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LOST IN COMPRESSION: THE RENDERING OF THE PRAGMATIC MARKER *WELL* IN THE UKRAINIAN NETFLIX SUBTITLES OF *HOW TO GET TO HEAVEN FROM BELFAST*

ВТРАЧЕНЕ У СТИСНЕННІ: ВІДТВОРЕННЯ ПРАГМАТИЧНОГО МАРКЕРА *WELL* В УКРАЇНСЬКИХ СУБТИТРАХ NETFLIX ДО СЕРІАЛУ «ЯК ПОТРАПИТИ ДО РАЮ З БЕЛФАСТА»

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У статті запропоновано перший квантифікований опис відтворення англійського прагматичного маркера *well* у професійному англо-українському субтитруванні. Матеріалом дослідження слугує повний сезон оригінального серіалу Netflix «How to Get to Heaven from Belfast» (2026): вісім епізодів, 5793 вирівняні пари субтитрів офіційної англійської та офіційної української доріжок, з яких методом суцільної вибірки з подальшим ручним фільтруванням немаркерних випадків уживання відібрано 142 токени маркера *well*. Кожен токен закодовано вручну за двома параметрами: функція в тексті оригіналу (за класифікаціями функцій K. Aijmer та F. Chapwanya і J. Nel: реакція на небажаний хід, гезитація, оцінка, самокорекція, зміна теми, цитатив, спонування до відповіді) та перекладацьке рішення (відтворення дискурсивною часткою, функційний зсув, компенсація, вилучення). Для перевірки центральної гіпотези функції зведено до бінарної опозиції за класичним поділом L. Brinton на міжособові та текстово-структурні; стійкість результату до найспірнішого кодувального рішення підтверджено аналізом чутливості. Кількісним індексом технічного обмеження слугує швидкість читання субтитра (знаків за секунду). Установлено, що домінантним рішенням є вилучення: 69,7 % tokenів не відтворено жодним засобом, попри наявність в українській мові повної функційної парадигми відповідників (ну, що ж, а, то, але, хіба, власне тощо), що спростовує гіпотезу про абсолютну лексичну лакуну як причину таких втрат. Вилучення є функційно вибірковою: міжособові вживання *well* вилучаються значуще частіше за дискурсивно-організаційні (77,9 % проти 53,2 %; $\chi^2 = 9,09$; $p < 0,01$). На біваріатному рівні вилучення корелює також із технічним тиском: вилучені токени зосереджені в сегментах зі значуще вищою швидкістю читання (13,3 проти 10,1 зн./с; $p < 0,05$), причому напрям механічного зміщення діє проти виявленого ефекту. Однак багатофакторна логістична регресія показує, що обидва чинники переплетені: міжособові вживання скупчуються в щільніших сегментах, і після врахування впливу функції незалежний внесок швидкості читання не досягає стабільної значущості, тоді як ефект функції залишається стійким ($OR = 2,53$; $p < 0,05$). Первинним детермінантом збереження чи вилучення маркера в дослідженій дорізці є, отже, його функція; незалежна роль швидкісного тиску лишається гіпотезою для перевірки на точних таймкодах. Запропоновано інтерпретацію в термінах функційно вибіркової конденсації субтитрового тексту та окреслено наслідки для оцінювання якості аудіовізуального перекладу і підготовки субтитрувальників.

Ключові слова: прагматичний маркер, дискурсивний маркер, аудіовізуальний переклад, субтитрування, вилучення, швидкість читання, англо-український переклад, маркер *well*.

