

A FRAMEWORK OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR RENDERING CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS IN ROMANIAN DUBBING OF CHILDREN'S ANIMATED FILMS

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Abstract: This article explores the translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) in the Romanian dubbing of *Inside Out* (2015) and *Inside Out 2* (2024), with the aim of proposing a framework that expands beyond the binary opposition of domestication and foreignization. Building on audiovisual translation theory and examining 49 manually selected examples, the study identifies six main strategies: foreignization, mitigation, subjugation, semi-domestication, domestication, and full domestication, further divided into subcategories. These strategies are organized proportional to the cultural intervention, from minimal to maximal adaptation, in order to highlight the diverse ways in which cultural items are preserved, reshaped, or omitted in translation. The analysis reveals that the choice of strategy is determined by linguistic and cultural factors but also by technical dubbing constraints such as lip synchronization, and audience age. Moreover, the findings demonstrate how translation strategies reflect broader cultural asymmetries, with foreignization often reinforcing the high status of English as a dominant source culture, while domestication reasserts the relevance of the Romanian target culture through adaptation and substitution. By situating translation as a decisional act shaped by competing priorities of fidelity, accessibility, and cultural resonance, this study offers a layered understanding of cultural transfer in children's audiovisual media and proposes a framework that may be applied to other types of translations.

Keywords: Romanian dubbing; culture-specific items; translation strategies; foreignization and domestication; audiovisual translation.

1 Introduction

Audiovisual translation (AVT) practices differ across the globe, depending on notions of nationalism and singularity associated with this concept. In non-English-speaking countries, dubbing and subtitling are the most common methods used to translate imported audiovisual products. Western European countries like France, Germany, Spain, and Italy have a long tradition of dubbing, dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, often encouraged by governments for linguistic protectionism and identity preservation.¹ In contrast, countries like Romania, the Netherlands, Sweden, or Portugal never fully adopted dubbing culturally, as they embraced subtitling. However, cartoons and kids shows are dubbed in these countries, because children cannot read fast enough and it makes the content more accessible.

¹ Carla Mereu Keating, *The Politics of Dubbing. Film Censorship and State Intervention in the Translation of Foreign Cinema in Fascist Italy*, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2016.

Each of these two methods has its unique implications. Subtitling keeps the original audio and displays translated text in sync with the dialogue, often in a condensed form for easier reading. This method preserves the original performances and is also cost-effective and useful for language acquisition,² as it has been linked to increased linguistic openness and proficiency.

Dubbing, on the other hand, involves replacing the original audio with translated dialogue recorded by voice actors, which necessitates precise synchronization with the on-screen characters' lip movements and timing. This method is commonly used in animated and live-action films, because it allows children or those with reading difficulties to fully concentrate on visual content. Furthermore, dubbing enables translators and institutions to omit verbal content in ways that subtitling does not, raising sometimes concerns about transparency.³ It also incurs significant costs due to the need for voice actors, professional studios, editing work, and precise synchronization. Subtitling, on the other hand, is significantly more cost-effective, which is why it has become the practical norm in countries with smaller film industries or limited media funding, like Romania.

Among the key elements that influence the final result of a dubbing, several essential criteria can be identified. First, proper lip-sync synchronization is needed for maintaining visual and auditory coherence. Equally important is the presence of plausible dialogue, which must sound natural in the target language. A further essential element is the accurate translation of the original script, which entails more than just a literal rendering. Technical quality is also important; clear sound ensures that the dialogue, background sounds, and music are well balanced and professionally mixed. Finally, a successful dubbing requires a satisfying performance from the voice actors, who, through dramatization, must be able to convey emotion, personality, and rhythm.

In the context of globalization, dubbing animated films for children brings about significant challenges, especially when the situation involves translating culture-specific items (CSIs). This challenge appears in the *Inside Out* films, where CSIs are purposefully used by the scriptwriters to build the fictional world of a young American girl. Elements like "Goofball Island", "Train of Thought", and "Stream of Consciousness" combine playful language with culturally resonant metaphors, raising important questions about how to effectively render such imaginative constructs in a different cultural and linguistic context. Considering this, my research aims to create a framework of translation strategies based on the concepts of foreignization and domestication, as well as learn about the impact of these strategies on addressing cultural disparities.

2. Previous Studies on Cultural Translation

For decades, the cultural dimension of translation has been a major focus in translation studies. Early contributions emphasized the translator's role as more

² *Ibidem*.

