
**BRAND IDEOLOGY AND THE CREATION OF “BRAND CULTURE” - THE USE
OF THE ESTABLISHED EQUIVALENT TECHNIQUE IN THE BULGARIAN
LOCALIZATION OF ANIMATED FEATURE FILM TITLES**

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Abstract: The present article looks at the localization of animated feature film titles for Bulgarian audiences with a focus on the concept of brand ideology as the current evolutionary stage of marketing ideology. The study is descriptive and employs a functionalist approach in considering the use of specific translation techniques as dependent upon the skopos (purpose) and context of the product. The role of the title as paratext is not only to provide an initial point of contact with the product (the phatic function of the title) but also to be functional in terms of creating a certain aesthetic effect (the expressive function) and motivating the consumer to take action regarding the product (the appellative function). Thus, the title becomes not only a “threshold” or a “vestibule” in Genette’s terms, but also a vehicle for accomplishing the authors’ (in the broadest sense) particular goals and objectives - in the context of brand ideology, this would entail the brand’s coming into existence, the establishing of its reputation (the brand’s image), as well as its relationship with the target audience (the consumers). In relation to the concept of brand ubiquity - the reality of everyone and everything being a brand - the title of a product, analogously to a name, has the power to establish its existence (distinguish it from other brands and products) and anchor the relationship with the target audience/consumers (provide them with a point of reference and a counterpart to relate to/with). Furthermore, in the context of globalization, brand ubiquity and worldwide brand presence require gauging the brand’s success in terms of global popularity and recognizability - and, most importantly, international appeal and positive optics. This leads us to the crucial importance of the interplay between glocalization (or internationalization in a global framework in Pym’s terms) and localization - the precarious balance between managing intercultural and inter-linguistic friction by limiting/stripping away real-world cultural markers while simultaneously limiting the ensuing “blandness” effect which is largely undesirable and counterproductive for brands capitalizing on originality and interest (such as those in the entertainment industry). The present article thus argues that brands in the field of animated films for worldwide audiences potentially approach this conundrum by means of substituting the brand’s and respectively the product’s country-of-origin culture with a purposely-constructed, fictional (potentially universal and non-problematic) culture. This particular dynamic finds concrete and practical expression in the present article from the perspective of the localization and, more specifically, the translation of animated film titles with the use of a specific technique - that of established equivalent (Hurtado Albir and Molina, 2002). The article discusses the potential ideological implications of the unique ways in which brands (in the face of five of the biggest animation studios) employ this translation technique in title localization in order to optimize their relationship with the Bulgarian audiences while also ensuring brand recognizability and projecting individuality - and, therefore, establishing a position of power for the brand.

Keywords: brand ideology, localization, translation techniques, animated feature films, movie titles

1. INTRODUCTION

Animated feature films have been demonstrating a trend of exceptional popularity and profitability on a worldwide scale for years, rivaling multi-million-dollar productions of all genres in their budget, stellar cast and, ultimately, box-office revenue. For the past 3 years, however, there has been an even greater and more remarkable surge in their popularity to the extent that in 2024 half of the top 10 movies in the worldwide box office chart were animated productions, while the chart itself was headed by the newest, second installment of the *Inside Out* franchise. The trend appears to be still operative, as the following year, 2025, the chart was spearheaded by two animated productions, *Ne Zha 2* and the second part of another franchise - *Zootopia 2*. Most recently, as of July 2026 the top ten features three animated movies (*The Super Mario Galaxy Movie*, *Toy Story 5*, and *Hoppers*), with the *Minions & Monsters* production in close 11th place (Box Office Mojo, 2024, 2025, 2026).

