

TRANSLATING ACRONYMS OF “DESIGNATED SURVIVOR” INTO ROMANIAN

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Abstract: *The present article is based on research focusing on acronyms, including their forms, spelling and punctuation in English, also discussing various, often contradictory, or ambiguous definitions for so-called “minor” word-formation options. We try to argue for a more lenient definition of abbreviations, acronyms, initialisms and alphabetisms, directing our attention towards certain technical features of acronyms (uppercase letters, with or without periods). The research database is taken from a popular TV series, “Designated Survivor”, resulting in 276 unique acronyms, totaling 1,198 occurrences, which includes acronyms of 2 to 9 letters combined with numbers and specific symbols (hyphens and ampersand), and excludes common ones (DJ, TV) and Roman numbers (II, III, XIII). The most frequent English acronyms with at least 5 occurrences are considered (856), out of which the most popular 15 ones (a total of 664) are examined together with all their Romanian renditions. The conclusion section summarizes the findings, considering the aspect of “slippery” quality, yet interpreting the results from the perspective of overall consistency.*

Keywords: acronyms; subtitle; consistency; English; Romanian.

Introduction

Although the pandemic has been generally bad for worldwide economy, a certain area of mass media entertainment has been able to preserve its popularity, namely film industry. Home office resulted in more binge watching and videogame time, hence audiovisual translation keeps many practitioners busy. As a result, “[e]very day, we are exposed to subtitles in many different forms and formats” (Szarkowska, Díaz Cintas, and Gerber-Morón, 2021: 661), the authors having in mind both intra- and interlingual subtitling.

While there are countless studies on major linguistic aspects of translation and subtitling, we are interested in certain less productive word-formation processes, namely *acronyms* and *initialisms*, which is justified by their constant growth. The topicality of studying these specific shortened forms is elaborated by Bloom, who explains that “[t]wenty-first century language will change to reflect the demands of society and science”, and electronic communication, has resulted in “a proliferation of initialisms”

(Bloom, 2000: 3). To put this into perspective, it is worth mentioning a study focusing on journal titles and abstracts, stating that “the proportion of acronyms in titles increased from 0.7 per 100 words in 1950 to 2.4 per 100 words in 2019” and “the proportion of acronyms in abstracts also increased, from 0.4 per 100 words in 1956 to 4.1 per 100 words in 2019” (Barnett and Doubleday, 2020: 1). Nevertheless, frequency corpuses typically underrate the frequency of acronyms (Izura and Playfoot, 2012: 869), and thus the importance of translating acronyms is also underrated.

Our starting point is that acronyms are inevitable in subtitles, as translators have to render the source language text, which typically contains acronyms (whatever the topic), as subtitle providers have long discovered the importance of compression on screen.

Even if the number of admitted characters per line has increased recently from 35 to 42 (Szarkowska et al., 2021: 664) due to popular streaming and subtitling services and software, little attention is paid to the ‘super-compressed’ initialisms, whose translation – in the overwhelming cases – is either doomed to a huge increase in number of characters (explicitation) or failure in rendering their meaning properly (i.e., borrowed terms). The problem has been signaled in various forms since the end of the 20th century, as Cannon (1989: 104–5) mentions that “[i]n just 75 years, the number of initialisms in numerous languages worldwide has exploded from tens of thousands to perhaps 800,000 recorded in dictionaries, besides those that are still unrecorded”. This is possible, because acronyms are “part of our everyday vocabulary” (Izura and Playfoot 2012: 862), hence we witness the “emergence of a significant number of new acronyms” (Kuzmina, Fominykh, and Abrosimova, 2015: 549). However, a more detailed reasoning is described by Mattiello:

“There are two main reasons for their proliferation. One of these, accounting especially for the use of acronyms and initialisms, is the need for a more efficient vocabulary in technical sectors, such as medicine, politics, law, and commerce... advances in computer science and technology brought with them a constant stream of new concepts and terms, the practice of abbreviating words (CAE ‘Computer-Aided Engineering’, DOS, HTML, mms) became increasingly convenient. The use of alphabetisms has been further popularised with the emergence of Short Message Service – itself an initialism (sms) – giving birth to neologisms”. (Mattiello, 2013: 64)

This explanation may be completed with the ‘faster lifestyle’, leading to the previously mentioned rise in number of characters per line. The need to “conform to space limitations” (Soyer, 2018: 589) or “save time and space” (Ribes, Aranda, and Giba, 2010: 269) especially in “the scientific and

medical communities... technical manuals and reports” (Mancuso, 1987: 124) is so prevalent now that the popularity of certain initialisms (e.g., *US*, *MIT*) has long “superseded the full forms” (Cannon, 1989: 103).

