

# THE TRANSLATOR'S PALETTE: BRIDGING CULTURES THROUGH MULTIMODAL DIGITAL STORYTELLING

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## **Abstract**

*This study examines how translation shapes meaning across linguistic, visual, auditory, and interactive modes in contemporary digital storytelling. Using qualitative document analysis, it compares five internationally distributed audiovisual works (Squid Game, Your Name, Frozen II, Bandersnatch, and Tower of God) with three Albanian initiatives: the UNICEF Albania campaign #NukJeVetëm, EU4Culture digital heritage projects, and subtitling practices at TIFF and Dokufest. The analysis draws on officially released subtitles, licensed dubbing materials, and publicly available Albanian digital artefacts. Findings show that translation functions as a multimodal, context-dependent practice influenced by platform constraints, production ecologies, and cultural aims. Industrial workflows tend to streamline linguistic and interpersonal nuance, whereas community and heritage-oriented projects allow greater flexibility in shaping cultural representation. The study argues that translation should be understood as a coordinated semiotic process that contributes directly to the circulation and interpretation of digital narratives. Considering global platform productions alongside Albanian digital initiatives highlights how multimodal translation operates across contrasting media environments.*

**Keywords:** *multimodal digital storytelling; audiovisual translation; translator agency; Albanian digital ecosystems; subtitling practices*

## PALETA E PËRKTHIMIT: URA KULTURORE PËRMES TREGIMIT DIXHITAL SHUMËMODAL

### *Përmbledhje*

*Ky studim shqyrton rolin e përkthimit në formësimin e kuptimit përmes mjeteve gjuhësore, vizuale, dëgjimore dhe ndërvepruese në tregimin digjital bashkëkohor. Duke u mbështetur në analizën cilësore të dokumenteve, ai krahason pesë vepra audiovizuale me shpërndarje ndërkombëtare (Squid Game, Your Name, Frozen II, Bandersnatch dhe Tower of God) me tri iniciativa shqiptare: fushatën #NukJeVetëm të UNICEF Albania, projektet e trashëgimisë digjitale EU4Culture dhe praktikatat e titimit në festivalet TIFF dhe Dokufest. Analiza mbështetet në titime zyrtare, materiale të licencuara të dublimit dhe artefakte digjitale të publikuara për publikun. Gjetjet tregojnë se përkthimi është një proces shumëmodal dhe i varur nga konteksti, i ndikuar nga kufizimet e platformave, mënyrat e prodhimit dhe synimet kulturore. Ndërkohë prodhimet industriale shpesh reduktojnë nuancat gjuhësore dhe ato ndërpersonale, nismat komunitare dhe projektet e trashëgimisë ofrojnë më shumë hapësirë për negociimin e përfaqësimit kulturor. Studimi argumenton se përkthimi duhet parë si një proces i koordinuar semiotik, thelbësor për qarkullimin dhe interpretimin e tregimeve digjitale në ekosisteme të ndryshme mediatike.*

***Fjalë kyçe:*** tregim digjital shumëmodal; përkthim audiovizual; agjencia e përkthyesit; ekosistemet digjitale shqiptare; praktikatat e titimit.

### **Introduction**

Digital media environments have transformed how stories are created and experienced, bringing multimodal forms of narrative to the centre of contemporary communication. In these settings, translation extends beyond linguistic transfer and becomes part of the broader organisation of meaning across visual, auditory, and interactive modes. Streaming platforms, interactive audiovisual formats, and digitally curated heritage projects depend on translation practices that coordinate language with visual framing, sound design, interface architecture, and viewer interaction. These shifts have encouraged scholars in Translation Studies to broaden their understanding of translational activity within evolving media ecologies (Pérez-González, 2020; Chaume, 2023). The growing use of automated and platform-based tools further highlights the importance of analysing translation within technologically mediated environments (O'Hagan, 2019).

In global entertainment industries, platform-governed subtitling and dubbing illustrate the increasing standardisation of audiovisual translation (AVT). Productions such as *Squid Game* (Netflix, 2021) show how timing and segmentation requirements influence characterisation and sociolinguistic nuance. *Your Name* (CoMix Wave Films, 2016) demonstrates the difficulty of conveying culturally embedded metaphors and symbolic imagery, while the Sámi-language version of *Frozen II* (Disney, 2019) exemplifies how collaboration can strengthen cultural and linguistic authenticity. Interactive works like *Bandersnatch* (Netflix, 2018) introduce further complexity as linguistic choices must align with branching pathways and interface cues. Anime releases such as *Tower of God* (Crunchyroll, 2020) reveal how officially licensed translations may incorporate terminology shaped by active fan communities.

