

FILM SCRIPTS AS OBJECTS OF LINGUISTIC RESEARCH AND THEIR TRANSLATION CHALLENGES

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Abstract. *Film scripts (screenplays) are hybrid texts: written documents designed for oral performance and multimodal realization. This article offers an expanded, publication-ready review of film scripts as objects of linguistic research and of the main translation problems that emerge when scripts are adapted across languages and media. First, the article clarifies the screenplay's status within telecinematic discourse as a form of prefabricated orality—planned discourse engineered to simulate spontaneous conversation. Second, it synthesizes key analytic approaches, including pragmatics, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, computational stylistics, and multimodal perspectives. Third, it examines translation challenges in both pre-production adaptation and post-production audiovisual translation (AVT), focusing on the interaction of technical constraints (e.g., lip-synchrony, isochrony, subtitle space–time limits) with pragmatic meaning, cultural reference, and characterization. The article concludes with methodological recommendations and a research agenda that integrates multimodal corpora, script–screen alignment, and translation-process evidence.*

Keywords: *film scripts; screenplays; telecinematic discourse; prefabricated orality; corpus linguistics; pragmatics; audiovisual translation; subtitling; dubbing.*

Аннотация. *В данной статье рассматриваются киносценарии как особый объект лингвистического исследования и анализируются основные трудности их перевода. Подчеркивается промежуточная природа сценария между письменной и устной речью, а также его мультимодальный характер. Исследование систематизирует современные подходы к анализу сценарного дискурса, включая прагматику, дискурс-анализ, корпусную лингвистику и мультимодальный анализ. Особое внимание уделяется проблемам аудиовизуального перевода — субтитрования и дубляжа, где технические ограничения взаимодействуют с прагматическим значением, культурными реалиями и характеристикой персонажей. В статье также предлагаются методологические рекомендации для дальнейших исследований телесинематического дискурса и перевода киносценариев.*

Ключевые слова: *киносценарий, телесинематический дискурс, прагматика, аудиовизуальный перевод, субтитры, дубляж, мультимодальность, корпусная лингвистика.*

Annotatsiya. *Mazkur maqolada kino ssenariylari lingvistik tadqiqot obyektini sifatida tahlil qilinib, ularni tarjima qilishdagi asosiy muammolar o'rganiladi. Ssenariyning yozma va og'zaki nutq oralig'idagi o'ziga xos tabiati hamda multimodal xususiyatlari yoritiladi. Tadqiqotda pragmatika, diskurs tahlili, korpus lingvistikasi va multimodal tahlil kabi zamonaviy yondashuvlar tizimlashtirilgan. Ayniqsa, subtitr va dublyaj jarayonlaridagi audiovizual tarjima muammolari, texnik cheklolar, pragmatik ma'no, madaniy birliklar va personaj xarakterini saqlash masalalariga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Shuningdek, kelgusidagi tadqiqotlar uchun metodologik tavsiyalar ishlab chiqiladi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *kino ssenariysi, telekinematik diskurs, pragmatika, audiovizual tarjima, subtitr, dublyaj, multimodallik, korpus lingvistikasi.*

Introduction. Film scripts are specialized texts that specify dialogue, action, scene description, and production-relevant directions. Unlike traditional literary texts, scripts are *written to be spoken* and acquire their full meaning only through performance and audiovisual realization. Consequently, the screenplay occupies an intermediate position between written and spoken registers, while also operating inside a multimodal communicative ecology (image, sound, gesture, editing).

Literature Review. Research on film scripts and telecinematic discourse has significantly expanded during the last two decades. Scholars increasingly recognize screenplays not merely as technical production documents, but as complex linguistic and multimodal texts. Piazza, Bednarek, and Rossi (2011) established the theoretical foundations of telecinematic discourse studies by emphasizing the hybrid nature of scripted dialogue, which imitates spontaneous speech while remaining narratively controlled. Their work introduced the concept of “prefabricated orality,” later developed extensively by Baños (2018), who demonstrated how screenplay dialogue employs colloquial structures, discourse markers, contractions, and formulaic expressions to create an illusion of natural conversation.

Research Methodology. The present study employs a qualitative-descriptive and interdisciplinary methodology combining discourse analysis, pragmatics, corpus-oriented observation, and audiovisual translation analysis.

The research material consists of English-language film scripts, audiovisual translation examples, and scholarly sources related to telecinematic discourse and screenplay translation. The selected materials include screenplay dialogues, subtitle segments, dubbing adaptations, and examples of multilingual cinematic discourse.

