

UDC 81'25'42:[004.738.5:338.4-028.23]

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30970/fpl.2024.137.4501>

## USER INTERFACE FEATURES OF VIDEO STREAMING SERVICES AS POTENTIAL TOOLS FOR AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

**Oleksandr Romaniuk**

*Ivan Franko National University of Lviv,  
1, Universytetska Str., Lviv, Ukraine, 79000  
oleksandr.romaniuk@lnu.edu.ua*

The article explores the multimodal potential of paratexts in the evolving media landscape with the focus on their use and adaptation in multilingual user interfaces of streaming video services. The functions of paratexts in conventional books are highlighted, parallels with paratextual elements in audiovisual media are drawn, and their specific features within the multilingual interface of a video streaming service Amazon Prime Video are analysed. The conclusions elucidate the significant potential of expanding translators' roles into interface design and software development within streaming services, fostering interdisciplinary collaborations between Audiovisual Translation Studies, IT, and marketing to advance translation quality and user experiences with localized audiovisual products.

*Key words:* audiovisual translation, user interface, streaming services, paratextuality, epitext, peritext.

**Introduction.** In traditional books, paratextual elements, particularly footnotes, are an immensely important tool for both editors and translators which have been used since Antiquity. However, times have changed and the emergence of new forms of media, such as audiovisual works, prompts further research of how similar elements can be used in the context of new medium's opportunities and limitations. This article aims to provide a brief overview of the function of paratexts in traditional books, show their connections with how paratextual elements are handled in the audiovisual sphere and analyse the features of a particular video streaming service interface whose multilingual character requires agency of translators and localizers.

**Previous Research in the Area.** The very term “paratext” was coined by the French theorist Gerard Genette. He calls paratext “what enables a text to become a book and to be offered to its readers and, more generally, to the public [5, p.1].” In general, there are different kinds of paratextual elements, from covers to prefaces to notes and annotations.

While providing an overview of the types of paratextual elements which might be found in books, Gerard Genette also draws a distinction between peritext, which is located “within the same volume” and epitext, which is “located outside the book” [5, p. 5]. In the course of his work named “Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation” Genette lists a number of examples

of peritexts (such as titles, authors' names, epigraphs, prefaces or postfaces, chapter titles, footnotes, etc.) and epitexts (letters, diaries, promotional interviews, posters and external textual material) [5].

Gerard Genette also lists the typology of paratext's functions: designating (identifying), descriptive function, connotative function and the so-called temptation function (that of attracting the reader). In 2013, this typology was also used by Valerie Pellatt in the volume called "Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation", various chapters of which also show that paratexts can even manipulate the reader's consciousness and purposely deceive them, staying true to the author's intention or contradicting him/her due to the reasons of ideological or political nature [6, p. 3]. Pellatt also provides another definition of paratexts by denoting it as "any material additional to, appended to or external to the core text which has functions of explaining, defining, instructing, or supporting, adding background information, or the relevant opinions and attitudes of scholars, translators and reviewers" [6, p. 1].

It is worth noting that in his work Genette mainly considers the so called *authorial paratexts* and *publisher's paratexts* [5, p. 9], while giving very little attention to the *translator's paratexts*. However, the author does mention the notion of a translator's preface as opposed to an author's preface. Genette denotes the former an "allographic" paratext if the translator is the author's "ally", whereas if "the translator-preface-writer may possibly comment on, among other things, his own translation... his preface then ceases to be allographic" [5, p. 263–264].

Another perspective on the definition of paratext, in this case from the point of view of translation studies, can be found in the 2018 volume "Translation and Paratexts" by Kathryn Batchelor. In the volume, the researcher denotes paratexts as "a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which the text is received" [4, p. 142]. She also indicates such functions of paratexts as referential, self-referential, ornamental, generic, meta-communicative, informative, hermeneutical, ideological, evaluative, commercial, legal, pedagogical, instructive and operational as well as the function of personalisation [4, p. 160–161].