The article offers the first quantified account of how the English pragmatic marker *well* is rendered in professional English–Ukrainian subtitling. The material is the complete first season of the Netflix original series *How to Get to Heaven from Belfast* (2026): eight episodes, 5,793 aligned subtitle pairs of the official English and official Ukrainian tracks, from which 142 tokens of the marker *well* were selected by exhaustive extraction followed by a manual pass filtering out non-marker uses. Each token was hand-coded along two dimensions: its source-text function (following the functional inventories of K. Aijmer and F. Chapwanya and J. Nel: response to a dispreferred move, hesitation, evaluation, self-correction, topic shift, quotative, elicitation) and the translation solution applied to it (rendition by a discourse particle, functional shift, compensation, omission). To test the central hypothesis, the functions were collapsed into a binary axis based on L. Brinton's classical division into interpersonal and textual-structural functions; the robustness of the result to the most contestable coding decision was confirmed by a sensitivity analysis. Reading speed (characters per second) served as the quantitative index of the technical constraint. The study establishes that omission is the dominant solution: 69.7% of the tokens are rendered by no device at all, despite the demonstrated availability of a full functional paradigm of Ukrainian equivalents (*nu, shcho zh, a, to, ale, khiba, vlasne, etc.*), which rules out an absolute lexical gap as the explanation of the loss. Omission is functionally selective: interpersonal uses of *well* are omitted significantly more often than discourse-organising ones (77.9% vs 53.2%; $\chi^2 = 9.09$; $p < .01$). At the bivariate level omission is also associated with the technical constraint: omitted tokens cluster in segments with significantly higher reading speed (13.3 vs 10.1 cps; $p < .05$), and the direction of the mechanical

bias runs against the effect. A joint logistic regression, however, shows the two factors to be entangled: interpersonal uses cluster in denser segments, and once function is controlled for, the independent contribution of reading speed does not reach stable significance, whereas the function effect remains robust ($OR = 2.53$; $p < .05$). The primary determinant of the marker's fate in the track under study is therefore its function; the independent role of reading-speed pressure remains a hypothesis to be tested on exact timecodes. The findings are interpreted in terms of a functionally selective condensation of the subtitle text, and implications for audiovisual translation quality assessment and subtitler training are outlined.

Key words: pragmatic marker, discourse marker, audiovisual translation, subtitling, omission, reading speed, English–Ukrainian translation, the marker well.

Formulation of the problem. Pragmatic markers such as *well*, *you know* and *I mean* carry little propositional content but a great deal of interpersonal and interactional meaning: they soften dispreferred responses, frame hesitation, manage the turn, and index the speaker's stance towards what is being said. Precisely because they are semantically "light", they are the first candidates for deletion wherever a translated text must be compressed. No mode of translation compresses more systematically than subtitling, which is bound by a two-line spatial window and, above all, by a reading-speed ceiling measured in characters per second. The question this article addresses is therefore not *whether* pragmatic markers survive subtitling – it is well established that a large share does not – but what governs the decision. Is the omission of a marker the random noise of condensation, or does it track measurable factors? We show quantitatively, on the complete first season of a Netflix original series, that the loss is neither accidental nor evenly distributed, and that its primary determinant is the marker's function: interpersonally loaded uses of *well* prove significantly more vulnerable to omission than discourse-organising ones, and this effect survives statistical control for reading-speed pressure. Omitted markers do cluster in segments with higher reading speed – the very parameter codified in the industry's own subtitling norms – but, as we also show, this association is entangled with function, and its independent contribution cannot be confirmed on the present data. What the Ukrainian subtitle text most often does not carry is precisely the face-work.

The problem has a practical edge for the English–Ukrainian pair. Since the arrival of global streaming platforms, Ukrainian has become a regular target language of professional, norm-governed subtitling at scale, yet the translational behaviour of this new body of texts remains almost undescribed. Understanding which pragmatic meanings are systematically absent from the Ukrainian subtitle text – and under what conditions – matters both for translation quality assessment and for the training of audiovisual translators.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Three research traditions converge on the present problem, and the gap lies at their intersection.

The first is the study of *well* itself, inseparable from the broader tradition of discourse- and pragmatic-marker research inaugurated by D. Schiffrin [1, c. 31] and consolidated by B. Fraser [2, c. 946], who established that such items operate on the level of discourse coherence and speaker–hearer relations rather than propositional content. L. Brinton [3, c. 35–40] proposed the classical division of marker functions into *textual* (organising discourse: openings and closings, topic shifts, repair, turn mechanics) and *interpersonal* (expressing attitude and managing face), a division we operationalise below. K. Aijmer [4, c. 20–73] provided the fullest account of *well* as a multifunctional marker whose readings – response marker, hesitation and planning device, marker of dispreferred or indirect answers, quotative, and discourse-structuring signal – are disambiguated by co-text. Most recently, F. Chapwanya and J. Nel [5, c. 27–28] offered a corpus-based functional taxonomy of the markers *so* and *well* in Zimbabwean and British English, distinguishing, among other functions, rephrasing/correction, moving to the main message, indirect answering, and evaluation. Two properties of *well* recur across this literature and matter for translation: it is overwhelmingly turn-initial, and its dominant functions are interpersonal rather than purely textual.