However, the phenomenon is not without issues. As Baue (2002: 486) explains, “[n]ow we are faced with a world of abbreviations, acronyms, aphorisms, euphemisms, and trite expressions that can be confusing and imprecise”. The confusion may stem from the author’s carelessness or overestimation regarding the potential readers’ competence in deciphering acronyms: “they can confuse and alienate unfamiliar audiences, and even well-intentioned writers and speakers may overestimate an audience’s familiarity with abbreviations” (Hales, Williams, and Rector, 2017: 22), and “some consider[ed] universally known may be obscure to others” (Ribes et al., 2010: 269–70), not to mention that certain acronyms are unknown among experts as well (Dróth, 2008: 24–25).

Taking all this into consideration, the conclusion is logical: reading a text full of acronyms becomes “unpleasant and even more difficult” (Soyer, 2018: 589) to which we should also add ambiguity: “the smaller the number of characters is, the more frequent ambiguity is” (Kuzmina et al., 2015: 551), well documented by (online) dictionaries, databases, glossaries and lists of acronyms. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the “nomenclature of biology, chemistry, physics and medicine expands daily, far more quickly than dictionaries are edited”, thus the number of entries in “[s]cientific and technical dictionaries now rival traditional vocabulary dictionaries” (Bloom, 2000: 2). Still, the number of acronyms listed is only a fraction of the ‘full repertoire’, as they come into being at a pace that not even online sources can retain them, while some listed ones are already out of use. This is amply presented by Sánchez and Isern (2011: 312), who conclude that “it is very difficult to construct a general and up-to-date database of acronym-definition repository”. Acronyms used in texts almost always require disambiguation (Jacobs, Itai, and Wintner, 2018: 527), which is “critical to the proper understanding of various types of texts” (HaCohen-Kerner, Kass, and Peretz, 2013: 2133).

A quick search on ambiguous acronyms revealed that longer acronyms are less ambiguous than shorter ones: “AA stands for 266 definitions, AAA for 162, AAAA for 31, AAAAA for 5 and AAAAAA for 1, according to Acronym Finder” (Sánchez and Isern, 2011: 323), while a decade later the same webpage (*Find out what any acronym, abbreviation, or initialism stands for*, <https://www.acronymfinder.com/>, January 30, 2022) offers 308 definitions for AA, 222 for AAA, 48 for AAAA, 6 for AAAAA and still 1 for AAAAAA. Seeing these numbers, it is easy to understand why Begg (2017, 261) mentions “epidemic”, and the created acronyms are “likely to be meaningless, often ambiguous, sometimes unpronounceable, and ugly

instead of euphonic” (Cannon, 1989: 103–4). The logical conclusion of these remarks is simple: “their overuse is to be avoided” (Panajotu, 2010: 165), although the author acknowledges on the same page that this is hardly tenable, as “standard communication... in nearly all fields of military English, e.g., air traffic control, consists mostly of an extensive use of abbreviations”, which may be used effectively even by non-native speakers of English.

Definitions of shortened forms of words

Before presenting our research, discussing certain definitions is vital, such as *acronym*, *initialism*, and *abbreviation*. While these terms have already been used in our text, the quotes taken were carefully selected not to cause unnecessary confusion. Yet, many scholars highlight the unhappy state of these overlapping terms connected to the traditionally less productive word-formation options. As it is impossible to cover the entire literature, we will try to offer relevant definitions.

The starting point is that “scholars have defined these shortened or contracted forms of words and phrases in different ways” (Callegaro et al., 2019: 49), so they are “ambiguously labelled”, resulting in “confusion, overlap and inconsistency” (López Rúa, 2004: 128). This inconsistency also includes that they are mixed with other ‘satellite’ terms considered either superordinate or subordinate, and sometimes used as synonyms: *shortening*, *truncation*, *alphabetism*, *clipping*, *blend* and even *contraction*, all belonging to “other types of word formation” (Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 482).

As for *abbreviations*, Kaspricz (2010) highlights the fact that this term triggers “two parallel concepts”, as it may refer to a more general “word formation process” (Cannon, 1989: 106), referring to all types of shortenings, and a concrete process (e.g., *p. ← page*).