In the article "Translator's footnotes as an (in)effective translation strategy" (2021) researcher Jana Ukušová also distinguishes the term *translator's footnotes* and mentions that, according to the scholar Jacqueline Henry, this type of note belongs to allographic paratext, that is, written by another person who is neither the author nor a character in the book. She also claims that this type of note appears only in the text of translation and is used by the translator to place the original text in a different cultural, geographical, or even temporal context [9, p. 53].

Since the main role of translator's notes is to add additional information to the text, in her work "*Listening to voice of the translator. A description of translator's notes as paratextual elements*" (2013) Carmen Toledano Buendia also distinguishes two main types of translator's notes depending on their functions: notes with an informative/explanatory function, which provide the necessary information to ensure that the reader can properly understand the source text; and translator's notes with a performative function, which contain explanations that convey the translator's comments, opinions, or criticisms [8, p. 157].

One important aspect to mention while overviewing footnotes is that both types disrupt the flow of the text, but to a different extent – while explanatory notes minimally interrupt the reader’s attention and try to preserve the integrity of the reading experience, performative notes take the reader out of the text and transfer them to another level of reality.

For centuries books were the only way of storing information, including literary works, and their format did not change for the longest time. It was only at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that humanity invented e-books, a new technology that uses screens with special electronic ink to reproduce the reflective properties of actual paper. It provides an experience that closely resembles reading traditional books, except for the tactile interaction with paper pages. And because each e-book is a computer device with its own interface and features, it allows readers to interact with books in a new way. For example, they can instantly copy and search text on the Internet or have access to many dictionaries without leaving the book’s page. Since the text is no longer permanently imprinted on the page after the book leaves the printing press, notes and annotations have also become interactive – their display on the screen can be adjusted, and if desired, turned off altogether. Thus, modern readers have new opportunities to interact with the book, and authors and translators can add not only textual explanations to notes and annotations, but also other epitextual elements, such as links to websites, audio and video content. In this way, books also have the potential to turn into a multimodal product at the reader’s request, or to remain in the traditional format of a textual work if the reader chooses not to use certain features.

A similar development has also taken place in the world of cinema. In the early twentieth century, films were screened exclusively in cinemas of various types, but with the advent of television, movies and TV series became available on TV screens at home in almost every family. In contrast, over the last decade we have seen a dramatic change in the format of broadcasting movies and TV series. Although cinemas are still popular, and film premieres traditionally take place almost exclusively in them, modern mass consumption of audiovisual content has almost completely shifted to the VOD (Video on Demand) format. The main difference between this approach and traditional television is that now the viewer has access to a certain library of audiovisual works, each of which they can play at any time if they pay a (usually monthly) subscription to a particular service. Now viewers are no longer dependent on the schedules of individual TV channels, and they do not need to change their plans if they coincide with the time of their favourite TV series. As of now, there are a number of companies that each have their own video streaming service – some of them are international and operate in Ukraine (e.g. Netflix, Apple TV, and Amazon Prime Video), some are available in many countries but have not yet been launched in our country (HBO Max, Disney Plus, Hulu), and others are purely local and work with Ukrainian consumers in mind (Megogo, Sweet.TV).

Even though all these services are owned by different companies and, as a result, differ in the content of their libraries, they all share common interface features – each offers access to video content with the ability to change the language and subtitles.

Carol O’Sullivan argued in 2018 that the distinction between peritext and epitext cannot be easily transferred to film. She argues that while “there are some film paratexts which sit intuitively easily with Genette’s distinction, e.g. title sequences as peritexts; posters and promotional interviews as epitexts ... but film does not share the stability of the book

format” [7, p. 266]. The scholar states that “film paratexts have been in a near-constant state of evolution through the history of the cinema, elements of the paratext may be peritextual in some exhibition contexts, or time periods, and epitextual in others” and provides an example of subtitles which “have become more often epitextual than peritextual”: “For DVDs and Blu-rays, peritexts include language menus and cover art. Special features are both epitextual (part of the package) and peritextual (because optional): you can watch a film on DVD without ever watching them, and they may be present in some editions and not in others. Epitexts, which include reviews, advertising and promotional material, directors’ comments and trailers, may become peritextual when adopted for home viewing formats in the form of directors’ commentaries and bonus features” [7, p. 267].