Such a strong trend and the exceptional revenue from this genre of films around the world make a strong case for the crucial importance of localization for international markets and the ideological connotations of brand ubiquity. These topics of interest and their interplay the present article proposes to study and discuss on the basis of the material, textual evidence of the utilization of one specific translation technique - that of established equivalent - in the Bulgarian localized titles of the aforementioned genre of animated feature films.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present article proposes to use a descriptive and functionalist approach to the analysis of a purposely created corpus of animated feature film titles from five of the leading animation studios (*Pixar, Walt Disney Animation Studios, Blue Sky Studios, Illumination* and *Sony Pictures Animation*). The qualitative analysis in the study is based upon quantitative findings regarding the techniques of translation used in creating the Bulgarian variants of all animated feature film titles produced by these studios during the period between the early 90's and 2025 (see Iglíkova, 2025). In addition, the paper maps the practice of localization of products seen as relying on, yet being more than, simple translation onto one of the translation techniques outlined by Molina and Hurtado Albir (2002, 509-511) and the idea of brand ideology as the ultimate strive for brand establishment and success through the brand's relationship with the consumer/target audience (Levy and Luedicke, 2013).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, the process of localization is seen by researchers in the field of Translation studies as “more sophisticated than translation” (Pym 2004, p. 25; 2023), “a combination of language, region, and culture related to the notion of markets” (Jimenez-Crespo, 2024, p. 13). The industry's view of the term is more procedural and purports that “[l]ocalization involves taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold” (LISA, 2003, p. 13). On the one hand, this relates to a phenomenon many moviegoers and film aficionados from all over the world have mentioned and discussed for years (ever since the emergence of online forums and social media as a means of communication and community creation) - the “translated” title is often not seen as “properly” translated, i.e. it often does not comply or diverges from some unwritten, internalized norms of EFL-speakers regarding what is an appropriate and “good” translation of the source text they have access to (Emilov, 2024; SvetlioPrezident, 2022; Zoghiami, 2026). On the other hand, such discrepancies are of course to be expected, since the translation of a title as an element of a product and a product itself, an extension of a brand and a brand in itself, is not a simple matter of preserving the referential meaning of the source - it is much more the question of ensuring the resulting title serves specific intended functions in the new context it will be existing in.

The important role of the title as paratext is usually discussed in terms of it being defined as a “threshold”, a “vestibule” (using Genette's metaphors) - the first point of contact the audience has with the text. Extrapolated to the context of digital content, brand ideology and marketing, however, another aspect Genette discusses seems to be pertinent - the paratext as “a zone of influence on the public”, whose most essential function is to “ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author's purpose” (cited after Batchelor, 2018, pp. 12-13). In this respect, movie titles are especially effective vehicles for establishing a brand and its relationship with the potential consumer base - in other words, the brand exists as an entity with its own produced, constructed identity, image and reputation, possessing a cultural aspect and a set of associated values and beliefs, whose existence and success is upheld by establishing a relationship with the consumer.

In the overarching context of globalization, however, that consumer is international, culturally, linguistically, geographically diverse, which places localization at the intersection between internationalization and translation. With entertainment brands like animation studios aiming at universal popularity and worldwide audiences, finding the appropriate balance is crucial since the brand needs to simultaneously distinguish itself as an individuality with its own unique characteristics (in order to be recognizable and interesting), while at the same time it needs to establish a relationship with the consumer, to bridge the existing geographical, cultural and linguistic distance. This dynamic is a tug-of-war between uniqueness (and therefore newness and foreignness) and familiarity (the brand presenting itself as belonging within the target culture and context, as being a natural and normal fit).

The first emphasizes SL/SC - TL/TC friction, the second - the lack of it, with localization serving as the process of minimizing or at least optimizing the gap between the two extremes of internationalization or “glocalization”, which involves “the suppression of elements of the culture in which the product is developed in favor of supposedly neutral ‘international’ standards” (Jimenez-Crespo, 2024, p. 23) and the efforts towards adapting with a view of the target culture and language (the translators' input). By internationalizing or “glocalizing”, the brand strips itself and its product (in the context of the present study, the title) of cultural markers which could potentially create problems or challenges at the translation stage of producing the actual localized product. This definitely makes the translation and localization process more efficient in terms of translator team effort, yet it is not always an optimal course of action for brands and products which are not purely pragmatic and function-oriented (and in the present day, even the most pragmatic of brands are well aware of the importance of paying attention to the cultural and aesthetic aspects of their image and products, and therefore aim at the perfect brand pyramid, see Levy and Luedicke, 2013, p. 63). The resulting culturally “bare” product runs the risk of being too generic, lacking personality and individuality and therefore setting up the brand and the associated product for failure in the establishing of a relationship with the customer. The potential compromise which has been utilized in the case of animated film titles, arguably, involves the initial stripping away of too specific real-world cultural markers (internationalization/glocalization) in order to reduce the potential friction between the source culture

and the target culture which would widen the distance between the brand and the potential consumers of its product it aims to establish a relationship with. After this initial “neutralizing”, the brand invests in creating a new, purposefully created, manufactured “brand culture” - one that is fictional (and hence allegedly neutral in terms of real-world culture), creative (hence captivating and interesting) and heavily marked with substitutes for the actual, organic cultural markers of the country of origin (hence enhancing the brand’s position and exposure).