³ Roberto Valdeón, Latest Trends in Audiovisual Translation, in *Perspectives*, vol. 30, nr. 3, 2022, p. 371.

than a linguistic mediator. Katan asserted that “a text can be understood at three levels of culture” and acknowledged the role of the translator as “a mediator between cultures”.⁴ He added that the translation process implies both linguistic interpretation and “understanding cultural frames”. In other words, rendering a text into another language is an exercise of differentiating the mental structures, perspectives, and shared assumptions that shape how people from a particular culture interpret the world around them. Sun⁵ reinforced this view by stating that “cultural translation cannot avoid translating cultural otherness”, illustrating how translation serves as “a forceful agent of cultural change”, with the ability of challenging dominant identities and structures. Furthermore, this underscores House’s statement that “linguistic units can never be fully understood in isolation from the particular cultural phenomena for which they are symbols”.⁶ In this sense, culture is not an external backdrop but an inseparable component of meaning itself. Lawrence Venuti also played a significant role by highlighting the risks involved in the process. According to him, “the aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar”, which may result in “a wholesale domestication of the foreign text” to serve domestic cultural, economic, or political agendas.⁷

In response to these complexities, various scholars have introduced specialized terms to define culturally embedded elements. Newmark⁸ referred to these as *Foreign Cultural Words* (FCWs), a term relatively straightforward, but lacking precision due to its conceptual limitations. For instance, “words” may be too narrow and prevent “expressions” from being included. Nord, following the model of other theorists in the field of translation studies, adopted the term *cultureme* from the social studies, which she defined as “a social phenomenon of a culture X that is regarded as relevant by the members of this culture and, when compared with a corresponding social phenomenon in a culture Y, is found to be specific to culture X”.⁹ This definition is more specific as it draws on concepts from semiotics, anthropology, and sociolinguistics, treating culture as more than words.

Other scholars proposed alternative terminology for similar phenomena. Mona Baker introduced the term *Culture-Specific Concept* (CSC), describing it as something “which is totally unknown in the target culture”, encompassing abstract or concrete ideas related to “a religious belief, a social custom, or even a type of food”.¹⁰ Chiaro, as cited in Munday, used the term *Culture-Specific References*

⁴ David Katan, *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters, and Mediators*, Manchester, St. Jerome Publishing, 1999, p. 126.

⁵ Yifeng Sun, *Translating Foreign Otherness: Cross-Cultural Anxiety in Modern China*, Oxon, Routledge, 2018, p. 14.

⁶ Juliane House, *Translation: The Basics*, Oxon, Routledge, 2018, p. 66.

⁷ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*, 2nd ed., London and New York, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2008, pp. 18–19.

⁸ Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, New York, Prentice Hall, 1988, p. 95.

⁹ Christiane Nord, *Translating as Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*, Manchester, St. Jerome Publishing, 1997, p. 34.

¹⁰ Mona Baker, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 21.

(CSR), defining them as “entities that are typical of one particular culture, and that culture alone,” and noting their visual, verbal, or hybrid nature.¹¹

Aixelà coined the widely used term *Culture-Specific Item* (CSI), explaining: “I have chosen the term ‘culture-specific item’ to stress the fact that a potential translation problem always exists in a concrete situation between two languages and two texts.”¹² Aixelà further classified CSIs into “proper nouns” and “common expressions”, this latter category including the “world of objects, institutions, habits, and opinions restricted to each culture and that cannot be included in the field of proper names”.¹³ According to Aixelà, CSIs are “those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem”.¹⁴ A translation problem, in this sense, may represent any element that resists straightforward equivalence across languages and cultures.

Despite the variety of terms used across the literature, this study adopts the term *Culture-Specific Item* (CSI) to refer to culturally embedded elements requiring special attention in translation. This choice is motivated by the term’s widespread acceptance and its emphasis on the translation problem arising from cultural and contextual gaps, particularly in audiovisual contexts, where linguistic and cultural elements must be synchronized with visual dimensions.

3. Methodology

I began developing this framework from the premise that every translation is, at its core, an act of interpretation. This decisional act inevitably ranges from faithfully preserving the source culture-specific item, together with its otherness or exotic flavor, to fully replacing it into a culturally acceptable form in the target language. This framework was developed by combining insights from audiovisual translation theory with empirical analysis of CSIs in *Inside Out 1* (2015) and *Inside Out 2* (2024). My aim was to go beyond the twofold models of domestication and foreignization, by proposing a more nuanced, spectrum-based typology of strategies that reflect actual translation choices in Romanian dubbing. Following a line of reasoning, I generalized from specific dubbing cases to broader strategies, which I then organized along an axis of cultural intervention, from minimal to maximal adaptation. In conceiving the framework of cultural translation strategies, I have manually drawn 49 examples of CSIs from the Romanian dubbing of *Inside Out 1* and 2, which I next classified according to the level of intervention applied to the CSI. These examples illustrate the full spectrum of cultural adaptation from foreignization to full domestication and are supported by commentaries related to linguistic differences and similarities. I also paid special attention to the pragmatic function of each CSI, the constraints of dubbing (lip-sync, tone, audience age), and how cultural meaning was transferred, altered, or omitted in the target version.