In her research O’Sullivan concludes that different media formats, such as films projected in cinemas, films on home video formats (i.e. DVD and Blu-Ray) and films on streaming services are paratextually framed in different ways, and, as such, require different approaches in terms of their analysis.

Being one of the leading scholars in the field of Audiovisual Translation Studies, O’Sullivan touches upon the potential of DVD and Blu-Ray menus and their flexibility and interactivity in the viewers interaction with the films in her article [7, p. 268–269]; however little research has been done in the field of the newest format of audiovisual content consumption, i.e. streaming services.

**Methodology.** The assumptions of the article are based on the interdisciplinary framework that bridges translation studies, film production, marketing, globalization, and IT design. The aim of elucidating the functions of user interface (UI) paratextual elements is achieved through the utilization of analytical and synthetic, modelling and inductive approaches. The interpretative methods of audiovisual and cultural analyses are employed to recognize and elucidate the cultural features of the paratexts. **Content Analysis** is used to systematically analyse the types of epitextual and peritextual elements provided by the X-Ray feature. By categorizing and quantifying the information presented, we can identify patterns and assess the effectiveness of these elements in aiding translation and viewer comprehension.

**Results and Discussion.** A user interface (UI) is the platform through which a user interacts with a specific computer system or software. It includes all possible elements through which users communicate with a digital product or service, including various screens, pages, buttons, icons, and other visual components. UI simplifies the way in which the user navigates and controls the system or application, making the overall experience more efficient and enjoyable for them. There are several different types of UIs, the most popular of which are graphical user interfaces (GUIs) that employ visual elements and voice user interfaces (VUIs) that rely on the usage of spoken commands. Due to the overall goal of providing the user with a fast and responsive experience, UIs should be clear and concise in order to avoid possible ambiguity, as well as have the necessary aesthetics to appeal to as many users as possible.

As a result, the functions of paratextual elements of user interfaces coincide with multiple entries from the aforementioned list by K. Batchelor, namely referential and self-referential (due to providing the identifying information about the given film as well as providing the user with the instructions on how to use the UI itself), ornamental (the various design aspects of UIs), generic (categorising the film), meta-communicative (explicitly

referencing the filmmaking processes), informative (removing epistemic obstacles to the viewer's understanding by providing them with various additional contextual information about the movie scenes), hermeneutical (containing various trivia entries about the decisions during the filmmaking process), commercial (regular presence of advertisements), legal (containing legal information about both the film and the streaming service), instructive and operational (facilitating and guiding reception and use of the streaming service) as well as the personalisation function (adjusting various interface elements to personal needs, such as subtitle font size, video quality, etc.)

The focus of this article will be directed towards the analysis of epitextual and peritextual elements and their multilingual translation of the user interface of Amazon Prime Video, a service owned by the world's most expensive company, Amazon.com, which currently possesses a unique set of features called X-Ray ((X-Ray is the integration of the Amazon Prime Video service with the IMDb platform (Internet Movie Database)). As of June 2024, imdb.com had more than seven million pages, most of which contained information about movies and TV series [3]. In total, the database has 13 different categories which it tracks: feature film, short film, television series, television series, TV movie, TV special, miniseries, music video, short TV movie, long-form podcast, podcast series, video, and video game. The pages for most movies, TV series, and their individual episodes contain detailed information about the cast and crew of a particular project as well as additional information, such as soundtracks used, interesting facts, and references and allusions to other audiovisual works in a particular movie or series. Since Amazon.com has owned IMDb since 1998 [1], it can afford integrating information from the site with the functionality of the streaming service.

Similarly to the goals and principles of the design and functionality of a streaming service's user interface, the translation of such a UI requires a rigorous approach that would ensure the highest level of convenience and effectiveness to the target user. Due to the brevity of multiple terms which denote the various functions of the interface, their target language equivalents must remain concise while retaining the maximal level of clarity for the audience, which might prove to be a challenge for the languages with longer words. The retention of the font style is also an important element to keep in mind, as it ensures the brand identity of the specific streaming service, as well as provides the aesthetic pleasure of matching the style of the rest of the UI's elements for the target user. This part, however, does not only rely on the decisions of translators, but heavily leans on the multidisciplinary cooperation of translators and UI designers from various countries.