This underlying dynamic was observed on the level of the product of the translation (the localized title) itself, namely in the specific way of employing the established equivalent translation technique, one of the leading translation techniques in the corpus of the study. Traditionally, this technique is one which potentially gives priority and influence to the target language and culture (leaning towards domestication, to use Venuti’s terms, 2008), as it is traditionally used to substitute an existing idiom or set phrase from the SL with one in the TL. These units of substitution are established within the target culture and language system and norms, they are “organic” and naturally occurring in the sense that the native language users have established them in the course of the development of the culture and language itself through frequency of usage and by institutionalizing them (including them in dictionaries and other kinds of referential literature). On the other hand, in the context of digitalization and globalization there have come to exist in the present day alternative (and much faster and larger-volume) mechanisms for introducing a unit of language into the system and establishing it as “set” simply by means of the speed with which content that contains it is generated and circulated digitally. Thus, the language may not only acquire new elements much faster than any official dictionary or encyclopedia could manage to documentalize (which has historically always been the case), but there also exists the technology to make it publicly accessible, proliferate and popularize it (even make it “viral”) among a very broad public. In the case of international-aiming brands and products, this is a potential pathway of influence on consumers in a stealthy way of sorts - seemingly by “hijacking” the means of production of their own language.

This hijacking can be illustrated by the creation of “artificial” or “produced” established equivalents whose “set” status has been generated by the same authors (in the broadest sense) who came up with the equivalents themselves and digitally wrote them into existence. Being artificially-created and highly purposeful, they are very well curated representations of the brand’s image and product, complete with sets of desirable values and positive associations.

A direct example of this on the level of translation technique are the two different ways in which the established equivalent technique figures in the corpus of the present study - out of 39 overall instances of its use, only 9 are of the “organic”, TL/TC-oriented type, whereas the overwhelming majority is of the “artificial” or “produced” kind. This mechanism of predominantly using SC/SL-oriented established equivalents is also predicated on the predominant pattern of title creation for franchise productions in animated feature films. Iglíkova (2023, 2024, 2025) notes that the titles of franchise movies with their multiple installments typically consist of a constant initial title - a phrase which is retained in all subsequent episodes of the film - and an added subtitle/additional title elements, which serve to distinguish the first movie from the next ones. Once the initial title has been localized and the decisions have been made regarding the technique or set of techniques to be employed in order to achieve the desired purpose, this chunk of paratext becomes digitally wide spread on a global scale - the entire world wide web becomes the encyclopedia or dictionary, containing the accepted translation for the specific set phrase; this, then, turns it into an established equivalent - an artificially produced one on the linguistic level, in addition to being fictional and virtual (artificial and produced) in terms of cultural content. One could argue that these titles then populate the entire web like slogans, activating the associations embedded in them by the brand and further promoting it with every search hit.

Once a film has turned from a standalone production into a franchise (subsequent parts have been produced), this initial “slogan”, the original title of the first part, then turns into a constant element of subsequent titles - and is always rendered in exactly the same way as it was in the first place. Localization and translation teams do not go again through the process of selecting the appropriate techniques for rendering the title, instead they utilize the already established, albeit artificially, equivalent.

If we look at the examples of using organic established equivalents, those include the 5 instances of usage in the initial title of a franchise series (including *Rio* / “Рио”, *The Smurfs* / “Смърфове”, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* / “Облачно с кюфтера” (among other techniques), *Hotel Transylvania* / “Хотел Трансилвания” (among other techniques) and once in the fourth film of the *Ice Age* franchise - *[Ice Age]: Continental Drift* / “Ледена епоха 4: Континентален дрейф” (also alongside other techniques). In addition, the technique was used in 4 standalone productions - alongside other techniques in *Lightyear* / “Баз Светлина Година”, in *Winnie the Pooh* / “Мечо Пух” (based on previous translations of the book/TV animated series), *The Emoji Movie* / “Емоджи: Филмът” and in *Peter Rabbit* / “Зайчето Питър” (also based on a previous book translation).

