Name: _____ Date: _____

The Subtitler Who Fits Words Into Seconds

Circle group

When you watch a film in another language, someone wrote the words at the bottom of the screen. That person is a subtitler. The job is harder than it looks. The subtitler must keep the meaning of what people say. And the words must be short enough to read in a flash.

The big problem is time. People talk faster than most viewers can read. The words must vanish before the next scene starts. So a subtitler keeps the text to two short lines at most. Each line shows up when a character starts to talk. It leaves a moment after the character stops.

Space is small, so the subtitler must choose. A long sentence is cut down to its main idea. Small filler words like "well" or "you know" are often dropped. But the subtitler cannot cut so much that a joke or a clue is lost.

Translation is another puzzle. A joke may make no sense word for word. So the subtitler finds a phrase that gives the same feeling in the new language. Some captions also tell about sounds, like a knock at the door or soft music. These help viewers who cannot hear. Good subtitles feel almost invisible. The viewer watches the story, not the words.

Questions

1. What two things must a subtitler do at once?

_____

_____

2. How many lines does a subtitler keep on screen?

_____

_____

3. What kinds of words are often dropped?

_____

_____

4. Why might a joke need a new phrase in the new language?

_____

_____

5. What do some captions tell about besides speech?

_____

_____

6. What does it mean that good subtitles feel almost invisible?

_____

_____

Words to know

subtitler: a person who writes the words shown on screen during a film
translation: putting words into another language
filler: small extra words that add little meaning
captions: words on a screen that show what is said and heard
invisible: not able to be seen or noticed

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Subtitler Who Fits Words Into Seconds

Triangle group

When you watch a movie in another language, someone had to write the words at the bottom of the screen. That person is a subtitler, and the job is harder than it looks. A subtitler has to do two things at once: keep the meaning of what people say, and make it small enough to read in a flash.

The biggest problem is time. People speak faster than most viewers can read, and the words must disappear before the next scene begins. So a subtitler usually keeps the text to two short lines at most. Each line is timed to appear just as a character begins talking and to leave a moment after the character stops.

Because space is limited, the subtitler must choose. A long sentence may be cut down to its most important idea. Little filler words like "well" or "you know" are often dropped. But the subtitler cannot cut so much that a joke or a clue disappears.

Translation adds another puzzle. A joke or a saying may make no sense word for word, so the subtitler looks for a phrase that gives the same feeling in the new language. Some captions also describe sounds, such as a knock at the door or soft music, to help viewers who cannot hear. Good subtitles feel almost invisible, because the viewer is watching the story instead of the words.

Questions

1. What two things must a subtitler do at once?

_____

_____

2. About how many lines does a subtitler usually keep on screen?

_____

_____

3. What kinds of words are often dropped?

_____

_____

4. Why might a joke need a different phrase in the new language?

_____

_____

5. What do some captions describe besides speech?

_____

_____

6. What does it mean when the passage says good subtitles feel almost invisible?

_____

_____

Words to know

subtitler: a person who writes the words shown on screen during a film
translation: putting words into another language
filler: small extra words that add little meaning
captions: words on a screen that show what is said and heard
invisible: not able to be seen or noticed

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Subtitler Who Fits Words Into Seconds

Square group

When you watch a film in an unfamiliar language, somebody had to compose the words that appear at the bottom of the screen. That person is a subtitler, and the profession is considerably harder than it appears. A subtitler must accomplish two things simultaneously: preserve the meaning of what the characters say, and compress it into text small enough to be read in a flash.

The greatest obstacle is time. People speak faster than most viewers can read, and the words must vanish before the following scene begins. For that reason, a subtitler generally limits the text to two brief lines at the very most. Each line is timed to appear just as a character begins speaking and to linger for only a moment after the character falls silent.

Because space is so limited, the subtitler is constantly forced to choose. A lengthy sentence may be trimmed down to its most essential idea, and small filler words such as "well" or "you know" are frequently dropped. Even so, the subtitler cannot cut so aggressively that a joke or an important clue disappears altogether.

Translation introduces yet another puzzle. A joke or a familiar saying may make no sense when rendered word for word, so the subtitler searches for an expression that produces the same feeling in the new language. Some captions go further and describe sounds, such as a knock at the door or soft music, for the benefit of viewers who cannot hear. Skillful subtitles feel nearly invisible, because the audience is absorbed in the story rather than in the words.

Questions

1. What two things must a subtitler accomplish at the same time?

_____

_____

2. How many lines of text does a subtitler generally allow at most?

_____

_____

3. Which kinds of words are frequently dropped to save space?

_____

_____

4. Why must a subtitler sometimes replace a joke with a different expression?

_____

_____

5. What do some captions describe in addition to speech?

_____

_____

6. What does it mean when skillful subtitles feel nearly invisible?

_____

_____

Words to know

subtitler: a person who writes the words shown on screen during a film
translation: putting words into another language
filler: small extra words that add little meaning
captions: words on a screen that show what is said and heard
invisible: not able to be seen or noticed

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: The Subtitler Who Fits Words Into Seconds

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: The Subtitler Who Fits Words Into Seconds

Easier · 210 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.6

1. Keep the meaning and make the words short enough to read fast.
2. Two short lines at most.
3. Small filler words like well or you know.
4. It may make no sense word for word, so a new phrase gives the same feeling.
5. Sounds like a knock at the door or soft music.
6. Viewers follow the story and do not notice they are reading.

Triangle: The Subtitler Who Fits Words Into Seconds

This passage · 230 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 6.6

1. Keep the meaning of what is said and make the words short enough to read quickly.
2. Two short lines at most.
3. Little filler words like well or you know.
4. The joke may make no sense word for word, so another phrase is needed to give the same feeling.
5. Sounds such as a knock at the door or soft music.
6. Viewers follow the story without noticing that they are reading.

Square: The Subtitler Who Fits Words Into Seconds

Harder · 262 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 10

1. Preserve the meaning of what is said and compress it so it can be read quickly.
2. Two brief lines.
3. Small filler words such as well or you know.
4. The joke may make no sense word for word, so another expression is needed to produce the same feeling.
5. Sounds such as a knock at the door or soft music.
6. The audience is absorbed in the story and does not notice the effort of reading.