Returning to Amazon Prime Video and X-Ray, one can observe a series of characteristics that afford audiences the opportunity of accessing diverse information seamlessly during the viewing experience, along with their significance and possible utilization in the process of translation.

### **1. Actor Information**

*Users of the service can view information about actors, such as their bios, photos, filmography, and character stories [2].*

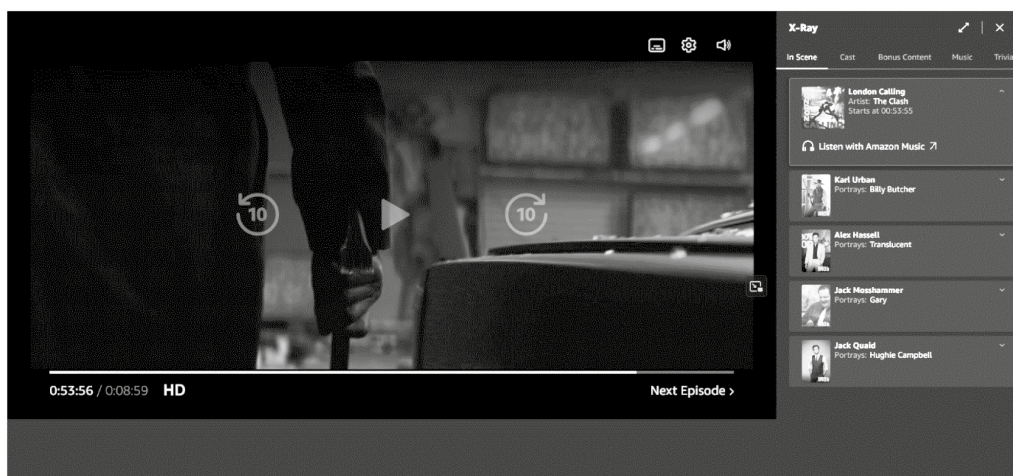
Although most of this epitextual information is not related to a specific audiovisual product, the last detail (character stories) can be a great asset for the viewer, especially if it is a series rather than a feature film, because due to the large number of episodes, the viewer

may need additional information about a particular character to better distinguish between the characters in the story and categorize this information in their memory. An important factor here is that this character description should be done either by the same translator who works directly on the film, or that the translator should take into account the proper names, titles, terms, etc. that have already been used in the translation of the film in order to maintain the coherence of all concepts in the minds of the viewer who will read the corresponding text in the application.

In addition, the IMDb page for individual characters usually lists all possible projects in which they have appeared (movies, TV shows, video games, and all possible variations of these genres). Thanks to this detail, viewers can trace intertextual connections between different audiovisual products, which will lead to an understanding of potential allusions to them that the work may contain.

## 2. Song Identification

*X-Ray can show the title of the song the viewer heard in the movie and its artist [2].*



**Fig. 1.** Song from the soundtrack, its beginning timestamp, link to the music streaming service and the list of actors with the characters they portray (paratext leading to epitextual elements).

In addition to the title and artist, modern technology allows the viewer to find and read the lyrics in seconds (and often a translated version, either by machine translation or by real poetry translators, depending on the composition). For the most part, diegetic music is not one of the elements of a film that needs to be translated, but directors and screenwriters often select certain songs for their lyrical component. In addition to the melody, which can emphasize the drama of the scene or, on the contrary, relax the viewer, the lyrics are often a surprisingly important component, especially if the author uses an oxymoron in the composition itself and combines a cheerful melody with contrastingly sad lyrics, or vice versa. In such cases, the viewer of the film in translation has access only to “one side of the coin,” i.e. only to the quality of the melody, and cannot perceive the intended mood of a particular scene. That is

why the native speaker of the original language of the film often receives more information, even if all elements of the dialog between the characters are fully translated, as in the case of dubbing, this feature allowing viewers from any country to get acquainted with the deeper connotations of a scene on their own.