As far as the overwhelming majority of instances of use of the artificial, brand-based established equivalent, those include the following:

- *Frozen 2* / “Замръзналото кралство 2” (1 instance);

- *Moana 2*/"Смелата Ваяна 2" (1 instance);
- *Rio 2*/"Рио 2" (1 instance);
- *Ice Age: [...]*/"Ледена епоха: [...]" (4 instances);
- *Despicable Me 2/3/4*/"Аз, проклетникът 2/3/4" (3 instances);
- *Minions*/"Миньони" (1 instance);
- *The Secret Life of Pets*/"Сами вкъщи" (1 instance);
- *Sing 2*/"Ела, изпей! 2" (1 instance);
- *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2*/"Облачно с кюфтета 2" (1 instance);
- *The Smurfs 2, Smurfs: [The Lost Village]*/"Смърфове 2", "Смърфове: [Забравеното селце]" (2 instances);
- *Hotel Transylvania 2, Hotel Transylvania 3: [Summer vacation], Hotel Transylvania: Transformania*/"Хотел Трансилвания 2", "Хотел Трансилвания 3: [Чудовишна ваканция]", "Хотел Трансилвания: [Трансформация]" (3 instances);
- *The Angry Birds Movie 2*/"Angry Birds: Филмът 2" (1 instance);
- *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*/"Спайдър-Мен: В Спайди-вселената", "Спайдър-Мен: През Спайди-вселената" (2 instances).

The predominance of the artificially produced, branded established equivalent seems to support the aforementioned hypothesis that brands rely heavily on what on surface level may seem as resorting to domestication-leaning techniques (selecting established equivalent instead of more explicitly and expectedly SC/SL-oriented and foreignizing techniques such as calque or borrowing, for example). On the other hand, however, this seeming TL-focus is one that rarely exploits the traditional, solely TL-originating set phrases or idioms, or, for that matter, much more rarely resorts to fictional, produced by the target culture and context tropes. An interesting example of the last is the use of the discursive creation technique (29 overall instances as compared to the 39 of the established equivalent), in two instances of which it was based on reference and allusion to phenomena or objects from Bulgarian pop-culture - case in point, the title of the first part of the "Sing" franchise, before it was merged with the brand image and became an established equivalent of the artificial kind, was translated to allude to a popular song from the early 2000s by Deep Zone Project and Kamen Vodenicharov, called "Ела, изгрей!" ("Come, rise!") - sounding extremely similar to and rhyming with "Ела, изпей!" ("Come, sing!"). Another interesting example of such creativity based on the pop-culture of the locale is the translation of the title *The Secret Life of Pets* - "Сами вкъщи" ("Home alone - plural form") when it appears initially, once again before being consumed for the brand's purposes as a paraphrase of the popular movie *Home Alone*/"Сам вкъщи" ("Home Alone - singular form").

4. CONCLUSIONS

In light of the research above, there are particular insights to be gleaned regarding the potential ideological implications of the unique ways in which the studios as brands (along with the products they subsume as brands of a lower order as well) employ established equivalent in title localization and the way in which they modify it to serve their purpose of optimizing their relationship with the Bulgarian audiences. The overall goal of creating this fictional cultural "avatar" of sorts in order to potentially compensate for the necessary compromise in cultural and linguistic markedness in order to insure localizability results in the creation and establishment of a so-called "brand culture". This construct is not the product of an "organic" process of crystallization over time and space, within the boundaries and with the means of a specific, local, real-world culture. Instead we have a carefully-curated brand image, subsumed under a controlled brand culture, whose priorities include its survival and success above all else. In this sense, the use of a specific technique traditionally expected to feature in contexts which lean towards domesticating instead of foreignizing, has become a revolt of sorts, a hijacking and a switching of a TC-oriented solution with one which is designed to seem familiar while being not even SC-oriented, but rather highly brand-centered. This could potentially be viewed as the dynamic of the brand - being an artificial, manufactured entity and identity of its own, at the same time posturing as independent and unique and as ultimately universal and global - going beyond the technique and, more importantly, beyond its markedness as signaling a tendency towards either end of the domestication-foreignization scale and ultimately towards the establishing a position of power for the brand, whatever the means.

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