¹¹ Delia Chiaro, *Issues in Audiovisual Translation*, în Jeremy Munday (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies*, Oxon, Routledge, 2009, p. 156.

¹² Javier Franco Aixelà, *Culture-Specific Items in Translation*, în Román Álvarez, María Carmen-África Vidal (eds.), *Translation, Power, Subversion*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters Ltd., 1996, p. 68.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

4. A Framework of CSI Translation Strategies

For the analysis of CSIs in the Romanian dubbing of *Inside Out* 1 and 2, I propose a framework consisting of six translation strategies that serve as metaphorical extensions of the concept of domestication, originally applied to the animal or plant environment. In translation studies, following Lawrence Venuti's work *The Translator's Invisibility* (2008), domestication refers to the extent to which a translated text conforms to the linguistic, cultural, and stylistic norms of the target audience. In contrast, foreignization seeks to preserve the linguistic and cultural specificities of the source text, making its "foreignness" visible and thereby challenging the norms of the target culture. This approach prioritizes the source culture's distinct elements, often resulting in a translation that may feel less natural to the target audience, but retains the original's unique identity. In developing this framework, I position foreignization and domestication at two opposing poles, illustrating the impact of translation strategies along a spectrum that ranges from minimal intervention on the CSI to maximal adaptation to the target culture. The strategies that I identified are these:

S1: Foreignization

S2: Mitigation

S3: Subjugation

S3.1: Subjugation through Lexical Displacement / Syntactic Restructuring

S3.2: Subjugation through Creative Compromise

S3.3: Subjugation through Literal Translation

S4: Semi-Domestication

S5: Domestication

S5.1: Domestication through Generalization

S5.2: Domestication through Full Equivalence

S5.3: Domestication through Approximate Equivalence

S6: Full Domestication

S6.1: Full Domestication through Creative Substitution

S6.2: Full Domestication through Omission

S1. Foreignization: I define this strategy as applying no changes to the CSI, leaving it intact in the target text. As I understand it, the concept of foreignization is rooted in issues of power dynamics and identity formation. The dominant group is the receiving culture, i.e., the culture for which the translation is produced, which often holds the power to define the "other", namely the source culture, through the lens of its own historical and cultural hierarchies. Foreignization, therefore, resists the erasure of cultural differences by preserving the source culture's specificity and challenging the dominant norms of the target audience.

ST1: Ooo! Walkie talkies!	TT1: Uuuu! walkie-talkie!
ST2: Eh, 50/50.	TT2: Eh, fifty-fifty.
ST3: Who likes <u>banana bread</u> ?	TT3: Cui îi place <u>banana bread</u> ?
ST4: Get up and glow!	TT4: Get up and glow!
ST5: Lance Slashblade	TT5: Lance Slashblade

In these examples, the Romanian translations illustrate clear instances of foreignization. In the first example, while Romanian equivalents exist (e.g., “stație de emisie-recepție”/ “stație radio portabilă”), the translation opts to keep the English term, to match the lip synchronization, but also, perhaps, for its pop culture familiarity and child-friendly tone. The same situation applies for the second example, where instead of translating the numerical expression as “jumi-juma” or “pe din două”, the English form is maintained.

In the third example, however, the English term was not required for lip-sync purposes, as the animation does not depict Joy speaking directly on screen. Therefore, the translator had greater flexibility and could have opted for a localized equivalent, i.e., “pâine cu banane”. In the fourth instance, the phrase is the name of a fictional musical group, and the choice of preserving the original name does not align with standard practice in children’s dubbing, where it is common to adapt band names to enhance accessibility and emotional connection. This time also the decision is motivated by lip-sync requirements. The fifth example follows a similar pattern, as the name Lance Slashblade, clearly a fictional, stylized name, reminiscent of action-hero or fantasy tropes, is preserved entirely in the original English.

S2. Mitigation: According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, mitigation is defined as “to make alterations to land to make it less polluted or more hospitable to wildlife.”¹⁵ Transposing this meaning into the field of translation, mitigation refers to the act of making phonetic or orthographic adjustments to the original CSI in order to make it more accessible or acceptable to the target audience. While the cultural identity of the source element is retained to some degree, these minor modifications facilitate smoother integration into the receiving culture’s linguistic system, reducing potential barriers to comprehension or making the term easier to pronounce.