Moreover, the function of song identification has its uses for the audience even on the rather rare occasion when the song is translated in the dubbed target-language version of the film. Due to the constraints of dubbing, mainly the lip-sync requirement to make the audio in the translation as coherent with the visual channel as possible, the translator might take some liberties and stray from the original song lyrics. Furthermore, the dubbing actors might fail to convey the necessary emotion in the reproduced version of the song, making the viewer likely to want to hear the intonations and tonal shifts in the original performers' voices. In such situations, the audience will still have fast and easy access to the original version of the song, its lyrics and their translations due to this particular X-Ray feature.

### 3. Video Sharing

*In some projects, X-Ray allows users to share individual scenes and moments on social media [2].*



**Fig. 2.** Videoclip sharing function (currently only available on iOS devices).

At first glance, this element does not seem to be of value for the study of audiovisual translations. However, if Amazon collects anonymous statistics on which moments of a movie are most often shared in a particular country, a detailed analysis of such data can demonstrate, among other things, the effectiveness of certain translation techniques and strategies. By looking at how often users share a scene in one language and comparing it to the results of other language groups, conclusions can be drawn about how successful the cultural adaptation of a particular scene is.

The efficacy of such an approach is most likely to be optimal when confronted with instances of humor adaptation. Given the culture-specific nuances of translating humor, there is a global choice between domestication, which aims to make humor more relatable to the target culture, and foreignization, which seeks to preserve the original allusions and acquaint the target audience with the source culture's humor perception. Furthermore, the

intricate decisions made by translators in reproducing humor relying on multimodal elements for comedic effect, along with the analytical possibilities offered by this aspect, enable the gathering of valuable statistical data from viewers regarding their reception of the translated audiovisual content. As a result, such data will inform the translators' decisions in the future movie adaptations they will be working on, potentially increasing the quality and effectiveness of further translations.

#### 4. Shopping

*In some projects, X-Ray shows links to products that viewers can see in the frame (for example, watches or clothes worn by a character), which are available for purchase on Amazon [2].*



**Fig. 3.** “The Fellowship of the Ring” book Amazon purchase link (peritext that leads to epitextual content) and general trivia (peritext).

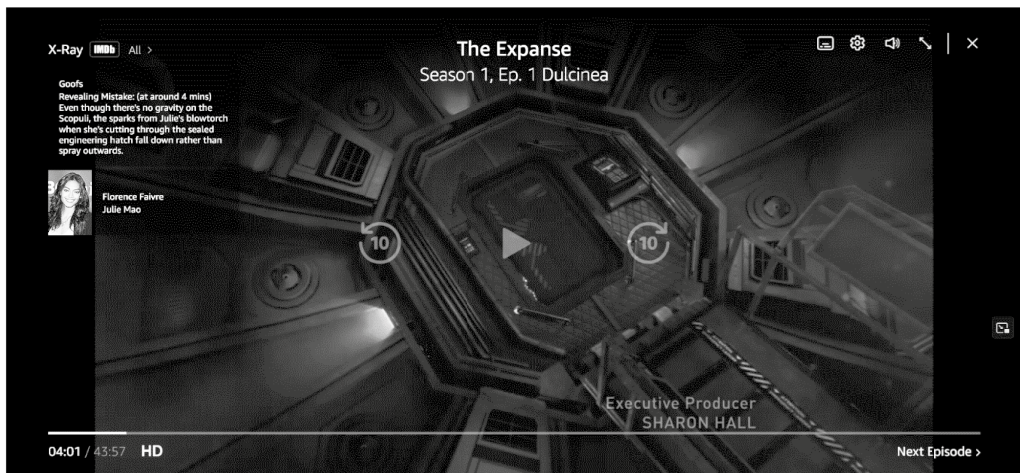
Along with this element of the X-Ray feature set, the viewer is exposed to another element of intertextuality (i.e., “a relation of co-presence between two or more texts, that is to say, eidetically and most often, by the literal presence of one text within another”, according to the definition provided by Gerard Genette [5, p. xviii]) which can be considered innovative and which leads to new interdisciplinary connections, this time with the marketing sphere. Given the presence of an online retailer like Amazon in the target country and the corresponding license agreements for the sale of this type of product, the fact that viewers can buy the item or piece of clothing they see in their favourite movie directly affects the popularity of a particular audiovisual product in that country. If we analyse the connections with translation studies, it will also be useful to pay attention to the names under which the relevant items will be sold in stores. As in the case of the first feature of the X-Ray service, all proper and common names should be unified and brought into line with how they are translated in the film. This is important to create the most favourable conditions for the consumer, who in this situation becomes not only a film viewer but also a potential buyer of related tangible goods.