On the one hand, it is the synonym of “shortened form and refers to basically everything that is a shorter form”. Thus, there are scholars who use it as a “general term” (Cintas and Remael, 2020: 137) or “umbrella term” (Hales et al., 2017: 22) for *clippings*, *acronyms*, *initialisms* (Mattiello, 2013: 65), *shortenings* (Kortmann, 2020: 69), *blends* (Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 482), *contractions* (Cintas and Remael, 2020: 137) (Soyer, 2018: 589) (Cannon, 1989: 106) or *truncation* (Canon, 2016: 11). Indeed, all these word formation processes have one important common denominator: they use “less space than the word or phrase it replaces” (Cintas and Remael, 2020: 137).

On the other hand, the dictionary definition of *abbreviation* states that it is perceived as “a reduced form” or “a shortened form of a word, phrase, or symbol” (Trumble and Stevenson, 2002: 3), referring to “a shortened form of a word or a group of words” (Thomas, 2021: 467) or simply “a shortened form of a term” (Soyer, 2018: 589), out of which the first letters are

preserved (CE, 2014: 19). Actually, we tend to think that the “misunderstanding and chaos in nomenclature” (Kasprowicz, 2010) stem from these permissive definitions, as the first letter or letters (“one or several letters”, Cintas and Remael, 2020: 137), and dictionaries add to this misunderstanding by exemplifying acronyms or initialisms with the label “abbreviation” (*BBQ*, *BC*, *FBI* or *FCC* in Trumble & Stevenson, 2002: 199, 933). The result is obvious: confusion about the relationship between these terms, which one is the “superordinate” or “subordinate term” (Mattiello, 2013: 65, Cannon, 1989: 107). However, it is sure that acronyms should be separated from abbreviations (Koelsch, 2016: 78, Kasprowicz, 2010).

The term *acronym*, “has remained maddeningly ill-defined for its entire existence” (Zimmer, 2010), or since it “was coined” (López Rúa, 2004: 110), partially due to imprecise definitions formulated in dictionaries and mainstream grammar books: “Like abbreviations, some acronyms are written with upper-case letters, others with lower case – and again some can be written in either way” (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 1634). The term may refer to both acronyms and initialisms – as they share similar graphical features (only uppercase letters) –, most scholars agree that acronyms are pronounceable as a word (Hales et al., 2017: 22, Barnett and Doubleday, 2020: 4, HaCohen-Kerner et al., 2013: 2133, Zimmer, 2010), exemplified by *SIM*, *RAM*, or *FEMA*. More controversial definitions accept the combination of uppercase letters with numbers or signs and symbols (e.g., hyphen or ampersand), while others accept even combinations of uppercase and lowercase letters, as acronyms “are generally” characterized by uppercase letters (Ribes et al., 2010: 271, Cannon, 1989: 109).

The term *initialism* (Ro. *siglă*, Sp. *sigla*) is used for initial letters substituting the individual words (Bloom, 2000: 2), and the resulting (uppercase) letters should be “pronounced as separate letters” (Thomas, 2021: 467), not as a single word. However, these features are also controversial, as definitions of initialism may refer to either the very first letter of each word or (some of) the first letters (Zandrahimi and Afzoon, 2017: 193). Explanations may underline the importance of always capitalized spelling (Mancuso, 1987: 124, Hales et al., 2017: 22, CE, 2014: 18, *Dicționarul ortografic, ortoepic și morfologic al limbii române*, 2005: XLIII), but they typically include examples with mixed letters as well (e.g., sciences *kWh*, *MHz*). Moreover, there are cases when initialisms are accepted with exclusively lowercase letters as well (Thomas, 2021: 469), which are so common today that people hardly think of them as initialisms or acronyms (e.g., *laser*).

Yet, there are views that the uppercase letters signal that we are faced with an acronym or initialism (Bíró, 2007: 425), but to make matters worse, instead of disambiguation, a new term was introduced for clarifying this,

namely *alphabetism*. This term only complicated the issue, as it was defined to be the superordinate term for both acronyms and initialisms (Quirk et al., 1985, López Rúa, 2002: 33, López Rúa, 2004: 117, Mattiello, 2013: 67, 82, Scarpa, 2020: 66), as it is “typically formed by taking the initial letters of the source words” (Kortmann, 2020: 69). In our view, this definition does not help substantially either in differentiating the previous terms or in convincing us that it may be used as a hypernym for them.

Technical remarks: uppercase letters, periods, space

Other distinguishing feature of both acronyms and initialisms is the lack of spaces and periods between the uppercase letters (Mancuso, 1987: 124, Cannon, 1989: 109, Bloom, 2000: 2, CE, 2014: 19, Thomas, 2021: 467), suggesting that “it is now a more direct part of the vocabulary” (Cannon, 1989: 111), while others explain this with contributing to a “cleaner typography” (Cintas and Remael, 2020: 138).