ST1: Hey look! <u>The Golden Gate Bridge!</u>	TT1: Hey, priviți, <u>Podul Golden Gate!</u>
ST2: TripleDent gum	TT2: TripluDent Gum

Inside Out’s Romanian dubbing uses mitigation to preserve essential elements of the source culture while adapting them just enough so they appear to blend naturally into the Romanian linguistic context, even though the integration is a deliberate and artificial adjustment rather than a truly organic one. In the first example, the translation localizes “Bridge” as “Podul” while retaining “Golden Gate” in English. Since this is San Francisco’s most famous landmark, its untranslated form preserves its international recognizability, while “Podul” serves to anchor it grammatically within the Romanian sentence. This mix of foreign and local elements balances comprehension with authenticity.

¹⁵ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5th ed., Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018, [online], <https://www.ahdictionary.com/>, accessed August 26, 2025.

The second example comes from a fictional chewing gum commercial and demonstrates a case of phonological mitigation in dubbing. The English brand name “TripleDent” is rendered phonetically as “TripluDent” in the Romanian audio, making it easier for Romanian speakers to process and pronounce. The word “Gum” is left unchanged in the audio, an intentional compromise that maintains the brand’s foreign flavor even though Romanian children are accustomed to chewing gum commercials which rely solely on brand recognition, and the phrase “gumă” or “gumă de mestecat” is often not mentioned at all: e.g., “Orbit professional - îți curăță dinții într-un fel în care cu adevărat simți!” [Orbit Professional – it cleans your teeth in a way you can really feel!], “Alătură-te bucuriei creației colorate cu Hubba Bubba!” [Join the joy of colorful creation with Hubba Bubba].

S3. Subjugation: Although the term may evoke notions of force and cruelty, it remains a fitting metaphor within the succession of domestication strategies, as it captures the act of overriding and reshaping the identity of the original CSI. In translation, subjugation involves forcibly dispossessing the CSI of its original cultural tradition, subjecting it to the structural and linguistic norms of the target language. This strategy may include word-for-word translation, loan translations, or syntactic restructuring, all of which retain a formal link to the source text but significantly alter the CSI’s cultural resonance. Subjugation thus reflects a deeper level of intervention than mitigation to fit target-language expectations.

S3.1 Subjugation through Lexical Displacement and / or Syntactic Restructuring

ST1: The <u>hockey lamp</u> goes there.	TT1: Și <u>lampa hochei</u> acolo.
ST2: Hockey Island!	TT2: Insula Hochei!

In the first two examples, the English term *hockey* is preserved but embedded in a Romanian sentence structure. I assume the spelling, as it is difficult to determine with certainty in the dubbed version, given that the word has been borrowed into Romanian. The oldest dictionary entry regarding the contextual use of the word *hochei* that I could find cites the magazine *Scînteia* as an example (1954) and appears in *Dicționarul limbii române literare contemporane* (1955–1957). The two elements are also juxtaposed in accordance with the syntactic rules of the Romanian language. This shows the enforcement of target-language conformity.

S3.2 Subjugation through Creative Compromise

ST3: That’s a Sar-chasm.	TT3: Abisul sarcasm
ST4: Train of Thought, right on schedule.	TT4: <u>Trenul Gândurilor</u> , chiar la fix.
ST5: follow the Stream of Consciousness!	TT5: Urmăm <u>râul conștiinței</u> !

A creative compromise arises when the translator cannot preserve both the form and the meaning of a culturally or linguistically marked item and thus opts for a functionally equivalent but stylistically reimagined solution. The original English pun, in ST3, a portmanteau of “sarcasm” and “chasm” in *Inside Out 2* (2024), appears as a new emotion-generated location inside Riley’s mind. Triggered when she uses sarcasm, it manifests physically in her mind into a deep rift that disrupts the path of the core emotions. The Romanian translation, “Abisul sarcasm” [the sarcasm abys], preserves the metaphorical meaning as the phrase is adjusted, but forgoes the pun structure, which means the joke effect is lost. This is a more stripped-down re-interpretation, where equivalence is not possible, because of the constraints of the Romanian language.

The original phrase in ST4 is a pun: “train of thought” is an idiom for a person’s sequence of ideas, but in the film, it is visually realized as an actual train. The Romanian “Trenul Gândurilor”, preserves the visual and metaphorical meaning but loses the idiomatic resonance since the syntagm is not an established Romanian expression, unlike the equivalents “ordine de idei” / “înșiruire de idei” / “înlanțuire logică de judecăți” / “raționament”.

