was viewed not just as a medical condition, but also as discursive construct that affects the speaker’s social identity. This lens is particularly important when studying their portrayal in cinema.

In the second part of the study, the analysis shifts towards media representation of these disorders, with a focus on English-language films. Historically, speech disorders were portrayed either comically or symbolically, reinforcing stereotypes or social stigma. However, recent films increasingly depict characters with speech impairments as multidimensional individuals.

A particular focus of the analysis is the correlation between male characters, speech disorders and their emotional expression. In the past, films rarely depicted male characters with speech disorders, creating an impression that such difficulties were either non-existent among men or simply not worthy of representation. This absence reinforced the ideal of the perfect male figure – fluent, confident and emotionally controlled – aligned with traditional masculine stereotypes. Traditionally, such depictions often privileged a model of hegemonic masculinity. Leading male figures were habitually characterised by stoicism, aggression and an unwavering dominance. In this regard, the analysis of films like *Fight Club* (1999), *The King’s Speech* (2010), *Stutterer* (2015), etc. revealed a gradual transformation that allowed for emotional expression of male characters. Therefore, the practical part of this research embedded a contrastive analysis of speech disorder representations in selected English-language films and their Russian translations, with a focus on how such disorders are treated in audiovisual translation (AVT) – specifically dubbing and voice-over [5].

The major goal of this analysis was to uncover how auditory impairments, especially those that are visually marked (e.g., facial tension, hesitation, lip distortion), are preserved, adapted or omitted in translation. Given the multimodal nature of film, speech disorders cannot be treated merely as linguistic oddities; they are audio-visual cues that contribute to character identity, narrative function, and viewer perception. Their translation requires a nuanced, multidimensional approach. A corpus of carefully selected films was analysed, each featuring characters with speech-related impairments and disorders that affect speech and language. These included:

1. *The King’s Speech* (2010) – stuttering as a central conflict;
2. *Stutterer* (2015) – stuttering, internalised speech anxiety;
3. *The Theory of Everything* (2014) – neurodegenerative motor speech disorder;
4. *The Aviator* (2004) – psychological disfluency and OCD;
5. *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) – disorganised speech linked to schizophrenia;
6. *The Sixth Sense* (1999) and *Dead Poets Society* (1989) – psychological trauma.

In each case, the Russian versions (whether dubbed or voiced-over) were examined in parallel with the original. The analysis revealed two major tendencies in translation strategies: preservation-oriented strategies and neutralisation strategies. The former group aims at maintaining the character's distinctive speech traits, even if they challenge synchronisation or linguistic norms. For example, in *The King's Speech*, the protagonist's stammer is both audible and visually foregrounded in close-up scenes. The Russian dub reflects this through phonetic similarity with the consequent loss of semantic accuracy: "Fffffffffather!" - "Фффффффакел!". While the semantic content changed, the articulatory rhythm was preserved, maintaining lip-sync plausibility. Strategically, the translators were placed in a dilemma: they had to sacrifice semantic accuracy in favour of phonetic and visual alignment, prioritising the viewer's perception of authenticity in lip movement over the literal meaning. This decision reflects a broader challenge in dubbing speech-impaired characters, where sound and articulation often outweigh lexical fidelity to preserve the illusion of natural, character-driven speech.

In terms of the latter, the disorder is usually softened, omitted or reinterpreted to prioritise lip-sync, fluency or viewer comfort. The application of this type of strategy was seen in the film *The Sixth Sense* (1999). There, the losses come into the picture. While the original utterance "*D... downtown clinic. S...single-parent family. P...possible mood disorder*" features clear stuttering on initial consonants ("d", "s", "p"), which reflect trauma recall, in the Russian version, these are rendered fluently, with only a change in intonation at the end to suggest escalating emotion: "*Центральная клиника. Сын матери-одиночки. Подозрение на психическое расстройство*".

Across the analysed cases, several key translation strategies were identified and categorised, among which are:

1) Literal phonetic replication (e.g. reproduced stutters or lisped sounds);
2) Compensatory substitution (replacing one type of disfluency with another that is easier to adapt);
3) Semantic substitution (modifying the wording to retain character function);
4) Lexical variation (introducing different wordings to adjust pacing);
5) Omission or reduction, especially in dubbing where time constraints or lip-sync demands dominate.

The study concludes that the choice of translation strategy significantly influences how speech-impaired characters are perceived in the target culture. Translators are to consider both the function and emotional weight of the speech disorder in context. This topic remains highly relevant, particularly in light of the increasing public discourse around inclusivity and disability awareness. By bridging linguistics, translation studies and film analysis, the research contributes to the understanding of how media can shape societal attitudes towards disability, and how translators mediate this process across languages.

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Recommended
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