Related patterns appear in Albanian digital storytelling. Youth-produced materials from *#NukJeVetëm* (UNICEF Albania, 2021) show how subtitling is negotiated within advocacy-oriented narratives. EU4Culture's digital heritage initiatives (2021–2023) illustrate how translation mediates between archival discourse and public-facing communication. Subtitling practices at TIFF and Dokufest demonstrate how Albanian AVT responds to dialectal variation, time constraints, and curatorial aims. Although these contexts have been studied individually, they have not yet been examined together as part of a broader account of multimodal translation across different sociotechnical environments.

The present study investigates how translation shapes multimodal meaning-making across industrial, institutional, and grassroots contexts. Rather than approaching language transfer as an isolated process, the analysis examines how linguistic, visual, auditory, and interactive modes intersect, drawing on multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021), intersemiotic translation (Jakobson, 1959; Borodos, 2019), and translator agency (Pym, 2012; Cronin, 2013). Qualitative document analysis of officially released subtitles, licensed dubbed versions, and publicly available digital storytelling materials supports an approach attentive to medium-specific features.

The article advances two claims: First, translation in digital environments functions as an interpretive practice shaped by platform constraints, collaborative structures, and the distribution of narrative

elements across modes. Second, points of comparison between industrial streaming productions and Albanian grassroots or heritage projects show how multimodal translation influences narrative accessibility, cultural representation, and audience engagement. By placing these cases side by side, the study contributes to ongoing debates about the multimodal turn in Translation Studies and the role of translation in contemporary digital culture.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework draws on scholarship in multimodality, audiovisual translation, intersemiotic translation, and translator agency. Taken together, these areas provide a coherent basis for analysing how meaning is shaped across linguistic, visual, auditory, and interactive modes in digital storytelling. Rather than restating existing typologies, the framework identifies the concepts needed to examine multimodal translation in both global streaming contexts and Albanian digital initiatives.

### **2.1 Multimodality and Semiotic Integration**

Multimodality provides a foundational perspective for understanding how narratives in digital media rely on the interplay of semiotic resources such as verbal language, moving image, sound design, graphical composition, and spatial arrangement. Building on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) account of semiotic orchestration, multimodality is understood here as the coordinated distribution of meaning across modes, each with distinct affordances and constraints. Multimodal discourse studies further emphasise that meaning arises from the patterned relations among modes rather than from any single channel alone (Bateman, 2017; Jewitt, 2016).

In audiovisual works such as *Squid Game* or *Your Name*, the alignment between linguistic expression and non-verbal cues (camera perspective, colour palette, gesture, and musical motifs) shapes narrative interpretation. Translation must therefore respond not only to semantic content, but also to the semiotic setting in which that content operates. This involves calibrating subtitle timing to editing rhythms, adjusting phrasing to on-screen spatial limitations, and interpreting cultural markers embedded in costume design, soundscapes, or interface prompts. From this perspective, translation

becomes a practice embedded in a composite meaning-making environment rather than a purely textual operation.

## **2.2 Audiovisual Translation (AVT) and Platform Ecologies**

AVT has documented the technical parameters that shape translation, including segmentation rules, character limits, synchronisation constraints, and reading-speed norms (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021). These constraints are intensified in platform-based distribution, where style guides, templated subtitle files, and centralised workflows standardise translation practices across global markets (Szarkowska, Díaz-Cintas, & Gerber-Morón, 2021; Chaume, 2023). Recent research also shows how the post-editing of machine-generated subtitles is increasingly incorporated into training and professional subtitling workflows, adding another layer of standardisation to industrial AVT (Bolaños-García-Escribano & Díaz-Cintas, 2023).

Officially distributed subtitles for productions such as *Squid Game* demonstrate how institutional templates can compress register distinctions and interpersonal nuances. Likewise, dubbed and subtitled versions of *Frozen II*, including the Sámi collaboration, reveal how platform governance intersects with cultural negotiation, production timelines, and linguistic authenticity. Interactive productions such as *Bandersnatch* extend the domain of audiovisual translation by incorporating user-driven branching structures, requiring translators to align linguistic choices with interface cues and shifting narrative paths. Within this ecological perspective, AVT is not merely a linguistic activity but a sociotechnical practice shaped by industrial priorities and the organisation of platform-based workflows.