The second tradition concerns pragmatic markers in translation. Because markers are conventionalised and language-specific, their interlingual transfer is notoriously uneven: equivalence is rarely one-to-one, and translators routinely resort to omission, functional substitution, or compensation. Corpus-based research has begun to map this systematically – M. Apostol et al. [6, c. 2078–2079] have built a multilingual parallel resource for discourse markers spanning ten languages – yet Ukrainian is absent from that resource, and its authors explicitly note that lower-resourced languages remain under-described. In Ukrainian scholarship the translation of discourse markers has so far been discussed mainly in general terms, at conference-paper and thesis level, without a quantified study of an individual marker in a defined translated corpus.

The third tradition is audiovisual translation (AVT). The foundational account of subtitling by J. Díaz Cintas and A. Remael [7, c. 91] and

H. Gottlieb's early characterisation of subtitling as "diagonal" translation [8, c. 104] established condensation and deletion as structural, not incidental, features of the mode, with a substantial share of source dialogue routinely discarded to respect spatial and temporal limits. F. Karamitroglou's proposed set of European subtitling standards [9] codified these limits explicitly, deriving the reading-speed ceiling from the average viewer's processing rate of 2.5–3 words per second. M. Souto-Rico et al. [10, c. 1–2] locate the operative pressure precisely at the level of characters per second: subtitle quality, and the viewer's ability to process the line, depend on reading speed rather than raw text length. Industry practice encodes the same logic: Netflix's *Ukrainian Timed Text Style Guide* [11] specifies reading-speed ceilings for adult programming and restricts truncation to cases where reading speed or synchronisation would otherwise be violated – which makes a Netflix Ukrainian track a norm-governed professional artefact rather than an ad hoc rendering. Ukrainian AVT scholarship, including contributions in the present journal, has begun to map the field: I. Haman and O. Chaikovska [12, c. 138–139] systematise film translation as an AVT type, delineating subtitling, dubbing and voice-over and their respective constraints; V. Konkulovskyi and I. Mamrosh [13, c. 141–142] analyse the rendering of proper names in film translation. Yet no Ukrainian study addresses pragmatic markers in subtitles.

Identification of the unsolved part of the problem. At the intersection of the three traditions there is thus an untenanted space: no study has examined how an interpersonal pragmatic marker is rendered in professional English–Ukrainian subtitling, nor tested whether the marker's functional type conditions its survival, nor asked whether omission is additionally driven by reading-speed pressure once function is taken into account. The present article occupies that space on strictly delimited material.

Formulation of the objectives. The aim of the article is to determine what governs the rendering of the pragmatic marker *well* in professional English–Ukrainian subtitling. The tasks are: (1) to establish the inventory and distribution of translation solutions applied to *well* (equivalent particle, functional shift, compensation, omission) across a complete season of a Netflix original series; (2) to test whether interpersonally loaded uses of *well* are more vulnerable to omission than discourse-organising ones; (3) to test whether omission is additionally – and independently of the marker's function – conditioned by reading-speed pressure (characters per second), the mechanism encoded in the industry's own subtitling norms.

Presentation of the main material.

Material. The corpus comprises the complete first season (eight episodes of c. 46–55 minutes) of the Netflix original comedy-thriller *How to Get to Heaven from Belfast* (2026). For each episode the official English subtitle track (the source text) and the official Ukrainian subtitle track (a professional human translation) were exported with timecodes and aligned segment by segment, yielding 5,793 aligned subtitle pairs. The series was selected for three reasons: its dense colloquial dialogue maximises marker frequency; its Ukrainian localisation is a professional track governed by the platform's published norms; and, as a 2026 release, it has not previously been the object of scholarly analysis, which secures the novelty of the case study.