Unfortunately, lack of spaces and periods is not controversial either. For instance, military English is “not regulated” in this respect, and “[t]he latest trend is to introduce periods” (Panajotu, 2010: 164), although the same author acknowledges that “it is extremely difficult to change or modify a way of spelling already embedded in modern use”. Another disturbing view is when acronyms and initialisms are distinguished based on the presence or lack of periods, arguing that initialisms “can have dots”, or a much worse conclusion is that “four different spellings are also possible” (Mattiello, 2013: 83, HaCohen-Kerner, Kass, and Peretz, 2004: 59), having in mind uppercase letters (no periods, no spaces), uppercase letters (periods, no spaces), only first letter uppercase followed by lowercase letters (as a word), or fully lowercase letters in a single word.

As the more definitions are considered the greater the confusion, we will try to rely on more technical descriptions. In fact, there have been attempts to define acronym as “a word in which half or more of the characters are upper case letters” (Barnett and Doubleday, 2020: 1), or as “consisting of an uppercase letter, followed by 1–4 more uppercase letters, or by the & character and by a single uppercase letter” (Dannewitz Linder, 2016: 253). As for length, scholars “many authors establish a minimum length of 2–3 characters and a maximum of 9–10” (Sánchez and Isern, 2011: 313), although it may contain only one uppercase (Park and Byrd, 2001: 127), but usually rarely “more than 5 letters”, and the most examples contain 3 letters (Yeates, 1999). In this respect, our decision was to include acronyms with two letters as well, as they might seem relevant, because “[t]hree-character acronyms are more common than two-character acronyms and four-character acronyms in both titles and abstracts” (Barnett & Doubleday, 2020: 2). Yet, it is important to remember that many scholars disregard two-letter

acronyms (Callegaro et al., 2019: 55, Zahariev, 2004: 368, Cannon, 1989: 113, Izura and Playfoot, 2012: 870).

Although we agree that this way the origin of the term becomes irrelevant, we also accept that there are cases when it is much more important the meaning and use of the resulting term than its labeling.

First, we accept that *abbreviation* may encapsulate all cases when the resulting term is shorter than the original, including *abbreviation*, *shortening*, *truncation*, *contraction*, *blend*, *clipping*, *acronym*, *initialism* and *alphabetism*. Secondly, based on technical descriptions, we use the term *acronym* for all cases when at least two uppercase letters contribute to the term, enabling us to recognize instances as different from regular words, and disregard the inconclusive differences between *acronym*, *initialism* or *alphabetism* presented earlier. Thirdly, the possibility for other word formation options to be listed among *acronyms* is preserved in case they contain at least two uppercase letters. As such, we are not interested in the origins of the acronym, and a so-called set of ‘fuzzy categories’ are favored (prototype theory, Rosch, 1975, Lakoff, 1987) with salient and less central examples for each word formation possibility. We have opted for these lenient rules for two main reasons. First, too strict ones will always generate sub-classes of exceptions. Secondly, a single uppercase letter is not enough to emerge from a text, as sentences typically start with an initial uppercased letter. Hence, we need at least a string of two uppercase letters with or without spaces and periods between them, and the two uppercase letters may be joined by a hyphen, en-dash, em-dash, or ampersand (Bloom, 2000: 1). Similarly, the string may be preceded or followed by numbers to visually excel among other words. This choice is close to Callegaro’s rules, who also includes “capitalized abbreviations with at least two letters” and only “singular” forms, thus excluding instances with a final lowercase *s* (Callegaro et al., 2019: 54).

These “graphic abbreviations” of at least two uppercase letters (Mattiello, 2013: 72) warn the readers that they are special, condensed/compressed words, and their comprehension may need extra processing time. In our view, it is more important to decipher them correctly, both intra- and interlingually, thus the first stage is recognizing them (with the help of uppercases), followed by proper rendition. From this perspective, it is less important how we categorize them.

In conclusion, we will use the term *acronym* for all the previously mentioned acronyms, initialisms, alphabetisms or other word-formation processes that contain two uppercase letters in the arrangement described above.