An important feature of the above functions is that they are optional. Since all these elements are integrated into the user interface, which appears on the screen only when the “pause” button is pressed, watching a movie as a single coherent work will be interrupted only at the request of the viewer. This is another difference between these features and traditional book notes, because the content of ordinary pages cannot be made interactive, and the comments of both the author and the translator will always occupy space on paper, potentially distracting the reader from the work. Amazon also offers elements in its e-books that are similar in functionality to X-Ray, which also appear only after users interact with numbers with a note number. They usually have a relatively small font size and minimize distraction.

### 5. Bonus Content & Trivia

*Amazon Prime Video users have access to a database of interesting facts and additional video content, including behind-the-scenes videos about the making of a film or series [2].*



**Fig. 4.** Bonus content of “The Expanse” television show in the form of a filming mistake (peritext).

Among the considerable amount of technical information, such as the film’s runtime, budget, box office, date of first release in cinemas in different countries, production companies, etc., the IMDb.com website contains a category called “Connections” that includes a whole “intertextual canvas,” namely:

- other audiovisual products that contain scenes from this movie;
- sequels and prequels to a given movie;
- a list of audiovisual works that contain references or allusions to the film;
- references and allusions to other audiovisual works in this film;
- other projects that use locations or characters from this movie;
- other projects that parody this movie.

Each of the above elements carries valuable additional information for the interested viewer, but the most important for the average viewer are the third and fourth components of

this category, which contain information about allusions. This kind of allusion map can be a potentially new way for viewers to interact with different cultural references of the original, although its usefulness depends on the strategy chosen by the translators of the film. For example, if the translation is dominated by the domestication strategy, and all references to the original culture are changed to the culture of the target audience, then the allusion map will only confuse the viewer who decides to study the film in more detail. At the same time, if the translator uses the strategy of alienation and preserves all references to the products of the original culture, such interaction with the portal will be a real treasure for improving the viewer's understanding of original intention of the filmmakers.

After analysing all functions and paratextual potential of Amazon Prime Video's X-Ray feature, it becomes apparent that most of them not only have great potential for use in audiovisual translation but can also become the next step in the evolution of the viewer's interaction with the translated audiovisual product.

**Conclusions.** Amazon's set of features called X-Ray is a promising technology that allows for almost seamless integration with such databases as IMDb. One of the obstacles to the future development of such systems of interaction between interfaces and databases is that Amazon is currently a de facto market monopolist due to its ownership of the IMDb.com database. It remains to be seen whether other companies will find ways to develop in this direction as well, either by launching their own alternative to IMDb or by signing a license agreement with Amazon, but the potential for competition to emerge in this area also holds good prospects for the development of both Audiovisual Translation Studies and the field of translation itself.

Upon analysing various epitextual and peritextual elements provided by the X-Ray feature, one might conclude that it proves to be an innovative tool to be added to the arsenal of audiovisual translators. Provided that this type of user interface continues to develop, and other companies manage to adopt these features in their respective streaming services, X-Ray can help audiovisual translators refine their strategies and approaches through the statistical data obtained from the "video clip sharing" function of the service, provide additional paratextual information to the viewers (such as data about the actors and characters, separate access to the musical compositions used in the film and their interpretations, extra insights into the film's creation and intertextual links with other works, etc.) that will undoubtedly enrich the viewer's comprehension of the audiovisual work while retaining the key property of being optional in case the audience chooses to consume the work in the traditional way instead. The function of integration with the Amazon marketplace builds upon the interactivity between the viewer and the tangible products related to the audiovisual work of art, prompting the need for the translators to unify proper names and terms between various implementations of the same given story in different art types and genres and, as such, ensuring a more cohesive experience for the target audience.