“Stream of consciousness” is a well-known literary and psychological term, referring to the unfiltered flow of thoughts in one’s mind. In the film, it is represented as a literal stream the characters must follow, once again, a pun. “Râul conștiinței” translates the concept literally and preserves the visual element, but it is not an established phrase as “fluxul conștiinței”.

S3.3 Subjugation through Literal Translation

ST6: Oh, look at you. Aren’t you a <u>little bundle of joy</u> ?	TT6: Parc-ar fi <u>un ghemotoc de bucurie</u> !
ST7: We’re called <u>the Prairie Dogs</u> .	TT7: <u>Câinii de Preerie</u>
ST8: the Fire Hawks	TT8: Vulturii de Foc

This case of subjugation involves word-for-word translation, which is understood as being close to the source language form¹⁶ and semantic intentions. However, this literal rendering brings the form closer to that of the source culture and does not naturally exist in the target culture. While the meaning may be inferred from context, the result sounds unusual or marked in the target language.

In ST6, the idiomatic English phrase “a bundle of joy” is addressed to baby Riley early in *Inside Out 1*, expressing affection. While the Romanian version preserves emotional warmth, it lacks cultural familiarity of the original and it is slightly less natural-sounding. A natural expression would have been “îngerăș” [little angel], an epithet given to a beautiful child, a term of endearment deeply rooted in the Romanian culture. However, the syntagm subtly refers to Riley’s original first emotion, Joy, so the translation had to include the name Bucurie.

ST7 and ST8 include examples of hockey team names that combine real animal species with regional flavors. It is well known that in the United States,

¹⁶ Andrew Chesterman, *Memes of Translation*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 1997, p. 94.

team names are based on native animals. The psychology behind it may be based on the idea that animals have certain characteristics associated with them that can be used to inspire a sense of pride, courage, and strength. Prairie dogs are native to the grasslands of western North America, largely west of the Mississippi River, not particularly including the area of Minnesota, Riley's hometown, but they are still used as a mascot for the school's team. In contrast, hawks are widespread throughout the United States. Although correct from a dictionary standpoint, "Căinii de Preerie" and "Vulturii de Foc" lack any cultural weight. Romanian football club names, as football is considered the national sport, reflect a rich tapestry of regional pride, industrial heritage, and cultural symbolism. Examples include Unirea Alba Iulia, Gloria Arad, Oțelul Galați, Metalul Buzău, Viitorul Constanța, CFR Cluj (Căile Ferate Române) [Romanian railways]. These naming patterns root teams in local life, making fans feel personally connected to history and nationality.

S4. Semi-Domestication: This strategy involves a hybrid form of translation, where the CSI is neither fully retained in its original form nor entirely adapted to the target culture. It represents a moderate and balanced approach, maintaining a certain foreignized tone while adjusting other linguistic elements to fit the context and expectations of the target audience. As a result, the translation is hybridized. Semi-domestication is accomplished through a foreign structure associated with a local idiom and aims at preserving a degree of cultural authenticity while ensuring readability and accessibility.

ST1: Let's review <u>the top five</u> daydreams.	TT1: <u>Top cinci cu cele mai tari</u> vise ale ei.
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This example comprises a number of changes meant to accommodate the text to the receiving cultural background. As we can see in the example below, "Top five" is retained in an Anglicized tone and adds "cele mai tari" [the coolest], a localized expression that matches the informality of the original.

S5. Domestication: This strategy involves adapting the CSI to align with the linguistic, cultural, and stylistic norms of the target language. While the result may still hint at the original term or retain a trace of its source identity, the primary goal is to make the translation feel familiar and emotionally resonate with the target reader.

S5.1 Domestication through generalization

Under this heading I refer to a specific form of domestication where the translation replaces the CSI with a more neutral, general, or familiar term.

ST1: Let's review the top five <u>daydreams</u> .	TT1: <u>Top cinci cu cele mai tari</u> vise ale ei.
ST2: But it's right over the <u>Memory Dump</u> .	TT2: Dar sub noi e <u>Groapa Memoriei</u> .

