Guidelines for Quality Subtitling in Croatia

Subtitles are text messages that appear at the bottom of the screen, enabling viewers to follow audio-visual content which would otherwise be inaccessible or incomprehensible to some audiences.
A key feature of subtitling is condensing the dialogue, the so-called adaptation of the translation, because it allows viewers to follow the audiovisual content of the film or programme rather than forcing them to read a lot of text. For AV translation, readability and the duration of the subtitles take precedence over the need to translate every word or detail.
The following guidelines reflect the subtitling tradition in Croatia.

A – Language

Grammar and Spelling
The language must be grammatically correct, unless the specificity of the style of the audiovisual content calls for a departure from the standard Croatian language.

Idioms
The language must match the style of the AV content idiomatically and be adapted to the target audience, which includes jargon, curses, figures of speech and stylistically marked expressions. Loanwords from the original language can only be used if they are common in Croatian (for example, *cool*, *chic* and so on). Expletives are used in accordance not only with the AV content but also with the client's requirements.

Dialogue
When a given subtitle includes lines uttered by two or more people, a dash is NOT placed in front of the line of the first speaker, while it is placed in front of the line or lines of every other speaker. There is no space between the dash and the first word of the sentence. It is recommended not to put too many speakers in the same subtitle.

The length of the translation
It is recommended that long sentences do not span several subtitles. Rather, long sentences should be divided into shorter ones where possible, which is sometimes not possible due to the specific structure of the AV content.

Italics
Italics should be used as little as possible in order not to distract the viewer who is already receiving visual and aural information from the movie. We usually italicize the following:
- names of companies, hotels, cars, movies, books, albums, series, etc., lyrics of songs, passages from literary works
- quotes and reported speech
- narrator's comments, unless most of the programme is narrated. The subtitler's assessment is very important here, as the narration can, for example, contain many quotations and references to movies, books, hotels, etc. In that case, it is better not to italicize the narrator.
- an off-screen speaker (over the telephone, the loudspeaker, an unseen speaker, etc.), but this does not include speakers who are off-screen due to (fast-paced) shot changes or when a speaker leaves the shot and continues speaking, e.g., from behind the door or from another room not in the shot.
- emphasized individual words

- written messages that appear on the screen. In such cases only relevant parts of messages necessary for following the story are translated.

Translation

A good translation does not only include the meaning of what is spoken, but should also reflect the style and tone. Standard language is favoured over loanwords or jargon, but this is also dependent on the style of the AV content. In addition to being faithful, a good translation is also unobtrusive and it allows the viewer to follow the story rather than attracts attention to itself.

Audiovisual content relevant for the story has to be translated. Lyrics of songs are not translated if their meaning is irrelevant.

Terminology

For programmes which contain specific terminology, the subtitler must use the correct technical terms. Terms specific to a show (series) must be translated consistently (i.e., they need to be the same in all episodes).

This also includes checking foreign names, place names, the transcription from foreign scripts and alphabets and the conversion of measurements and figures that express quantities, such as length, weight, volume, etc. into the metric system, temperature into degrees Celsius, etc.

Additional foreign languages

When other foreign languages appear in the movie or programme, the translation is put in brackets only when the characters in the movie do not understand the speaker of that other foreign language, but the translation is necessary to understand the story. (Such lines are usually subtitled in the original material or translated in the script the subtitler is given.) If characters start speaking another language (e.g., two Italian American gangsters who switch from English into Italian), that part of the dialogue is not put in brackets. Furthermore, if characters or speakers in the film or a programme switch back and forth between two languages, the translation of what is considered a second foreign language is not put in brackets because viewers can hear the difference between the two languages.

B – Technical aspects

The duration of the subtitles

A subtitle must be displayed long enough for viewers to read it and at the same time to follow the story or audiovisual content. A rule of thumb is that a single-line subtitle should appear for at least two and a half seconds, and a two-line subtitle four to five. In children's programmes the duration of the subtitles should be a little longer.

The recommended minimum is two seconds for very short subtitles and the maximum seven seconds, depending on the complexity of the text and the target audience.

Time coding

The subtitle should appear simultaneously with the speech.

A subtitle should not cross into the following scene, but if the scenes are very short and if they are interconnected, this can be tolerated in order for the viewer to finish reading the subtitle.

In Croatia, it is not common to interrupt the duration of the subtitle every time a shot changes within a single scene.

A minimum of three frames should be left between two consecutive subtitles to allow the viewer to register the appearance of a new subtitle.

Position

Subtitles are positioned in the middle of the lower part of the screen.

Descriptive subtitles (e.g. names of people appearing on screen) in documentaries are placed directly above the subtitles that follow the speaker's speech, either to the left or to the right, depending on where the speaker appears on the screen. Subtitles and descriptive subtitles can cover the on-screen text, but this can vary according to the client's requirements. In that case they can be written in bold letters in order to be more legible. In descriptive subtitles only what is necessary is translated, since the viewer has to read both that subtitle and the one containing what the person is saying.

Smaller sized font is recommended for such subtitles to keep most of the screen visible. Descriptive subtitles should not cover the face of the speaker.

Readability

In Croatia, white letters on a transparent gray background are normally used.

Division and design of the subtitles

Larger grammatical units should not be split between two subtitles. If a sentence spans two or more subtitles, the new subtitle must start with a new clause or phrase.

Unacceptable:	Correct:
I went to the post office to pay	I went to the post office to pay the bills,
the bills, pick up a package and top up my mobile phone.	pick up a package and top up my mobile phone.

In a double-line subtitle, ideally both lines should be of equal length. If this is not possible, then the upper line should be shorter than the lower one.

In a double-line subtitle, certain meaningful wholes should not be split between the two lines (e.g. *Mr.* and *Smith*, or a figure and a unit – 80 and kg).