Acronyms in “Designated Survivor”

Our research focuses on tracking all the acronyms in a rather popular American TV series entitled “Designated Survivor”, a political thriller available on Netflix (<https://www.netflix.com/watch/80133832?trackId=13752289>, January 30, 2022) with multiple subtitles (e.g., French, German, Romanian or Hungarian). The series received favorable ratings (*Designated Survivor*, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/designated_survivor/s01 (87%), and <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5296406/> (7.5), January 30, 2022), presenting the United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development turning into the accidental President of the United States due to a terrorist attack. The series is among the best 200 Netflix series (*The 214 Best Netflix Series to Watch Right Now*, <https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/guide/best-netflix-shows-and-movies-to-binge-watch-now/>, January 30, 2022) (#178, while “House of Cards” is #166, “Peaky Blinders” is #81, and “Money Heist” is #64).

The storyline builds on fictional events related to the political life of the USA, hence it involves the US government, military as well as more mundane issues, such as health and education. Thus, it amply offers acronyms of all types, predominantly connected to politics, government, administration, and military.

After having watched the entire series (3 seasons with 53 episodes, total running time around 2,400 minutes), we collected all the acronyms in the English transcript into an Excel file, followed by the Romanian acronyms. These were collected ‘as is’, which means that a few acronyms may be repeated, belonging to previous episodes (reminders of previous episodes).

As our definition of acronym is elaborated in the previous section, we only offer the statistics at this stage:

Designated Survivor (2016-2019), 53 episodes	#	Frequency
Unique values of English acronyms, except for the ignore list (<i>DJ, TV, Roman numbers II, III, XIII</i>)	276	5.21 new acronyms/episode (approx. one new in every 8’)
Total occurrences	1,198	22.60 new acronyms/episode (approx. one in every 2’)

TABLE 1. ACRONYM FREQUENCY

A more detailed breakdown justifies the predominance of three-letter acronyms, which is followed by two-letter acronyms, often ignored by researchers:

Unique	276	100%	Total	1,198	100%
2-letters	70	25.36%	2-letters	358	29.88%
3-letters	138	50.00%	3-letters	604	50.42%
4-letters	43	15.58%	4-letters	172	14.36%
5-letters	17	6.16%	5-letters	49	4.09%
6-letters	6	2.17%	6-letters	13	1.09%
7-letters	1	0.36%	7-letters	1	0.08%
8-letters	0	0.00%	8-letters	0	0.00%
9-letters	1	0.36%	9-letters	1	0.08%

TABLE 2. ACRONYM LENGTH IN "DESIGNATED SURVIVOR"

The data proves the insignificant number of acronyms with more than five letters; however, it is interesting to note that the only acronym with 9 letters (*ROSCOSMOS*) has 8 more occurrences with only an initial uppercase (*Roscosmos*, S02E12).

As scholars discuss the presence or absence of periods between letters, as well as other signs or symbols, the next table illustrates these findings:

Unique	276	100%	Total	1,198	100%
with period	26	9.42%	with period	127	10.60%
with &	3	0.25%	with &	8	0.67%
with #	13	1.09%	with #	15	1.25%

TABLE 3. ACRONYMS WITH PERIODS, SYMBOLS, AND NUMBERS

According to the table, around 10% of all occurrences contains periods, which proves the theory that periods tend to disappear in acronyms or acronym-like terms. Nevertheless, out of the 26 unique cases with periods 19 are also used without periods, which results in a disturbing inconsistency, as the choice seems to be made randomly, detailed in the next table:

Acronym	#	With periods	Without periods
<i>U.S. – US</i>	88	40	48
<i>D.C. – DC</i>	76	35	41
<i>V.P. – VP</i>	40	6	34
<i>I.D. – ID</i>	18	3	15
<i>U.N. – UN</i>	14	6	8
<i>P.A. – PA</i>	13	3	10
<i>D.O.D. – DOD</i>	10	2	8
<i>C.E.O. – CEO</i>	9	3	6
<i>P.M.</i>	7	7	0
<i>U.S.S. – USS</i>	7	2	5
<i>I.V. – IV</i>	4	2	2

<i>D.A. – DA</i>	3	2	1
<i>M.E. – ME</i>	3	1	2
<i>R.P. – RP</i>	3	1	2
<i>S.U.V. –SUV</i>	3	1	2
<i>V.A. – VA</i>	3	1	2
<i>B.P.</i>	2	2	0
<i>C.O. – CO</i>	2	1	1
<i>C.T. – CT</i>	2	1	1
<i>O.R. – OR</i>	2	1	1
<i>P.D.</i>	2	2	0
<i>U.S.A. – USA</i>	2	1	1
<i>B.S.</i>	1	1	0
<i>M.I.A.</i>	1	1	0
<i>M.P.</i>	1	1	0
<i>P.R.</i>	1	1	0
TOTAL	317	127 (40%)	190 (60%)