## **2.3 Intersemiotic Translation and Cross-Modal Meaning Transfer**

Jakobson's (1959) formulation of intersemiotic translation as the interpretation of verbal signs through non-verbal sign systems remains a central reference for analysing digital storytelling, where meaning frequently shifts across modes. Borodos (2019) and recent scholarship in multimodal translation (Hagström & Pedersen, 2022; Kirchhoff, 2019) highlight how digital narratives employ cross-modal reinforcement, condensation, and transformation. Examples include the symbolic treatment of braided cords in *Your Name* (a motif visually and musically elaborated in ways that exceed linguistic

explanation) or the adaptation of heritage narratives in EU4Culture's digital projects, where archival textual materials are transformed into captioned video tours.

Intersemiotic translation provides the conceptual tools to analyse how linguistic decisions interact with visual and auditory elements, particularly when the verbal mode alone cannot convey cultural specificity, emotional resonance, or historical context. It also clarifies how translators interpret and redistribute meaning across modes when captioning heritage sites, rendering advocacy narratives for youth audiences, or adapting interactive choice interfaces for multilingual users.

## **2.4 Translator Agency and Production Contexts**

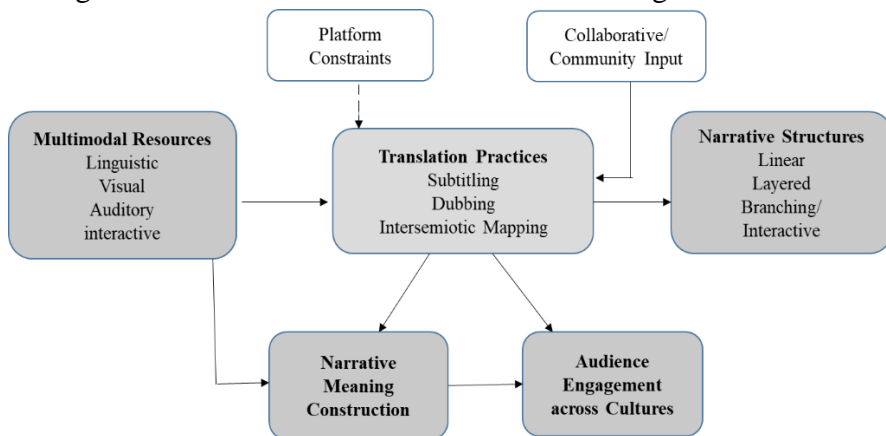
Translator agency concerns the degree to which translators influence narrative framing, cultural mediation, and semiotic coordination. Agency is shaped by institutional structures, workflow segmentation, and the expectations of producers, curators, and audiences (Pym, 2012; Cronin, 2013). In industrial streaming settings, agency may be constrained by templated subtitling systems, prescribed terminology lists, and post-editing guidelines that limit control over register, emphasis, or creative adaptation.

By contrast, Albanian grassroots initiatives such as #NukJeVetëm allow greater discretionary agency, as youth contributors manage linguistic choices and visual composition within self-directed digital narratives. Heritage-oriented translation in EU4Culture projects demonstrates another form of agency, where translators mediate between specialised archival discourse and public-facing communication goals, balancing terminological precision with accessibility. Translator agency is therefore not uniform; it reflects the interplay between institutional authority, collaborative structures, technological affordances, and the semiotic demands of the narrative environment.

## **2.5 Integrating the Framework**

Taken together, the preceding theoretical components provide a coherent basis for analysing translation within multimodal digital storytelling. Multimodality clarifies how meaning is distributed across linguistic, visual, auditory, and interactive resources. Audiovisual

translation identifies the industrial and technical mechanisms (such as templated subtitling, dubbing conventions, and platform-specific standards) that shape the integration of language into audiovisual form. Intersemiotic translation accounts for how meaning shifts across modes, particularly when symbolism, sound design, or interface architecture reinforce or transform verbal content. Translator agency highlights how institutional structures, collaborative arrangements, and technological affordances influence the choices through which translators mediate cultural meaning.



*Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Translation in Multimodal Digital Storytelling*

The conceptual model synthesises these strands by illustrating how semiotic modes, production ecologies, and translator decision-making interact within digitally mediated storytelling environments. It foregrounds the dynamic relationship between platform constraints, multimodal narrative design, and the interpretive work of translators. This integrated perspective guides the analytical approach adopted in the present study and supports comparative examination across both global streaming productions and Albanian digital initiatives.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs qualitative document analysis to investigate how translation contributes to meaning-making across linguistic, visual, auditory, and interactive modes in digital storytelling. Qualitative document analysis facilitates systematic interpretation of artefacts in

which meaning is distributed across multiple semiotic resources (Bowen, 2009) and is well-suited to multimodal environments where observational access to production workflows is limited. The approach also aligns with multimodal research traditions that understand texts as composite semiotic configurations (Jewitt, 2016; Bateman, 2017) and with audiovisual translation scholarship emphasising the interaction between linguistic mediation and formal constraints (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021; Chaume, 2023).

### 3.1 Corpus Selection

The corpus includes officially released audiovisual works and publicly disseminated Albanian digital materials selected for their relevance to multimodal translation, diversity of production ecologies, and demonstrated public circulation. These materials represent industrial, institutional, and grassroots contexts.

#### *Global Audiovisual Works*

- *Squid Game (Netflix, 2021)*: English subtitle files and selected dialogue sequences from the licensed streaming release.
- *Your Name (CoMix Wave Films, 2016)*: English subtitles and dubbed tracks produced through authorised international distribution.
- *Frozen II (Disney, 2019)*: Sámi-language dub created in collaboration with the Sámi Council, with accompanying English subtitles.
- *Bandersnatch (Netflix, 2018)*: Interactive choice prompts, interface elements, and multilingual subtitles from Netflix's official platform version.
- *Tower of God (Crunchyroll, 2020)*: English subtitles and episodes from Crunchyroll's licensed streaming edition.

#### *Albanian Digital Storytelling*

- *#NukJeVetëm (UNICEF Albania, 2021)*: Youth-produced advocacy videos subtitled in Albanian and English.
- *EU4Culture Digital Heritage Projects (2021–2023)*: Multilingual captions and narrative materials accompanying digital heritage exhibitions.
- *TIFF and Dokufest Festival Screenings*: Subtitled festival selections as presented in official screened formats and educational resources distributed by festival organisers.

This ensures that the analysis is grounded exclusively in artefacts encountered by actual audiences.

### **3.2 Data Collection Procedures**

All materials were examined through their authorised distribution channels during November 2025. Global works were reviewed on Netflix, Disney, and Crunchyroll; Albanian initiatives were accessed through verified institutional platforms and campaign channels; and festival materials were consulted through programme archives and officially subtitled screenings. Only publicly available materials were analysed, and no private drafts, internal documents, or non-released subtitle versions were included.

### **3.3 Analytical Framework**

The coding scheme drew from established theories of multimodality (Jewitt, 2016; Bateman, 2017), audiovisual translation (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021; Carroll & Ivarsson, 2010), and intersemiotic translation (Jakobson, 1959; Kirchhoff, 2019; Borodos, 2019). The analysis was guided by four dimensions:

1. *Mode Interaction*: Examination of how linguistic content aligns with visual framing, sound design, or interactive cues.
2. *AVT Strategies and Constraints*: Consideration of condensation, segmentation, template requirements, dubbing conventions, and platform-specific formatting rules (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021; Hagström & Pedersen, 2022).
3. *Intersemiotic Reinforcement or Shift*: Identification of meaning distributed across modes, including symbolic imagery, musical motifs, or interface architecture (Jakobson, 1959; Kirchhoff, 2019).
4. *Translator Agency and Mediation*: Attention to the degree of interpretive discretion in lexical choices, cultural localisation, descriptive strategies, and community-driven adaptations (Cronin, 2013; Greco, 2018).

Coding was limited to what could be observed in the final distributed texts, avoiding speculation about production decisions that are not publicly documented. Focusing on the publicly released versions of the texts keeps the analysis anchored in what audiences actually encounter. It also reflects common research conditions in digital

media, where behind-the-scenes production information is typically out of reach.

### **3.4 Analytical Rationale**

The choice of qualitative document analysis follows directly from the kinds of questions the study seeks to answer. Because translation in digital storytelling is realised through multimodal architectures that are materially inscribed in the narrative artefacts themselves, document analysis offers direct access to the semiotic configurations under investigation. This approach aligns with recent developments in audiovisual translation and digital media studies, which emphasise the materiality, circulation, and publicly distributed form of audiovisual texts (Pérez-González, 2020; Chaume, 2023).

