



# **Guidelines for Subtitling in Slovenia**

Društvo slovenskih filmskih in televizijskih prevajalcev  
(Association of Slovenian film and TV translators)  
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## **Guidelines for Subtitling in Slovenia**

Subtitles are a written, often condensed rendition of the speech contained within video material. They are displayed at the bottom of the screen (or sometimes below the screen in the cinema) and follow the original dialogue or narration.

Slovenian subtitles are a condensed translation of the original speech in another language or a (condensed) transcript of a Slovenian speech in a programme in the Slovenian language, as an aid for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Subtitling is a specialised profession.

The recommended daily workload for a subtitler is up to 200 subtitles or 20 minutes of running time when working with a script. When the script is not provided, the recommended workload is 50% less. For highly specialised documentaries, the recommended daily workload is up to 150 subtitles or 15 minutes with a script.

These guidelines define the standard for good subtitling in Slovenia. They have been compiled by Društvo slovenskih filmskih in televizijskih prevajalcev, the Slovenian subtitlers' association, in dialogue with Televizija Slovenija (Slovenian national broadcaster), Slovenska kinoteka (Slovenian Cinematheque), Filozofska fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani (Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana), and Lektorsko društvo Slovenije (Slovene Society of Language Editors and Proofreaders). They represent the joint perspective of the participating institutions, describe best practice and apply exclusively to subtitles in the Slovenian language.

The guidelines consolidate the long-standing Slovenian tradition of subtitling. The tradition has developed according to Slovenian syntactic rules, word-formational and communicative features of the Slovenian language.

They are relevant for both established and new actors within the subtitling market who want to ensure that they are subtitling in the way that Slovenian viewers are used to and will recognize as good subtitling.

They follow the examples of similar documents of related associations in several European countries.

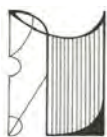


Audiovisual translation comprises a host of creative activities that exclude the possibility of machine translations, as only a human subtitler can interpret the text appropriately and choose the most suitable translation procedures to transpose all semantic nuances into the Slovenian language.

These nuances cannot be recognised only through a text, as picture and sound often convey important information that is not observed by machine translation software.

The Guidelines for Subtitling in Slovenia are endorsed by:

- Televizija Slovenija, Translation and Language Editing Division
- Slovenian Cinematheque
- Department of Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana
- Slovene Society of Language Editors and Proofreaders
- AVTE (AudioVisual Translators Europe)





## **Formal requirements for subtitles**

### **Workflow**

Subtitles are always created based on video material with audio and preferably a manuscript or time-coded subtitles in the source language. The final subtitles should preferably be checked by another translator to highlight any mistakes that may arise. After that, the subtitles should be checked by a trained language editor or proofreader.

### **Credits**

The subtitler is entitled to be credited by name. The credit usually states the name of the subtitler and the commissioning agency (where relevant).

If there is more than one translator, all should be credited.

Subtitlers cannot waive their moral rights to the work, and hence it is not allowed to make changes to the subtitles without consulting the subtitler.

### **Appearance**

According to Slovenian tradition, subtitles are written in white letters, typically on a semi-transparent black backdrop or in letters with a dark outline on or below the screen.

### **Number of lines and characters**

A subtitle has one or two lines. Typically, each line has a limit of 32-42 characters due to the space constraints of the play-out system. This is decided by the client.

### **Reading speed**

Reading speed defines the ratio between the length of the subtitles in characters and the duration of its appearance on the screen. It is expressed by CPS, characters per second, i.e. by the number of characters in a subtitle read by the viewer per second. The recommended reading speed in Slovenia is 9-15 CPS: 9-12 for children's programmes, and 10-15 for adult audiences.

### **Text alignment**

Subtitles are centre aligned at the bottom of the screen and have one or two lines. In the case of graphics with names or other information, the subtitles can be raised, but not more than two lines.



## Italics

Italics in subtitles are used to denote:

- lyrics (translated only if they are relevant to the storyline – if they rhyme in the original, they should also rhyme in the translation)
- books, films, programme titles
- scientific names for animals and plants
- less known foreign words
- translated inscriptions
- the subtitler can decide to use italics for archival footage
- narrators and inner monologues in feature films
- distorted or electronic sounds (radio, television, walkie-talkie, etc.)
- phone conversations, when the speaker is off screen (but we don't change the type in the middle of the sentence).

If the percentage of the subtitles in a given subtitling project is too great, or the subtitling program does not allow italics, we don't use them.

## Inscriptions

Translated title of the subtitling project is written in capital letters.