Analysis and Results. Telecinematic discourse research has emphasized that script dialogue is neither a transcript of natural conversation nor purely literary narration. It is constructed speech designed to be intelligible, characterizing, and narratively efficient. The concept of *prefabricated orality* captures this design: language is prepared in advance but shaped to resemble everyday talk (Piazza et al., 2011; Baños, 2018).

This article has four aims: To define film scripts as linguistic objects and justify their relevance for linguistic theory and method.

To systematize major strands of script-focused linguistic research.

To describe recurrent translation problems in script translation and AVT (subtitling and dubbing). To propose methodological recommendations and directions for future work. Film scripts warrant linguistic analysis because they link (a) the textual organization of a written document, (b) the interactional logic of spoken performance, and (c) multimodal meaning construction.

Screenplays are produced as working documents for filmmaking but also function as textual artifacts with recognizable conventions (scene headings, action lines, dialogue blocks). This “double orientation”—toward written documentation and toward enacted speech—helps explain why scripts show systematic regularities that can be approached as register features rather than as idiosyncratic stylistic choices.

A central implication is methodological: scripts should be analyzed not only as written texts, but as *pre-performance discourse* whose linguistic form anticipates embodied delivery and visual anchoring.

Script dialogue is typically crafted to sound spontaneous without reproducing the full density of natural interaction, such as extensive hesitations, repairs, and false starts. To achieve “pretended spontaneity”, writers rely on contraction, colloquial lexicon, discourse markers, and formulaic sequences (Baños, 2018).

Corpus studies support this characterization. Lexical bundle research shows that mainstream scripts frequently use high-frequency spoken bundles (e.g., *I don't know, what are you doing*), which organize interpersonal stances and narrative conflict, alongside bundles that index action and staging (Xu & Wijitsopon, 2023). These patterns contribute to audience processing: they cue relationship dynamics quickly and repeatedly.

Importantly, the relative absence of dysfluencies does not necessarily make scripts “non-conversational”. Instead, scripts often exhibit *strategic compression*: turns are designed to deliver plot-relevant action, reveal character traits, and guide audience inference efficiently.

Pragmatics, characterization, and discourse organization

A large portion of script meaning is pragmatic: characters rarely state everything explicitly, and viewers infer intentions and relationships through implicature, presupposition, politeness strategies, and stance.

Pragmatic analyses of film discourse highlight how speech acts (requests, refusals, threats, invitations, apologies) serve narrative functions while also indexing social roles (Dynel, 2011; Bozorova, 2026). Scripts also provide a controlled environment for studying identity construction, including gendered patterns of lexis and semantic domains in telecinematic corpora (McIntyre, 2012).

From a discourse perspective, scripts manage topic progression, information distribution, and turn design under time pressure. They must remain performable, coherent, and audience-friendly, producing an interactional architecture optimized for comprehension and dramatic effect rather than for conversational authenticity.

Corpus linguistics enables large-scale, replicable analysis of script language and its conventional phraseology. Common techniques include:

Lexical bundle extraction to identify recurrent sequences (Xu & Wijitsopon, 2023).

Keyness and comparative register analysis (scripts vs. spontaneous conversation, scripts vs. novels).

Collocation and semantic prosody to trace how evaluation and emotion are lexicalized.

A key benefit is that corpus methods link micro-features (formulaic sequences, discourse markers) with macro-functions (genre conventions, narrative pace, characterization). They also allow for cross-cultural comparisons when parallel corpora or comparable corpora are built.

Computational stylistics and NLP methods complement corpus approaches by modeling narrative and characterization. Studies have used sentiment and valence

measures, interaction networks among characters, and graph-theoretic indicators to capture portrayal differences and relational structure (Ramakrishna et al., 2017). Related work suggests that high-status scripts can exhibit nuanced thematic and stylistic signatures, complicating simple claims that “scripted language” is uniformly unlike natural speech (Holmberg, 2026).

These approaches are especially productive when combined with interpretive analysis, because algorithmic measures become explanatory when linked to discourse functions and narrative roles.

Because scripts function as blueprints for audiovisual meaning, linguistic forms interact with visual and acoustic codes. Multimodal discourse analysis emphasizes that meaning is distributed across dialogue, gesture, camera work, and sound (Mu, 2022).

A further dimension is **linguistic historicization**: in historical films, language is shaped to index period authenticity while staying accessible to contemporary audiences (Werner, 2025). This can affect lexicon, address terms, politeness norms, and pragmatic conventions, with clear consequences for translation.