Further research can lead to new potential interdisciplinary connections in the form of expansion of the role of translators in the development and design of user interfaces for streaming services. Now they can actively interact with web design and software development not only in terms of localizing the above-mentioned services, but also take an active part in creating new features and adapting them to the needs of international viewers.

Apart from the practical implications, the same conclusions can be made regarding the interdisciplinary branching out of Audiovisual Translation Studies and the need to work in tandem with researchers in both the IT and marketing spheres to contribute to the development of translation quality and target user's experience with translated and localized audiovisual products.

## REFERENCES

1. Amazon.com Acquires Three Leading Internet Companies. *Amazon Press Center*, April 27, 1998, URL: <https://press.aboutamazon.com/1998/4/amazon-com-acquires-three-leading-internet-companies>
2. Prime Video X-Ray. *Amazon.com*. URL: <https://www.amazon.com/salp/xray>
3. Press Room. *IMDb.com*. URL: <https://www.imdb.com/pressroom/stats/>
4. Batchelor K. *Translation and Paratexts*. London & New York : Routledge, Taylor and Francis, 2018.
5. Genette G. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Intepretation* [English translation of Seuils]. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1997.
6. Pellatt V. (ed.). *Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation*. Newcastle upon Tyne : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.
7. O'Sullivan C. "New and improved subtitle translation": Representing Translation in Film Paratexts. *Linguistic and Cultural Representation in Audiovisual Translation*. Routledge, 2018. P. 265–279.
8. Toledano Buendia C. Listening to voice of the translator. A description of translator's notes as paratextual elements. *Translation & Interpreting*. 2013. 5(2). P. 149–162.
9. Ukušová J. Translator's footnotes as an (in) effective translation strategy. *Bridge: Trends and Traditions. Translation and Interpreting Studies* 2. 2021. P. 51–70.

*Article submitted 28.06.2024*  
*Accepted for publication 19.08.2024*

## ФУНКЦІЇ ІНТЕРФЕЙСІВ КОРИСТУВАЧА СТРИМІНГОВИХ СЕРВІСІВ ВІДЕО ЯК ПОТЕНЦІЙНІ ІНСТРУМЕНТИ ДЛЯ АУДІОВІЗУАЛЬНОГО ПЕРЕКЛАДУ

**Олександр Романюк**

*Львівський національний університет імені Івана Франка,  
вул. Університетська, 1, м. Львів, Україна, 79000  
oleksandr.romaniuk@lnu.edu.ua*

У статті підкреслено історичне значення текстових приміток у традиційних книгах, відзначено їхню важливу роль для редакторів, перекладачів і читачів таких творів. Завдяки появі нового виду мистецтва, а саме аудіовізуальних творів, з'являється також необхідність адаптації паратекстуальних елементів для цього нового медіуму. Дослідження функцій приміток у традиційних текстах, проведення паралелей з паратекстуальними елементами в аудіовізуальних творах та аналіз інтерфейсу конкретного стримінгового сервісу Amazon Prime Video демонструє значний потенціал його паратекстуальних елементів у покращенні якості аудіовізуального перекладу та взаємодії глядача з аудіовізуальним твором. У висновках звернено увагу на значний потенціал збільшення ролі перекладачів у розробленні інтерфейсів і програмного забезпечення для стримінгових сервісів, а також подальший розвиток міждисциплінарної співпраці між галузями перекладознавства, інформаційних технологій та маркетингу задля покращення локалізації аудіовізуальних продуктів для цільових глядачів.

*Ключові слова:* аудіовізуальний переклад, інтерфейс користувача, стримінгові сервіси, паратекстуальність, епітекст, перітекст.