TABLE 4. ACRONYMS WITH(OUT) PERIODS

We have signaled in bold the entries with periods only, but entries with less than five occurrences are not to be considered relevant. It is visible that only *P.M.* is used consistently, which is the Latin abbreviation for indicating time (*post meridiem*, i.e., ‘after 12 o’clock’). While scholars agree that Latin abbreviations are “traditionally spelled in small italicized letters, with dots in-between” (Kasprowicz, 2010), this is not the case, not to mention that various proofreading sites offer *PM*, *pm* or *p.m.* (Proofreading Academy, <https://www.proofreadingacademy.com/advice/writing-the-time-am-and-pm-or-a-m-and-p-m/>), explaining that “[i]t is now rare to see periods placed after these abbreviations as in ‘A.M.’; but in formal writing it is still preferable to capitalize them” (Morrison, <https://brians.wsu.edu/2016/05/16/am-pm/>).

A final remark is the number of total occurrences per entry. Knowing that scholars include entries with at least three or more entries to be representative, we have opted for a minimum of five entries (Caon, 2016: 12, Jacobs et al., 2018: 522), as we deal with a TV series with many episodes. This means that we have counted 39 unique entries (14.13%) out of 276, resulting in 856 total entries (71.45%) out of 1,198 instances found. The ‘top list’ of most frequent entries will be discussed in the next section.

The Romanian rendition of English acronyms

The 15 most frequent English acronyms in “Designated Survivor” are categorized and discussed below:

Top	En.	#	Ro.	#
1	<i>FBI</i>	191	<i>FBI</i>	191
7	<i>CIA</i>	31	<i>CIA</i> [omitted]	30 1
10	<i>NASA</i>	26	<i>NASA</i>	26
13	<i>FDA</i>	17	<i>FDA</i>	17

TABLE 5. PURE BORROWING

The table contains four of the most popular acronyms, which were preserved throughout the Romanian subtitles of the series (pure borrowing). In these cases, no extra letters appear during translation, so omission was used only once. An interesting remark is that *FBI* already has suffixed versions in Romanian (*FBI-ul* ‘the *FBI*’, *FBI-ului* ‘to the *FBI*’), which is typically a proof that it is on the way to be accepted in the standard Romanian vocabulary.

Top	En.	#	Ro. + backtranslation, remarks	#
2	<i>U.S. – US</i>	88	<i>SUA</i> [Ro. established equivalent] <i>american</i> ‘ <i>American</i> ’ <i>Statele Unite</i> ‘the <i>United States</i> ’ [omitted]	56 15 1 15
4	<i>NATO</i>	42	<i>NATO</i> [Ro. established equivalent]	42
12	<i>DNA</i>	17	<i>ADN</i> [Ro. established equivalent]	17

TABLE 6. ESTABLISHED EQUIVALENTS

The next batch contains entries with established equivalents in Romanian, thus no whatsoever difficulty is observed in rendering them, except for the fact that omission is often observed in the case of *US*, as the context helps the viewers: *țară* ‘country’, *guvern* ‘government’, *procuror general* ‘district attorney’, *avocat* ‘attorney’, *sistem interstatal* ‘Interstatal system’, *Capitoliu* ‘Capitol’, *navă cargo* ‘cargo ship’, *bombardamente* ‘strikes’, *muncitori* ‘workers’ are easily placed in the proper situation.

Top	En.	#	Ro. + backtranslation, remarks	#
5	<i>V.P. – VP</i>	40	<i>vicepreședinte</i> ‘vice president’ [male] <i>vicepreședintă</i> ‘vice president’ [female] <i>vicepreședinție</i> ‘vice presidency’ [omitted]	25 1 5 9
8	<i>POTUS</i>	28	<i>președinte</i> ‘president’ <i>el</i> ‘he’ [omitted]	24 1 3

TABLE 7. VP AND POTUS

Although *VP* could have been a functional equivalent for *vice president* in Romanian, the translator(s) have never used this possibility,

opting for the extended version (it is not rooted in the Romanian use). This method also enabled them to add the “feminizing inflectional suffix” (Jacobs et al., 2018: 521). As for the ‘president’, the successfully condensed American term is ‘downgraded’ to the general term, implying the US president. When omitted, the translators either give proof of creative interpretations, such as *post ‘job’*, *nominalizare ‘nomination’*, *candidatură ‘candidacy’* (for *VP*), or make use of the Romanian grammar possibilities, such as the use of passive voice: *Ai fost desemnată... ‘You’ve been appointed...’*.