Moreover, the method enables systematic comparison across heterogeneous production contexts (including global streaming platforms, cultural heritage institutions, and youth-led advocacy initiatives), without requiring access to internal workflows or confidential production processes. By focusing on the observable features of the final distributed texts, the analysis can trace how translation decisions manifest in multimodal patterns and contribute to narrative meaning across contrasting ecologies.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

All materials analysed were already publicly released. No private information beyond what appears in the distributed artefacts was collected. Youth-produced content from #NukJeVetëm was handled in accordance with the visibility approved in the campaign's dissemination strategy. No contact with translators, contributors, or festival organisers was required, and no identifiable data beyond official releases were reproduced.

## **4. Global Case Studies**

The following case studies examine how translation operates within globally circulated audiovisual works distributed through major streaming platforms. Each example is drawn from officially released subtitles or dubbing versions, ensuring that the analysis reflects the materials actually encountered by audiences. The cases illustrate how

multimodal alignment and production ecologies shape translation outcomes in distinct narrative environments.

#### **4.1 *Squid Game* (Netflix, 2021)**

The subtitling of *Squid Game* illustrates how platform-governed workflows shape interpersonal nuance. Subtitle templates restrict line length and segmentation, a constraint that has long been noted in AVT scholarship and is particularly visible in high-volume streaming environments (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). The well-known rendering of *kkangpae aniya* as “I’m not a gangster” conveys basic denotation but reduces the socio-indexical stance that characterises the Korean expression. Close-up shots heighten the tension of the exchange, yet the subtitle cannot capture the subtle pragmatic shades conveyed through tone and delivery. A similar pattern appears in Player 212’s confrontational dialogue, where emotional intensity is moderated through obligatory segmentation. These examples show how platform standardisation influences the multimodal construction of character relations, reflecting broader structural tendencies in contemporary subtitle production.

#### **4.2 *Your Name* (CoMix Wave Films, 2016)**

In *Your Name*, meaning is tightly distributed across verbal, visual, and auditory modes, making certain cultural concepts difficult to relocate fully into English. The notion of *musubi* (central to the film’s cosmology) is reinforced visually through braided cords and rhythmically through the musical motif that accompanies key transitions. English subtitles paraphrase the concept in ways that preserve narrative coherence but do not reproduce its philosophical or spiritual resonance. Dubbing further compresses these layers due to the need for prosodic and timing alignment. The resulting shifts echo dynamics identified in work on intersemiotic translation, where symbolic meaning often migrates unevenly across modes (Jakobson, 1959; Kirchhoff, 2019). A representative montage sequence accompanied by “Nandemonaiya” illustrates how subtitling maintains narrative clarity while necessarily reducing the semantic density carried by non-verbal cues.

#### **4.3 *Frozen II* – Sámi Version (Disney, 2019)**

The Sámi-language adaptation of *Frozen II* offers a distinct model of culturally grounded localisation. Produced through collaboration with the Sámi Council, it exemplifies an approach where translation decisions are embedded in broader ethical commitments to representation (Greco, 2018). In the opening song “Vuelie,” the Sámi version foregrounds cultural resonance through sound texture and imagery drawn from local symbolic landscapes. English subtitles maintain accessibility for broader audiences, yet their reliance on concise phrasing reflects the familiar constraints of synchronisation in musical contexts. Rather than multiplying examples across the film, this sequence captures the central dynamics of the project: cultural specificity negotiated within the practical requirements of global distribution.

#### **4.4 *Bandersnatch* (Netflix, 2018)**

The interactive design of *Bandersnatch* brings interface timing into direct conversation with translation. Choice prompts appear and disappear within strict temporal windows, requiring concise subtitles that are immediately legible, and closely aligned with visual cues and branching narrative logic. A key scene in which the viewer must make a rapid decision shows how translation interacts with the interface architecture itself, extending established concerns about synchrony and multimodal coordination in AVT to a format where timing affects narrative progression (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). The case illustrates how interactive storytelling reshapes translational demands as user-driven narratives become increasingly integrated into mainstream digital media.