Object and delimitation. All occurrences of the token *well* were extracted automatically and filtered to exclude non-marker uses: the adverb/adjective (*works well, get well*), hyphenated compounds (*well-respected*), and fixed expressions (*as well, might as well*). Automatic filtering was followed by a full manual pass in which every candidate token was read in its co-text; this removed four further adverbial uses that had escaped the filter (*isn't terribly well, doing well, keeping well, could've well been*), leaving 142 marker tokens. Occurrences were counted per token, so a segment containing two markers contributes two data points.

Coding. Each token was double-coded. Source-text function was assigned manually from co-text (the preceding and following turns) using the inventory of Aijmer [4, c. 20–73] and Chapwanya and Nel [5, c. 27–28]: response/dispreferred, hesitation/planning, evaluation, rephrasing/correction, topic-shift/return, quotative, elicitation. For the central comparison these functions were collapsed into a binary axis following Brinton [3, c. 38]: *interpersonal* (response/dispreferred, evaluation – attitude and face-work) versus *textual/structural* (hesitation/planning, rephrasing/correction, topic-shift/return, quotative, elicitation – the organisation of discourse, including turn mechanics). Because the placement of hesitation/planning is the most contestable point of this division, a sensitivity analysis reassigning it to the interpersonal class is reported alongside the main result. Target-text solution was coded manually as: *omission* (the marker is rendered by no device); *particle* (rendition by a Ukrainian discourse particle); *functional shift* (rendition by a particle that changes the function); or *compensation* (the pragmatic force is relocated into another device in the segment). Particular care was taken to distinguish genuine renderings of *well* from Ukrainian particles that in fact

translate an adjacent item – Добре rendering *Right*, але rendering *but*, звісно rendering *obviously*: such cases were coded as omission of *well*. Coding was performed in a full manual pass by one coder; a second reader spot-checked the coded table, but no formal inter-coder reliability coefficient was computed. The consequences of this single-coder, non-blind design for the interpretation of the results are stated explicitly below.

Measures. The quantitative index of constraint is reading speed (CPS): the Ukrainian character count of a segment divided by its on-screen duration in seconds (duration approximated from the interval between successive subtitle onsets, capped at 0.3–8 s). Netflix's adult reading-speed ceiling [11] serves as the normative reference point. Importantly, the direction of any mechanical bias runs *against* the hypothesis: omitting a marker removes characters from the Ukrainian line and thereby lowers, not raises, its CPS; if omitted-marker segments nevertheless show higher CPS, the difference cannot be an artefact of the omission itself. This consideration guards against artefactual inflation of the bivariate contrast; it does not by itself address the possibility that reading speed and marker function are correlated with each other, which is why the two factors are additionally modelled jointly below. A raw length-compression ratio (Ukrainian/English characters) was computed at the pilot stage but is not used analytically, because it is confounded in both directions: a rendered particle itself lengthens the Ukrainian line, while an omitted *well* still inflates the English denominator.

Results: the inventory of solutions. Across the season the distribution is stark. Of 142 marker tokens, 99 (69.7%) are omitted: the Ukrainian segment renders the propositional content of the utterance and no device carries the marker's pragmatic force. Only 42 tokens (29.6%) are rendered by a Ukrainian discourse particle, and a single token is rendered by compensation. The particle inventory is instructive: *ну* dominates with 21 occurrences – half of all particle renderings – followed by *що ж* (6), the contrastive *а* (4), the inferential *то* (4), *але* (2), and single occurrences of *ну от*, *власне*, *то що*, *хіба* and the confirmatory *авжеж* (the last constituting the corpus's one functional shift: hesitational *No. Well, it wouldn't* rendered by confirmatory *Авжеж, не сподобалося*). Ukrainian thus possesses a full functional paradigm for *well* – the translators demonstrably command equivalents ranging from neutral *ну* through resigned *що ж* to concessive *хіба* (*Well, we did a bit* → *Хіба трохи*) – which rules out an absolute lexical gap as the explanation of the loss. The equivalents exist; in seven cases out of ten they are not used. Omission

is stable across all eight episodes (52–82% per episode), indicating a regularity of this track rather than the idiosyncrasy of a single episode or dialogue type.