Translation challenges depend on whether the screenplay is translated for production (adaptation) or for post-production AVT (subtitling and dubbing). In both cases, translators must preserve pragmatic force and characterization while satisfying constraints imposed by performance, timing, and multimodal anchoring.

Translation for production vs. translation for AVT

Two partially overlapping scenarios should be distinguished:

Script translation/adaptation for production, where the translated script may be reworked to fit local production norms, casting, and audience expectations.

AVT of the finished film, where translation is constrained by the audiovisual product and by distribution conventions.

This distinction matters because “equivalence” is defined differently. In production translation, naturalness and performability in the target language often dominate. In AVT, technical and semiotic constraints can decisively shape solutions.

Linguistic and technical constraints

Screenplays mix dialogue with stage directions and technical terminology (e.g., *close-up*, *pan*). Accurate translation requires domain knowledge and stable conventions for technical terms (Blend Localization, 2020).

In **dubbing**, constraints include:

Isochrony (timing alignment).

Phonetic/labial correspondence (lip-synchrony).

Kinesic alignment with visible articulation and gesture (Chaume, 2012).

In **subtitling**, constraints are dominated by space and time, including line length, reading speed, segmentation, and shot changes. These pressures often compel

condensation and reformulation, with potential loss of nuance (Baños & Díaz-Cintas, 2018).

Prefabricated orality increases difficulty: translators must preserve colloquialness, rhythm, and interpersonal stance while adapting to timing, performance, and visual anchoring. Humor, slang, idioms, and culture-bound references frequently resist literal transfer. Wordplay and allusion-based humor may require creative substitution, compensation, or partial loss (Chen, 2024). Translators must decide whether pragmatic effect (e.g., teasing, sarcasm, face-threat) is more crucial than propositional meaning.

A persistent debate concerns **domestication vs. foreignization**. Dubbing traditions often favor domestication to achieve natural-sounding spoken dialogue, while subtitling can tolerate more foreignizing solutions because it does not replace the original soundtrack (Translation Journal, n.d.). Cultural connotation and metaphor sometimes require re-framing rather than direct lexical substitution (Li, cited in Chen, 2024).

Mode-specific issues: subtitling, dubbing, and multilingual scripts

Subtitling prioritizes brevity and legibility. Common strategies include omission, paraphrase, and selective explicitation to keep coherence under strict limitations (Mayoral et al., 1988; Baños & Díaz-Cintas, 2018). Dubbing, by contrast, may shift lexis and syntax to improve lip-synchrony and acting naturalness.

Multilingual scripts add additional complexity: translators must decide whether to preserve language barriers, mark code-switching, or neutralize multilingualism, depending on narrative function and audience expectations (Filmstage, 2023).

AVT can shape ideology and audience perception because translation choices interact with non-linguistic codes (image, music, acting) and with constraints that limit translator agency (Mayoral et al., 1988). Solutions may involve pragmatic strengthening/softening, reformulation, or controlled explicitation, each with consequences for characterization and interpersonal meaning.

To strengthen future studies of film scripts as linguistic objects (and to improve comparability across projects), the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Clarify the data object.** Specify whether the study uses (a) shooting scripts, (b) transcripts, (c) subtitle files, (d) dubbing scripts, or aligned combinations.
2. **Use alignment where possible.** Align script lines with time-coded film footage or subtitle segments to study how linguistic choices map onto multimodal cues.
3. **Combine corpus and pragmatic analysis.** Use corpus findings (bundles, keyness) as hypotheses for qualitative pragmatic analysis of function.
4. **Report constraints explicitly.** For translation-focused work, document subtitle constraints (characters per line, reading speed) and dubbing constraints (isochrony, lip-synchrony) as part of the method.
5. **Support cross-linguistic comparison.** Build comparable corpora across languages and genres, controlling for film type, period, and production context.

Conclusion. Film scripts constitute a productive object for linguistic research because they integrate written planning with spoken realization and multimodal coordination. Linguistic approaches—from pragmatics and discourse analysis to corpus and computational methods—show how scripts use patterned language to construct character, advance narrative, and guide audience inference. In translation, especially in subtitling and dubbing, technical restrictions and multimodal anchoring create systematic pressures on equivalence, often requiring creative adaptation of colloquial speech, humor, and culture-bound meaning. Future research can advance the field by (a) building multimodal screenplay corpora aligned with film footage, (b) combining phraseological and interactional-pragmatic analyses, and (c) incorporating translation-process evidence to better explain how translators manage constraint-driven decision making.

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