Graphic text information, such as road signs or explanations regarding the place of action, are written without the punctuation at the end in italics and in small letters. They are subtitled only if they are important to the storyline. If speech overlaps with an inscription, only the speech is subtitled. If speech overlaps with the title, the subtitler assesses what is more important and omits either the speech or the title or places the translated subtitle earlier or later.

If the translation is identical to the original (London or September 2001), the inscription or sign is usually not translated, unless the same subtitling project includes inscriptions or signs that need to be translated. In this case, everything is subtitled for consistency purposes.

In the opening and closing credits, we usually translate the following members of the crew: director, scriptwriter, actors, literary work and composer. We do not translate the same participants in the closing credits again. For the opening and closing credits in Non-Latin alphabet, we include personal names. The orthographic rules for transliteration and Slovenisation apply.



## Line breaks

Use of hyphens to divide words at a line break is usually not allowed, with the exception to very-long technical terms and compound words.

A subtitle consisting of less than 20 characters is kept in one line, unless we have a good reason for two lines, such as two speakers.

We create a line break at a comma or at a connective word (it goes in the second line or in a new subtitle), or at the contextually or structurally concluded phrases.

Examples:

LIKE THIS:

Ljudje mislijo,  
da vsi filmi govorijo o drugih,

v resnici pa govorijo o njem.

Tiho je odprla vrata  
in pogledala proti moji postelji.

NOT LIKE THIS:

\*Ljudje mislijo, **da**  
vsi filmi govorijo o drugih, **v**

resnici pa govorijo o njem.

\*Ljudje mislijo, **da vsi**  
filmi govorijo o drugih, **v resnici**

pa govorijo o njem.

\*Tiho je odprla vrata **in**  
pogledala proti moji postelji.

LIKE THIS:

Kako je postal  
tako vplivna ikona?



Sanjal sem,  
da sem med jutranjim sprehodom  
zašel v meni neznani del mesta  
  
s praznimi ulicami  
in razpadajočimi stavbami.

Bil sem visok,  
grbast in grozljivo suh.

Prepositions and auxiliary verbs are in the same line as the rest of the corresponding phrase.

Examples: .

LIKE THIS:

Ob pogledu  
na posnetke iz taborišč je menil,

da so bili uprizorjeni  
zaradi propagande.

V tridesetih letih  
je bilo to še precej običajno.

NOT LIKE THIS:

\*V tridesetih letih **je**  
**bilo** to še precej običajno.

LIKE THIS:

Zato so si le redki  
upali vzeti keks.



## Dialogue dashes

In principle, there should be no more than two speakers in one subtitle. The established tradition in Slovenia is that the first speaker is not marked with a dash (hyphen).

Ste to pričakovali?  
-Nisem, po pravici povedano.

Ideally, each speaker has a separate line. Allowed exceptions are:

- when there is not enough time and space for two or more separate subtitles, the first speaker can continue to the second line, with a shorter reply of the second speaker, providing that the guidelines for line breaks are observed:

Moja mlada ženka pravi,  
da jih imaš okrog 50. -Grdoba mala!

- at two very short sentences, which do not have more than 20 characters together, in order to cover as little happening on the screen as possible:

A tako?  
-Ja.

OR:

A tako? -Ja.

- if the consecutive speakers talk very fast, e.g. if there are four speakers in two seconds, and nothing can be omitted due to the importance of the information, the same subtitle can include three or more speakers, where all except the first speaker are separated by dialogue dashes (hyphens):

Ko ležete, pa noge začnejo ...  
-Se tudi vam to dogaja? -Ja.

Koga sta videli? -Johna.  
-Jaz Anno. -Pa ti?





## Features of subtitles

### Text condensation

Usually, there is a great difference between how fast people speak and how fast the average viewer's ability to read. Therefore, the spoken message needs to be written in fewer words in the subtitle – this is done by omitting, condensing or summarizing, but keeping in mind that the original meaning is preserved and that these interventions are as miniscule as possible for those viewers who understand the original language in the subtitling project, but still wish to read the subtitles. A subtitling project does not involve only a translation from one language into another, but also from spoken language into written language. As a result, repetitions and interjections are usually left out. We keep them only in comedies when a greater degree of expressiveness is needed.

Do not condense at all costs. If there is plenty of time, there is no reason to omit parts of the text. The adaptation of the translation in subtitling therefore aims to regulate the reading speed.

### Subtitle cueing

A subtitle must appear on the screen at the same time as the speech. It can continue to the next cut in order to achieve the needed duration – if so, it should be on the screen at least half a second into the next cut. In principle, subtitles should not remain on the screen across a change in location. This should be observed to an even stricter level when subtitling for the cinema, where protracting the subtitles into the next cut is more obvious and annoying.