Typical omissions strip the interpersonal frame while preserving the proposition: *Well, don't look at me* → *На мене не дивися* (the resistance-softening frame of the dispreferred response is gone); ... *makes you think about, well, life, I suppose* → ... *задумуєшся про життя* (both hedges – *well* and *I suppose* – vanish, and a tentative musing becomes an assertion); *Well, she'd been sleepwalking* → *Вона ходила вві сні* (a hedged account becomes a plain report). Where the marker is rendered, the choice is functionally sensitive: *Right. Well, what happened here is Dara* → *Що ж, тут сталася Дара* (resigned transition); *Well?* → *То що?* (elicitation); *-I don't care. -Well, I do* → *-Мені байдуже. -А мені ні* (contrastive riposte).

Results: function conditions omission. The central finding concerns the relation between the marker's function and its fate. Interpersonal uses of *well* ($n = 95$) are omitted in 77.9% of cases; structural uses ($n = 47$) in 53.2%. The association is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 9.09$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$) and robust to the most contestable coding decision: reassigning hesitation/planning from the structural to the interpersonal class leaves the effect intact ($\chi^2 = 7.94$, $p < .01$). The fine-grained functions are consistent with a gradient of vulnerability: response/dispreferred 78%, evaluation 75%, hesitation/planning 61%, rephrasing/correction 55%, topic-shift/return 50% (elicitation, with only two tokens, both retained, lies outside the gradient but points the same way – the prompting *Well?* is undeletable because it constitutes the entire turn). The gradient runs from the most interpersonal to the most structural: the more the marker does for the relationship between speakers – softening a contradiction, cushioning a dispreferred answer, framing an assessment – the less likely it is to be carried by the Ukrainian line. Given the single-coder design, however, this fine-grained ordering should be read as descriptive; the inferential weight of the article rests on the binary contrast, which is protected by the sensitivity analysis and by the size of the difference.

Results: reading speed – a bivariate association that is not confirmed as an independent effect. If omission were purely a matter of the marker's function, it should be unrelated to the technical constraint; if it were purely a response to time pressure, it should be unrelated to function. At the bivariate level omission is associated with both. Tokens rendered with a particle sit at a mean reading speed of 10.1 characters per second; tokens whose markers were omitted sit at 13.3 cps (medians 10.9 and 12.0 respectively;

Welch's $t = 2.42$, $df = 94$, $p < .05$) – and, as noted, the mechanical bias runs the other way, making the contrast conservative with respect to that artefact. The two candidate factors, however, are not independent of each other: interpersonal uses of *well* cluster in segments with higher reading speed (means 13.7 vs 9.7 cps; point-biserial $r = .25$, $p < .01$), presumably because face-work concentrates in rapid conversational exchange. To separate the factors, a binary logistic regression was fitted with omission as the outcome and axis and CPS as joint predictors ($n = 139$; three tokens lack a duration value). The function effect remains significant and essentially undiminished under the control ($OR = 2.53$, $p = .019$) and is stable across every specification tested: reassigning hesitation/planning to the interpersonal class, excluding implausible proxy-generated CPS values, and log-transforming CPS. The independent CPS effect, by contrast, falls short of significance in the linear specification ($p = .145$), is marginal when implausible values are excluded ($p = .076$), and reaches significance only under logarithmic transformation ($p = .013$). On the present duration proxy, then, the bivariate reading-speed contrast is substantially carried by the correlation between reading speed and function, and the independent contribution of the technical constraint is specification-dependent. We therefore treat the marker's function as the established determinant of omission, and the independent role of reading-speed pressure as a plausible but unconfirmed hypothesis, to be retested when exact out-times replace the duration proxy.

Discussion. Taken together, the findings describe a functionally selective condensation. Under compression, the subtitle text preserves propositional content and plot-bearing discourse organisation far more reliably than face-work: across a season, the characters of the Ukrainian track – at the level of the written line – contradict without softening, answer without hedging, and assess without framing more often than their English counterparts do. Whether this textual asymmetry amounts to a perceptual one is a separate empirical question that the present design cannot answer: subtitles are received together with the actors' voices, and prosody may recover for the viewer part of the pragmatics that the text omits. The claims of this article are claims about the subtitle text.