#### **4.5 *Tower of God* (Crunchyroll, 2020)**

*Tower of God* illustrates how fan-influenced terminology can transition into officially sanctioned subtitles, especially in genres with active global communities. Early fan translations stabilised key terms that later appeared in the authorised English subtitles, reflecting a porous boundary between community knowledge and professional practice. Focusing on one representative term avoids redundancy while making clearer how grassroots lexicons shape formal translation choices. This dynamic is consistent with discussions in digital translation studies about the interplay between participatory

cultures and institutional workflows. (Pérez-González, 2020; Cronin, 2013).

## **5. Albanian Case Studies**

The Albanian case studies illustrate translation practices that emerge in institutional, heritage-oriented, and youth-led digital environments. Unlike industrial streaming platforms, these contexts often involve flexible production arrangements, uneven access to linguistic or technical resources, and differing expectations regarding cultural representation. The examples analysed below are derived from publicly available materials disseminated through official campaign channels, EU-funded project platforms, and film-festival resources in Albania.

### **5.1 The #NukJeVetëm Campaign (UNICEF Albania, 2021)**

The #NukJeVetëm (“You Are Not Alone”) campaign illustrates how youth-led digital storytelling relies on subtitling to convey emotional tone in short-form testimonial videos. Similar to observations in accessibility and community media studies, the subtitles must balance clarity with affective nuance when dealing with sensitive subject matter (Greco, 2018). Rapid speech and brief shot durations limit the space available for rendering colloquial expressions, often resulting in English versions that prioritise legibility over the full expressive range of the Albanian original. This tendency is especially evident in passages where adolescents describe experiences of pressure or vulnerability, underscoring how subtitling functions as a mediating layer in youth advocacy narratives.

### **5.2 EU4Culture Heritage Storytelling (2021–2023)**

EU4Culture materials combine landscape footage, archival imagery, and explanatory captions to communicate cultural heritage to a general audience. Translating heritage terminology requires careful negotiation between semantic precision and accessibility, a challenge noted in broader discussions of cultural mediation within translation (Cronin, 2013). Terms such as *çardak* or *kullë* resist straightforward equivalence; English subtitles, therefore, adopt concise descriptive renderings that preserve cultural relevance without disrupting the visual flow. Such strategies align with heritage-communication

practices that rely on multimodal cohesion to support viewer comprehension, particularly when addressing non-specialist audiences.

### **5.3 TIFF and Dokufest Subtitling Practices**

Festival contexts introduce a different set of subtitling considerations, shaped by curated programming and international distribution rather than platform templates. Documentaries such as *Luzmë* rely heavily on ambient sound and controlled pacing, which requires subtitles that match the film's rhythmic structure: a feature consistently highlighted in AVT discussions of synchrony and tone (Chaume, 2023). When interviewees use regionally specific expressions or culturally embedded references, subtitles favour interpretive clarity to ensure accessibility for diverse audiences. Festival circulation imposes communicative priorities that place linguistic fidelity and audience reach in productive tension (Pérez-González, 2020).

### **5.4 Cross-Case Observations**

Across the three Albanian cases, translation emerges as a practice that mediates between cultural specificity, communicative intention, and multimodal design. Youth advocacy videos emphasise emotional immediacy; heritage materials require terminological precision; and festival-screened works depend on careful alignment between subtitle rhythm and audiovisual pacing. These patterns reflect broader insights from translation studies regarding how sociocultural context, production ecology, and media form shape translational choices (Cronin, 2013; Greco, 2018). Despite their differences, the cases show how translation contributes to narrative coherence and cultural transmission within Albania's growing digital ecosystem.

## **6. Discussion**

The findings from the global and Albanian case studies demonstrate that translation in digital storytelling operates as a multimodal, context-dependent, and interpretive practice shaped by production ecologies, platform governance, cultural expectations, and semiotic orchestration. By examining industrial streaming productions alongside heritage-oriented and grassroots Albanian initiatives, the

analysis highlights both shared challenges and significant contextual differences in how translation contributes to meaning-making within digital environments.

### **6.1 Translation as Multimodal Mediation**

Across the global and Albanian cases, translation participates directly in the organisation of multimodal meaning. Verbal, visual, and auditory cues frequently operate together to structure narrative coherence, and the subtitled or dubbed text becomes one layer within a larger semiotic arrangement. The examples from *Squid Game* and *Your Name* show how subtitling interacts with visual framing or symbolic imagery, while the Sámi version of *Frozen II* demonstrates how sound, landscape, and linguistic choice mutually reinforce cultural representation. These findings resonate with multimodal analyses that view meaning as the outcome of coordinated semiotic work rather than a property of language alone (Jewitt, 2016).