### Subtitle duration and divergence

The viewer is supposed to watch the programme, not read it. Hence, the subtitle must remain on screen long enough for the viewer to be able to read it while following the action with ease.

As a rule of thumb, a subtitle of one full line must remain on screen for 3 seconds, while a subtitle of two full lines must remain on screen for 4-6 seconds, and not more than 8 seconds. The minimum duration for short subtitles is 2 seconds, in rare cases 1½ seconds (monosyllables,



established/short greetings).

It is recommended that individual subtitles keep a steady rhythm, with more-or-less the same reading speed, since the viewers don't know how long an individual subtitle will be visible on the screen.

There should be at least two frames (80 milliseconds) between two consecutive subtitles.

Due to the syntactic features of the Slovenian language, longer subtitles are often recommended than two short ones: when the word order in the translation is different than in the original, viewers have two different pieces of information presented to them at the same time, visual and spoken, therefore a changed word-order is not so intrusive as it would be with two consecutive shorter subtitles. While reading, we take in several words at once. If they appear on the screen together, it is easier and faster to grasp their meaning.

When there is less than a second between two subtitles, and there is no cut between them, we bridge the gap between them, providing that their duration allows for this.

If the text in the subtitles cannot be condensed enough, up to 10% of subtitles can exceed the reading speed by up to 10%, providing their duration is more than 2.5 seconds.

## Language

### Implicating register and style

Subtitles must comply with Slovenian grammar and syntax. When the language register and style significantly differ from the standard variety, this is implied only at a lexical level (by using colloquial /slang terms).

Examples:

LIKE THIS:

Mater, sploh je nisem videl.

NOT LIKE THIS:



\*Mater, sploh jo nisem videl.

LIKE THIS:

Si res moral vse skozlati?

NOT LIKE THIS:

\*Si res mogel vse skozlat?

When more than one spelling of a word is allowed, either option can be used, providing that the spelling is consistent throughout the subtitling project.

Foreign words should be used sparingly, but a Slovenian synonym should not be used just for the sake of it. The decision should be based on the vocabulary of the speaker and the type of the subtitling project.

### **Abbreviations**

Traditionally, abbreviations are avoided, with the exceptions of e.g., i.e., etc., and Mr, Ms, Mrs (when followed by a name), and symbols for measuring units (km, kg ...).

Examples:

Dober dan, ga. Smith.

Dober dan, gospa.

### **Numerals**

For the purposes of achieving the appropriate reading speed, numerals up to and including 10 can be written as numbers, although the style guide recommends that they be written in words. However, years, centuries and numerals next to unit symbols (2 kg for example), are always written with numbers.

### **Punctuation**

Punctuation in subtitles must comply with Slovenian grammar and syntax. The recommended punctuation marks are the full stop, comma and question mark. Ellipses and exclamation marks should be used sparingly.

All ending punctuation marks except ellipsis (three dots) should join words. In compliance with the well-established tradition, ellipsis in subtitles can be used without a space, although this feature is gradually being discontinued.



When a sentence from one subtitle continues into the next one, the next subtitle starts with a small letter and without any punctuation marks. In the same vein, no dots or ellipsis are used at the end of a subtitle when the sentence continues in the next subtitle. When a subtitle ends with ellipsis, the next one starts with a capital letter.

Quotation marks are used only at the start and end of a quotation. If a quotation continues across several subtitles, only the start and end of the quotation is marked by quotation marks. The following type of quotation marks should be used "" (and not »«).

### **Fact checking**

All foreign personal and geographical names must be checked against reliable sources.

### **Idiomatic language**

Idioms must not be translated literally – instead, an equivalent in the Slovenian language needs to be found.

*It's raining cats and dogs.*

LIKE THIS:

Lije kot iz škafo.

NOT LIKE THIS:

\*Dežujejo mačke in psi.

### **Negation**

The negated or affirmative form from the original should be preserved whenever possible, especially if a person on the screen shakes his/her head in negation or nods in affirmation, since the contrast between the scene and the translation can be annoying.



## Conclusion

Subtitles are the most widely read types of text in Slovenia, as they are read by more people than books or newspapers and magazines.

They help children to learn how to read; they enable the deaf and hard of hearing to watch television and movies on an equal basis with those without impairment; they open-up a world of movies and other programmes in foreign languages for everyone. In addition, they contribute to the improvement of foreign languages skills of the audience.

Subtitling is a big responsibility and should not be taken lightly, under any circumstances. By following these guidelines, you take a large step closer to carrying out that responsibility in the best possible manner.