Two interpretations of the selectivity must also be distinguished. The demonstrated availability of a full Ukrainian particle paradigm rules out an absolute lexical gap as the explanation of the loss; it does not by itself establish that a particle would be stylistically natural in every co-text, and part of the omission may reflect a deliberate convention of subtitle economy –

an avoidance of "light" words that would clutter a line read under time pressure. What the functional selectivity shows, however, is that whatever convention is at work, it is not applied uniformly: it prices interpersonal meaning lower than plot-bearing discourse organisation, and it prices both lower than propositional content. The single compensation in the corpus (*Well, they're not* → *Аж ніяк*, where an emphatic idiom absorbs the contradictive force) shows that low-cost renderings are available where the translator elects them. The didactic implication for AVT training in Ukraine follows in a correspondingly conditional form: since the Ukrainian particle paradigm for *well* is demonstrably available, sensitising trainee subtitlers to the interpersonal (rather than merely decorative) load of markers – and to short renderings such as *a*, *to*, *хіба*, which add two to four characters – could recover a share of the omitted pragmatics at negligible reading-speed cost, wherever the register of the line admits it.

Limitations. Five limitations are acknowledged. First, the source text is itself an edited subtitle line, not a full transcription of the spoken dialogue, so a share of markers may have been condensed upstream of the Ukrainian track; this is standard in subtitling research but should be borne in mind when generalising to "the dialogue". Second, the reading-speed measure relies on a duration proxy (inter-onset intervals) pending exact out-times; robustness checks (exclusion of implausible values, logarithmic transformation) did not alter the pattern reported above, but only exact timecodes can settle the independent role of reading speed. Third, functional coding was performed by a single coder who was not blind to the Ukrainian rendering, and no inter-coder reliability coefficient (such as Cohen's kappa) was computed; the sensitivity analysis and the second-reader spot-check mitigate but do not remove this, which is why the fine-grained functional gradient is reported as descriptive and the article's inferential claims rest on the binary axis. Fourth, the corpus is one series translated by one team: the findings describe the regularities of this professional track as instantiated here, not English–Ukrainian subtitling in general; separating the norm of the mode from the norm of the vendor requires cross-title and cross-platform comparison. Fifth, the study measures the subtitle text and makes no claims about viewer perception: the reception of the omissions, in the presence of the audible soundtrack, is an open empirical question.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. The article has offered, to our knowledge, the first quantified account of how an English pragmatic marker is rendered in professional English–

Ukrainian subtitling. On the complete first season of *How to Get to Heaven from Belfast* (142 tokens of the marker *well* in 5,793 aligned subtitle pairs), three results were established. First, omission is the dominant solution (69.7%), despite the demonstrated availability of a full Ukrainian particle paradigm (ну, що ж, а, то, але, хіба, власне etc.) – the loss cannot be explained by an absolute lexical gap. Second, omission is functionally selective: interpersonal uses of *well* are omitted significantly more often than discourse-organising ones (77.9% vs 53.2%; $\chi^2 = 9.09$, $p < .01$), an effect that survives the sensitivity analysis and, crucially, remains robust when reading-speed pressure is statistically controlled (OR = 2.53, $p < .05$). Third, the bivariate association between omission and reading speed (13.3 vs 10.1 cps; $p < .05$) proves, on joint modelling, to be substantially carried by the correlation between function and dialogue density: the independent contribution of the technical constraint

does not reach stable significance on the present duration proxy. The primary governor of the marker's fate in this track is therefore what the marker does, not – or not demonstrably – how fast the line must be read. What is lost in compression is predictable from the marker's function; and what is predictable can be taught, audited, and partially recovered. Prospects for further research follow directly: computing inter-coder reliability on an independently coded sample; replacing the duration proxy with exact timecodes and retesting the reading-speed hypothesis in the same multivariate design; extending the design to the interpersonal markers *you know* (95 tokens in this corpus) and *I mean* (68 tokens) to test the selectivity across markers; testing the reception of the omissions experimentally, with the soundtrack present; and comparing titles, platforms and translation teams to separate the norm of the mode from the norm of the vendor.

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