ST3: <u>safety check list</u> is complete!	TT3: <u>Lista de siguranță</u> e completă !
ST4: It's like I'm having a <u>breakdown</u> .	TT4: E ca și cum aş avea o <u>criză</u> .
ST5: Fort Pillowton	TT5: Fortul pernuteilor
ST6: From that <u>preschool show</u> Riley used to like?	TT6: Din <u>emisiunea care îi plăcea lui Riley când era mică?</u>

In ST1, the noun “daydreams” involves a spontaneous, often pleasant or imaginative thought that occurs while awake and not paying attention to the present moment. The perfect equivalent in Romanian would be the expression “a visa cu ochii deschiși” [lit., to dream with open eyes]. However, due to time limitations, the translation is forced to use a shorter utterance, therefore the noun “vise” [night-time dreams] is used. Furthermore, there are two distinct concepts in Romanian involving the plural form of the word “vis” [dream]. “Vise” means dreams, which occur during sleep and “visuri” involves aspirations, hopes and imaginative thoughts that appear while awake, another equivalent for “daydreams”. Through this generalization, the term becomes easier for young Romanian viewers to process, even if it blurs the semantic precision.

“Memory Dump”, a word loaned from computing, is a metaphorical space in Riley’s mind where forgotten memories are sent. It implies disposal, irreversible deletion or abandonment, similar to other English constructions like “garbage dump”, “nuclear dump” or “ammunition dump”. In Romanian, each context has a different construction. The most accurate equivalent in IT would be “dump de memorie”, while for waste disposal it is “groapă de gunoi”, for nuclear waste “sit de deșeuri radioactive”, and for ammunition storage “depozit de armament”. This shows the contextual specificity of the Romanian language, where very frequently, each instance requires a distinct lexical choice. For our audiovisual context, TT2 tends to generalize the IT term, adapting it to something that children can easily visualize.

In ST3, “safety checklist” in English refers to a structured list of items or procedures designed to ensure physical safety. It appears typically in technical or industrial contexts, but in *Inside Out 2* is used humorously as Fear is shown going through a ritualistic safety protocol: “Helmet, pads, gloves, safety checklist is complete!”. The Romanian translation, “Lista de siguranță”, generalizes this concept by stripping it of any technical nuance. The translated phrase fits naturally into Romanian child-directed discourse, avoiding unfamiliar jargon and instead favoring clarity.

In ST4, “breakdown” expresses Sadness’s inability to cope emotionally. The term sometimes carries medical overtones, as in “nervous breakdown”, and very often suggests a mental or emotional collapse. In Romanian, the term is often rendered as “criză emoțională” or “colaps nervos”, but here the Romanian version simplifies the psychological metaphor to something more common in everyday language, especially for a child audience.

The phrase “Fort Pillowton” is a playful, invented name. “Pillowton” is a creative toponym made from “pillow” + the suffix “-ton” often used in place names like “Princeton” or “Brighton”. In the movie, it refers to a pillow fort, a classic childhood imaginative structure. The Romanian version, “Fortul pernuteilor” [The

Fort of Little Pillows] shows domestication through semantic generalization and loss of wordplay ensuring the meaning lands intuitively for the target audience.

Finally, ST6 example includes the term “preschool”, for children typically aged between 3 and 5. In Romanian, the translation “emisiunea care îi plăcea lui Riley când era mică” [the show Riley used to like when she was little] omits the direct reference to preschool and replaces it with a broader, more general phrase.

S5.2 Domestication through full equivalence

This strategy involves translating a source phrase using an expression in the target language that conveys the same semantic content, pragmatic function, tone, and cultural resonance. The result is a natural, fluent expression. I use the term “full equivalence” and not “perfect equivalence” to describe translations that successfully preserve the intended meaning, tone, and communicative effect, even if they are not word-for-word or structurally identical. This strategy is limited to form or structure and avoids the illusion of absolute linguistic mirroring.

ST7: Headquarters	TT7: Sediul central
ST8: I would have sworn <u>Sparkle Pony Mountain</u> was right here.	TT8: Aș fi jurat că <u>Muntele Ponei Lucios</u> era aici.
ST9: <u>The Mom Bad News Train</u> is pulling in!	TT9: Trenul cu vești proaste de la mama a sosit deja!
ST10: <u>Friendship Island</u> is pretty good too.	TT10: <u>Și Insula Prieteniei</u> de asemenea!
ST11: Oh, I love <u>Honesty Island</u> .	TT11: Aaaaa...iubesc <u>Insula Sincerității!</u>
ST12: And of course, <u>Family Island</u> is amazing!	TT12: Desigur, <u>Insula Familiei</u> e fabuloasă
ST13: Get out the <u>rubber ball</u> , we're in solitary confinement.	TT13: Scoate <u>mingea de cauciuc</u> , suntem în regim de izolare.
ST14: I found a Junior Hockey League	TT14: Există o ligă de hochei pentru juniori
ST15: when she was only a <u>freshman</u> .	TT15: De când era <u>boboc</u> .
ST16: And she's nice to <u>stray cats</u>	TT16: Și are grijă de <u>pisicile fără stăpân</u>
ST17: we are suppressed emotions!!!	TT17: Suntem emoții reprimată!!
ST18: We... used to... play <u>tag</u>	TT18: Ne mai jucăm <u>leapșa</u>
ST19: Bring it on <u>coppers!</u>	TT19: Aici sunt <u>curcanilor!</u>