### **6.2 Intersemiotic Reinforcement and Compensation**

Several cases foreground how meaning shifts as it moves across modes. Concepts with deep cultural resonance (such as *musubi* in *Your Name* or the heritage terminology in the EU4Culture materials) cannot always be fully relocated into English without some loss or transformation. Subtitles often provide narrative continuity rather than exhaustive cultural explication, leaving symbolic or affective layers to be carried by visuals or sound. This pattern aligns with foundational discussions of intersemiotic translation, where modes redistribute meaning in uneven ways (Jakobson, 1959; Kirchhoff, 2019). Such shifts are not errors but structural features of multimodal storytelling, and the case studies illustrate how translators work within these cross-modal dynamics.

### **6.3 Production Ecologies and Technical Constraints**

Translation practices are shaped by the production environments in which they occur. Streaming platforms impose segmentation rules, timing standards, and stylistic templates that streamline global distribution but limit pragmatic nuance. The effect is evident in *Squid Game* and *Bandersnatch*, where subtitle timing interacts with rapid

dialogue or interface-driven cues. In festival contexts such as TIFF and Dokufest, translators work to match the aesthetic pacing of documentaries and curated selections rather than follow platform specifications. These contrasts show how production ecologies condition the forms of multimodal alignment achievable in the final artefact (Mangiron, 2022).

#### **6.4 Translator Agency Across Contexts**

The degree of interpretive discretion available to translators varies considerably. Industrial workflows favour terminological uniformity and compressed phrasing, while grassroots and heritage-oriented projects often allow greater latitude for descriptive or culturally embedded renderings. The youth-produced #NukJeVetëm materials, for example, rely on translators to maintain an affective tone within the constraints of short-form testimony. Heritage projects require judgement in balancing terminological precision with public accessibility, echoing broader observations about translation as situated cultural mediation (Cronin, 2013). Agency, therefore, emerges not as a stable attribute but as a function of institutional structures, collaborative arrangements, and narrative purpose.

#### **6.5 Synthesis**

Taken together, the case studies demonstrate that translation in digital storytelling is both a technical and interpretive practice embedded in multimodal environments. Whether operating under platform requirements, festival aesthetics, or community-driven production, translators shape the narrative meaning, cultural visibility, and audience engagement. The comparative perspective highlights not only the diversity of translational challenges across contexts but also the shared reliance on coordinated semiotic processes. Analysing translation within its wider media ecologies offers a clearer understanding of how linguistic, visual, and auditory resources combine to shape narrative interpretation in contemporary digital landscapes.

#### **7 Conclusion**

This study examined how translation contributes to meaning-making in multimodal digital storytelling by analysing a corpus that spans

global streaming productions and Albanian digital initiatives. The findings show that translation functions as an integral semiotic layer within audiovisual and interactive narratives, interacting with visual framing, sound design, and interface structures. Across the cases, translators negotiate varying degrees of constraint and agency, shaped by platform-specific standards, festival aesthetics, cultural heritage aims, and community-driven practices.

The comparative perspective highlights two central insights. First, meaning often shifts across modes, and translation plays a decisive role in managing these intersemiotic movements. Second, production ecologies influence not only the form of translated text but also its narrative function, from the compressed expressivity of streaming subtitles to the cultural framing required in heritage-oriented communication.

Taken together, the cases demonstrate how translation supports the circulation and accessibility of digital narratives while mediating cultural representation and audience engagement. Approaching translation as a multimodal and context-dependent practice provides a clearer view of the processes through which linguistic, visual, and auditory resources intersect in contemporary media environments.

## **8. Limitations**

The analysis is based solely on publicly accessible versions of the audiovisual and digital materials, which do not reveal internal workflows, draft subtitles, or production decisions. Audience reception and translator perspectives also fall outside the scope of the study.

The corpus is selective rather than comprehensive, covering specific global productions and Albanian initiatives but excluding commercial dubbing studios, independent creators, and many interactive media forms. Interpretations therefore rely only on features present in the distributed artefacts.

Further research incorporating translator interviews, reception studies, or broader corpora would help extend the insights offered here.

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