However, a very smart omission was also detected, making use of the previously mentioned information about *POTUS*:

President Kirkman met with the leaders of the Congressional Black Caucus, and they threw their support behind the project...

I gather you played a role in this.

[chuckles] Guess I should've gotten mugged working for an important white dude years ago.

It's kind of a good thing, no?

I guess. If it's not just paying lip service to get the black vote.

You think POTUS would do that?

Ro. Crezi că ar face așa ceva?

‘Do you think that (he) would do that?’

The next table is proof of translation struggle: the translators alternate their methods (also labelled as procedure, strategy) by preserving the original term, localizing (e.g., *Washington*), offering synonymous terms (e.g., *pușcaș*) or giving proof of creative solutions in the case of *ID*. On the other hand, *DC* is preserved in addresses, company names (*DC United Gas*), or names of TV stations, signaled by indented characters in the Romanian subtitle (*DC News Daily, DC One*):

Top	En.	#	Ro. + backtranslation	#
3	<i>D.C. – DC</i>	76	<i>Washington</i>	27
			<i>Washington, DC</i>	5
			<i>capitală ‘capital’</i>	1
			<i>DC</i>	15
			<i>poliția ‘the police’</i>	8
			[omitted]	20
6	<i>SEAL</i>	33	<i>echipa SEAL ‘the SEAL team’</i>	7
			<i>trupele SEAL ‘the SEAL troops’</i>	1
			<i>pușcași marini ‘the Marines’</i>	5
			<i>pușcaș ‘Rifleman/Marines’</i>	2
			<i>SEAL</i>	1
			[omitted]	17
11	<i>I.D. – ID</i>	18	<i>identifica ‘to identify’</i>	7

			<i>identificare</i> 'identification'	1
			<i>confirmare</i> 'confirmation'	1
			<i>insignă</i> 'badge'	1
			<i>legitimăție</i> 'membership card'	2
			<i>cont</i> 'account'	1
			<i>găsește</i> 'to find'	1
			<i>număr</i> 'number'	1
			<i>caută</i> 'to search'	1

TABLE 8. MIXED APPROACHES

The last three acronyms are clear evidence for the difficulty of rendering acronyms in another language, thus we first discuss translation methods typically connected to acronyms, based on various scholars (Kuzmina et al., 2015: 552, Vid, 2016: 111, Dróth, 2008: 27, al-Qinai, 2007: 370, Cintas and Remael, 2020: 138, Hegyesi, 2008: 36, Al-Batineh, 2021: 50, Kasprowicz, 2010):

1. *borrowing* – with or without disambiguation; no disambiguation is needed in the case of globally known acronyms;
2. *transference* – the use of a “equivalent” acronym;
3. *transcription* – acronyms without correlative in the target language;
4. *descriptive translation* – when no target equivalent is available;
5. *transliteration* of proper names.

The last table displays a variety of methods, the translators visibly struggling with *NSA* and especially with *HUD*, as these are typically American-bound acronyms. Although it is noteworthy the fact that omission was hardly considered, the original terms lack consistency in Romanian. Fans of the series will inevitably spot these attempts, not to mention a dozen renditions for *HUD*, including two acronyms as well:

Top	En.	#	Ro. + backtranslation	#
9	NSA	27	NSA	16
			ANS (S02E17, S02E18) [created!]	2
			<i>Agenția de Securitate</i> 'Security Agency'	1
			<i>Cel de la Securitate</i> 'from the Security'	1
			<i>Agenția Națională de Securitate</i>	3
			'National Agency for/of Security'	1
			<i>Agenția de Securitate Națională</i>	1
			'National Security Agency'	2
			<i>Servicii secrete</i> 'Secret services'	
14	HUD	16	<i>Departamentul de Locuințe</i>	1
			<i>Cei de la Locuințe</i>	1
			LDU	3
			<i>Locuințe și Dezvoltare Urbană</i>	1
			LUD	1
			<i>Ministerul Dezvoltării</i>	1
			<i>Ministerul Locuințelor</i>	1

			<i>ministru –</i>	1
			<i>ministru la Locuințe</i>	1
			<i>ministrul de la Locuințe</i>	1
			<i>Ministrul Locuințelor</i>	1
			<i>ministrul Locuințelor și Dezvoltări Urbane.</i>	1
			<i>postul de la Ministerul Locuințelor</i>	1
			[omitted]	1
15	<i>CDC</i>	14	<i>CDC</i>	8
			<i>CCB</i>	6

The case of *HUD* is more than interesting, as on its very first occurrence (S01E01, 00: 23: 01,507), we have a very clear extension of the acronym:

Before being appointed Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, ... He ran HUD. They find affordable homes for people...