These examples illustrate how terms like “Headquarters” - “Sediul central” and “Junior Hockey League” - “Ligă de hochei pentru juniori” show functional accuracy, while playful or metaphorical constructs, such as “Sparkle Pony Mountain” - “Muntele Ponei Lucios” and “The Mom Bad News Train” - “Trenul cu vești proaste de la mama” are rendered with creativity that maintains their childlike tone. Island metaphors (Friendship, Honesty, Family) are directly mirrored into Romanian, demonstrating conceptual alignment. Cultural expressions such as “freshman” rendered as “boboc”, “stray cats” as “pisicile fără stăpân” and “play tag” as “leapșa” further highlight how Romanian equivalents are chosen for naturalness and accessibility, not literal form.

S5.3 Domestication through Approximate Equivalence

Approximate equivalence, in my view, refers to a form of translation where the CSI preserves the essential meaning or emotional effect, but without reproducing it with complete semantic or grammatical precision. This strategy is especially useful in audiovisual contexts, where time constraints, register, and audience expectations demand clarity and relatability over exactness.

ST20: Can I say that <u>curse word</u> now?	TT20: Să spun <u>cuvântul urât</u> acum?
ST21: Yep, <u>Goofball</u> is the best.	TT21: Hmmm, Da, <u>poznașa</u> e cea mai tare!
ST22: Graham Cracker Castle	TT22: Castelul biscuiților crocanți

In ST18, the English phrase “curse word” implies an explicit term, often stronger in register than the Romanian “cuvânt urât” [ugly word], which is more general and commonly used with or around children. This softening slightly dilutes the original’s edginess. In ST19, “Goofball” is a nuanced American colloquialism that blends affection, silliness, and harmless eccentricity. Translating it as “poznașa” [the mischievous one], and not as “caraghioasa” / “prostuța”, demonstrates how the original meaning can be bent by using semantic substitutes to capture the playful intent and also the length of the original word, i.e., two syllables in both languages. Also, for ST20, the original term, “Graham Cracker Castle”, referring to a common snack in North America, sweetened with honey and made with graham flour, which does not exist in Romania, is approximated by adding an adjective suggesting the crispy texture.

S6. Full Domestication: This is the final strategy on the foreignization – domestication axis, representing the most extreme level of adaptation or acculturation. In this case, the CSI is transformed so thoroughly that it no longer resembles the original. The translation may involve omission, transformation, creative substitution, or complete rewriting, resulting in a term or expression that exists only in its domesticated form. Full domestication prioritizes the norms, expectations, and familiarity of the target culture to such an extent that the source culture’s identity is entirely erased.

S6.1 Full Domestication through Creative Substitution

ST1: Stretch those <u>hammies</u> , Anger!	TT1: Scăpăm de <u>colăcei</u> , Furie!
ST2: Jiminy mother-lovin-toaster strudel!!!	TT2: Că-mi vine să-mi iau lumea-n cap!
ST3: I live in <u>Canada</u> .	TT3: M-am mutat în <u>Bulgaria</u> !
ST4: Glitterstorm, Honeypants	TT4: Pufulina, Dulcețița
ST5: Let’s go Foghorns!	TT5: Hai Farul Mare!
ST6: OK. We’ve got a group of cool girls <u>at 2 o’clock</u> .	TT6: Bine, avem un grup de fete cool <u>în stânga</u> .
ST7: Cool kids whispering <u>at 3 o’clock</u> !	TT7: Copiii cool șoptesc <u>lângă noi</u> .
ST8: You know what? Save “Chopsticks” and	TT8: Ține “Ceata lui Pițigoi” și “Vesel

“Heart and Soul,” get rid of the rest.	se Trăiește” și scapă de restul !
ST9: Mt. Crushmore?	TT9: Muntele îndrăgostelii ?

In each case, the translation departs significantly from the literal or structural features of the source CSI, opting instead for cultural relevance over fidelity to source culture. For instance, “Stretch those hammies!” becomes “Scăpăm de colăcei!” [Let’s get rid of the belly fat], replacing a specific fitness phrase (“hamstrings”) with a Romanian colloquialism (“colăcei” – belly fat / love handles). Similarly, “Jiminy mother-lovin-toaster strudel!!!”, a nonsensical euphemism meant to mimic a swearing, is fully domesticated into “Că-mi vine să-mi iau lumea-n cap!” [I feel like running away from everything], a Romanian idiom that captures the emotional outburst without retaining the original’s surreal food-based expletive.

Names and place references are also creatively substituted: “I live in Canada” becomes “M-am mutat în Bulgaria”, one of Romania’s neighbouring countries, and “Foghorns!”, a nautical instrument for sounding warning signals, is replaced by “Farul Mare!”, referencing a recognizable Romanian sports idiom (Farul is even the name of a real Romanian football team, adding authenticity). Even abstract or invented doll names like “Glitterstorm, Honeypants” are transformed into “Pufulina, Dulcețica”, evoking affectionate Romanian-sounding nicknames that preserve the tone but not the lexical content.

Expressions like “at 2 o’clock” and “at 3 o’clock” are part of a military or tactical clock-based positioning system, used in English to describe directions relative to the speaker (e.g., “2 o’clock” meaning front-right, or “3 o’clock” meaning directly right). This system is not commonly used in Romanian everyday language, especially not by children. Therefore, the spatial orientation is simplified by using “to the left” and “next to us”.

“Chopsticks” and “Heart and Soul” are both well-known beginner piano duets in American culture, commonly referenced as simple, often overplayed tunes. The dubbed translation substitutes them with two equally well-known Romanian children’s songs: “Ceata lui Pițigoi” [The Titmouse Gang] and “Vesel se Trăiește” (the Romanian version of “If you’re happy and you know it”).

Finally, “Mt. Crushmore” is a play on “Mount Rushmore”, the famous U.S. monument, blended with “crush” to create a comic metaphor for romantic infatuation, reflecting Riley’s adolescent feelings. “Muntele îndrăgostelii” [Mount Lovey-Dovey] is an invented Romanian name that maintains the emotional exaggeration but removes any prominent identifying feature of a location.

S6.2 Full Domestication through Omission

In TT6 and TT7 we have two cases of full domestication through omission, where culturally specific references are entirely removed. “Long Term” is a metaphor for the brain’s long-term memory storage, a cognitive-science reference turned into a spatial metaphor. Similarly, “The house of the dead” alludes to haunted houses and is used by Riley’s emotions as a disgusted reaction to the sight

of their new house when the family moves to San Francisco. The language is softened in Romanian and paraphrased.

ST10: Let's get those memories down to Long Term.	TT10: Să salvăm amintirile importante!
ST11: Ahhhhh!! It's <u>the house of the dead</u> !	TT11: Super! Cât se poate de super!

What ties all these examples together is that they erase the cultural trace of the original, recasting the reference entirely within the target culture's emotional, linguistic, and imaginative framework. The result is a translation that feels native to Romanian children, even though much of the source culture's surface content is lost. In this sense, full domestication is not a failure of translation, but a deliberate strategy of adaptation. It prioritizes function over form, ensuring that the communicative effect is preserved, even if the wording is radically altered.

5. Conclusions

This study has shown that the translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) in the Romanian dubbing of *Inside Out 1* (2015) and *Inside Out 2* (2024) can be productively analyzed through a spectrum-based framework that expands the binary opposition of foreignization and domestication into a more nuanced set of strategies. By quantifying their distribution and examining the motivations behind their use, several patterns emerge. Foreignization (S1) accounts for a modest proportion of examples (5 cases), typically where lip synchronization or the preservation of international recognizability outweigh the need for localization. Mitigation (S2) is less frequent overall (2 cases), yet it balances accessibility and authenticity, often through phonological adaptation.

Subjugation (S3) is one of the most frequently employed strategies, (8 cases), spanning lexical displacement, creative compromise, and literal translation. The high number of creative compromises illustrates the limits of linguistic equivalence, particularly when dealing with English puns and idioms.

Semi-domestication (S4) appears less often (1 case), but when used, it offers hybrid solutions that balance an Anglicized tone with localized idioms, ensuring fluency without full erasure of the source identity. Domestication (S5), in its various forms, occupies a dominant position in the corpus (22 cases), given the necessity of rendering culturally remote items into language and imagery accessible to Romanian children. Finally, Full Domestication (S6) also proves to be a significant category (11 cases), revealing how translators deliberately reshape or even erase foreign elements in favour of Romanian cultural references or idioms, maximizing emotional immediacy and cognitive accessibility.

Taken together, these translation strategies reflect a combination of linguistic, cultural, and technical constraints. Lip synchronization, timing, and child-oriented discourse norms strongly influence the retention of English terms or the simplification of complex concepts. Nevertheless, the frequent recourse to domestication and subjugation reflects the need for translations that are not only linguistically accurate but also emotionally engaging and pedagogically effective.

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