Ro. *Înainte să fie numit ministru al Locuințelor și Dezvoltării Urbane, ... A condus LDU. Caută locuințe ieftine pentru populație,*

CDC only appears when health issues and epidemic are discussed, so the context may justify the pure borrowing of the American term, as Netflix viewers can stop the movie anytime and check up on the term. However, the consistency is lost when the Romanian acronym appears, which is not used whatsoever, even if based on the extended English version and re-created as an acronym. The closest equivalent we have found is *Centrul National de Supraveghere si Control al Bolilor Transmisibile (CNSCBT, <https://insp.gov.ro/centrul-national-de-supraveghere-si-control-al-bolilor-transmisibile-cnscbt/>, January 31, 2022)*, which might be a functional equivalent instead of *CCB*.

A final remark is that the massive cumulation of acronyms is bewildering and frustrating (Begg 2017: 561), “alienating” and may “trigger feelings of ostracism” (Hales et al. 2017: 23), unless a possible joke is intended:

S02E03, 00: 23: 54,099

Look, we have the CDC, HHS, NIH, FEMA--

I don't think we can contain this with acronyms, Emily.

Ro.

Avem CCB, HHS, NIH, FEMA...

Nu cred că-l putem opri cu acronime.

Conclusions

We fully agree that “[q]uality is a slippery concept, notoriously difficult to define, pin down and measure” (Szarkowska et al., 2021: 662). As

the authors admittedly take a “novel approach” by considering all stakeholders of a subtitle, we do not wish to offer subjective remarks on the quality of the Romanian rendition of the English acronyms, except for certain obvious and objective cases.

The most important one is consistency. Subtitlers should have in mind the specific feature of TV series, namely possibly repeating terms throughout multiple episodes, thus consistency in terminology is more than required for the sake of overall quality. Hence, we do not feel ‘authorized’ to discuss quality issues, except for cases of severe inconsistency listed below:

1. variation between the graphic image of acronyms, including both the source and target subtitles; while this is a clear issue of spelling, often with contradictory pieces of advice, a professional subtitler should unify them, irrespective of the source version(s);

2. we tend to think that creating new acronyms by the translator is hardly justified (the “burden” of the reader, (Bloom, 2000: 4)

To our surprise, the Romanian translators/subtitlers have not relied on omission very frequently, which is praiseworthy, knowing that “omissions are normally treated as errors” (Szarkowska et al., 2021: 663). Nevertheless, we should be more lenient with omissions in the case of acronyms, as they might be very troublesome in subtitles. In fact, there are few cases when the original acronym may be purely borrowed (e.g., due to globalization or Americanization, such as *FBI*, *CIA*, *NATO*, or *NASA*), and there is very little chance for the original acronym to have a similar (established) equivalent in the target language (*DNA*–*ADN*). The overwhelming majority of acronyms results in extended versions in the target language, when aiming at utmost comprehension. Therefore, the subtitling policy of main streaming service providers such as Netflix is important, as they establish certain standards, whether intended or not. If we accept that “good quality subtitles are those that allow viewers to understand the plot while comfortably following the onscreen action, without drawing unwarranted attention to themselves” (Szarkowska et al., 2021: 673), then acronyms should also fit in, without startling the viewer on seeing *hapax legomenon*-like terms.

Although we have monitored the combination of uppercase letters with hyphens and numbers, relatively few cases were detected: *AB-33* (2), *ABC7* (2), *AK-47* (1), *AR-15* (1), *GS-15* (1), *MiG-29KR* (1), *MI6* (1), *SB8180* (6), *SK1* (1), *SS-7* (1), *TWA 847* and *XLI200C* (1). None of them represents any translation challenge, thus it is worth considering their exclusion from further research.

While it is concluded that “the commissioner’s style guides are systematically referred to by most professionals as their key reference document to achieve high-quality levels” (673), subtitlers should always have in mind intelligibility, and avoid “acronym diarrhea disorder (ADD)” (Begg,

2017: 561). Although mass media is responsible for many professional jargon acronyms turning to trivial (used in our everyday life, Rébék-Nagy, 2010: 196-97), few of them are actively known by the viewers. Therefore, advice on restricted acronym use is easy to find: extended words should replace 2-letter acronyms, acronyms difficult to read should be avoided or not used at all, similarly to those under three or five occurrences (Caon, 2016: 12, Soyer, 2018: 590), even if they may save a lot of character space in subtitles.

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