LINGUISTIC AND SENSE-CREATION ASPECTS OF AI-FACILITATED POLITICAL INTERVIEW TRANSLATION

МОВНІ І СМИСЛОТВОРЧІ АСПЕКТИ ПЕРЕКЛАДУ ПОЛІТИЧНОГО ІНТЕРВ'Ю, ОПОСЕРЕДКОВАНОГО ШІ

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In late 2024, L. Fridman, a podcaster with 4.7 mln-strong following, interviewed the President of Ukraine V. Zelenskyy in what became a talk with massive discussion in social media. The interviewer insisted on conducting the dialog in Russian, a mutual mother tongue. The interviewee avoided the imposed strategy by deliberate and hectic code-switching in English, Russian, and Ukrainian. The episode, released on numerous platforms, shifted attention to the AI-dubbed videos.

The present study raises the possibility of the AI dubbing, either consensual or not, being a threat for documenting a person in a political interview which entails the political portrait of a statesperson distorting its psycholinguistic features. Among the issues emerged are the AI's capability to synthesize realistic voices, manipulate with original wording and translation. Further research could help us understand how technology is used in a news-making and journalism discourse.

This paper aims to demonstrate how AI is implemented in the most conservative genres disarming any orthodox ways to run psycholinguistic, linguistic, and translatological deconstruction of political discourse in AI-capable media.

By analyzing the podcast incentives, L. Fridman's field of expertise in AI, the authors of the paper reveal the interviewer's bias in his language behavior, speech as well as confusing workflow that belittles human participation and enhances machine involvement to achieve greater options for the audiovisual product manipulation.

Instead of recording and diligently translating a public person's political interview, L. Fridman's team created a hybrid multimedia product with a human-machine involvement into creating AI overdubs which promoted discrepancies in the original and its translations. The linguistic and translation analyses revealed the interviewer's biased communicative strategies.

The established AI intrusion in the political interview creation is fraught with the enhanced capabilities to promote false senses and narratives, which is especially sensitive in cases where wars and hostile conflicts are taking place.

Key words: political interview, political portrait, psycholinguistics, audiovisual translation, simultaneous interpreting, AI dubbing, hybrid translation.

Наприкінці 2024 року Л. Фрідман, подкастер із 4,7 мільйонами підписників, взяв інтерв'ю у Президента України В. Зеленського, яке викликало бурхливу дискусію в соціальних мережах. Інтерв'юер наполягав на проведенні розмови російською мовою, рідною для обох. Натомість В. Зеленський уникнув нав'язаної стратегії, навмисно й хаотично переходячи з англійської на російську та українську мови. В оприлюдненій

численними платформами версії інтерв'ю акцент змістився на відео з дубляжем, виконаним за допомогою штучного інтелекту.

У цьому дослідженні піднімається питання того, що навіть узгоджений дубляж, здійснений з використанням інструментів штучного інтелекту становить загрозу для документування людини в жанрі політичного інтерв'ю, в результаті якого постає цілком конкретний політичний портрет діяча зі спотвореними психолінгвістичними рисами. Серед новоявлених проблем, зокрема, є здатність штучного інтелекту синтезувати реалістичні голоси, маніпулювати оригінальними формулюваннями та, власне, перекладом. Подальші дослідження можуть допомогти нам зрозуміти, як сучасні технології використовуються в на даному етапі розвитку журналістики й новинарства інформаційної доби.

Ця стаття має на меті продемонструвати застосування штучного інтелекту в одному з найконсервативніших жанрів, підриваючи методи традиційних психолінгвістичного, лінгвістичного і транслатологічного досліджень політичного дискурсу в засобах масової інформації, що використовують штучний інтелект.

Аналізуючи мотивацію створених подкастів у межах компетенції Л. Фрідмана в галузі ШІ, автори статті виявляють упередженість інтерв'юера в його мовленнєвій поведінці та неочевидному технологічному процесі створення інтерв'ю, що применшує участь людини та посилює залучення машини для досягнення більших можливостей що стосується маніпуляцій аудіовізуальним продуктом.

Замість акуратного запису й ретельного перекладу політичного інтерв'ю публічної особи, команда Л. Фрідмана створила гібридний мультимедійний продукт із залученням як людини, так і машини до створення ШІ-дубляжу, що тільки поглибило розбіжності між оригіналом задокументованої розмови та її різномовними перекладами. Зокрема, лінгвістичний та перекладознавчий аналіз дискурсу виявив упереджені комунікативні стратегії інтерв'юера.

Укорінена практика застосування ШІ при створенні політичного інтерв'ю і його перекладів загрожує посиленням можливостей для розповсюдження помилкових уявлень і наративів у суспільстві, що є особливо чутливим на фоні актуальних конфліктів і воєн.

Ключові слова: політичне інтерв'ю, політичний портрет, психолінгвістика, аудіовізуальний переклад, синхронний переклад, ШІ-дублювання, гібридний переклад.

Introduction. Since the arrival of the multifunctional and publicly available technologies utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) and their boom in the early 2020s, the modern media landscape has become increasingly infested with reliable, partially reliable and totally unreliable information of various kinds generated by large language, text-to-image, text-to-speech and other models of machine learning. Recent years have witnessed the appearance and introduction of multiple AI applications for the multimedia products in the entertainment sphere. Global discussion has been actively covering the topics of their legality, ethics, compliance with professional standards, etc., but only the second half of 2024 brought up the first instances of political interviews being held with considerable AI assistance.

From 2022 on, the sensitive Ukrainian matter and cause happened to be not only hotly debated and contested in human-run communication and translation, but also the testbed for the AI dubbing technology and methods of its implementation. Considering how easily audiovisual information is getting manipulated by AI tools (either for entertainment or malicious purposes) we need to give our attention to the possibility that now a bias is introduced into texts in a highly nuanced and sophisticated manner.

In the beginning of January 2025, the YouTube channel of the Office of the President of Ukraine posted a 3-hour-long video interview with the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy [1]. The formal host was a U.S. podcaster Lex Fridman who visited Ukraine in late December 2024 to conduct and record the meeting with him. The official governmental source published **only** a Ukrainian-language video with an option to choose between English or Ukrainian subtitles.

Nearly at the same time, L. Fridman released the same interview on his own website and related social media. Unlike Ukrainian officials, he presented it in four different language versions with respective number of subtitle tracks [2]. On his platform, **every** language version of the interview was delivered **in seemingly realistic voices** of President Zelenskyy and his interviewer. Having compared both releases public could understand that **nothing** of the audiovisual content suggested to the

Ukrainian audience by the official Presidential video channel was truly natural and/or authentic, even though both interviewee and interviewer communicated in their own voices.

Thus, the whole *Lex Fridman Podcast* episode under question turned out to be a complex AI-enhanced media event with hybrid human-machine involvement, based on interpreting and translation acts, all of which constitute a comprehensive communicative feature entailing massive implications in terms of information reception, processing and analysis, semantic and pragmatic shifts across lingual cultures and identities, social and political response, sociolinguistic relativeness and the whole genre of a documentary interview being completely rethought.

Language and translation study got to be tested within an information technology framework providing numerous insights on any of these fields and at the same time mixing researchers' cards and fogging the intrinsic dangers of the scope how huge AI applications have become, totally unlimited and unhindered either by type of human activity or its genre.

Theoretical Background. Staying at the crosshairs of multiple academic fields, Fridman – Zelenskyy interview can be naturally researched and discussed at many angles, theory- and methodology-wise. However, the authors of this paper would like to concentrate on:

a) the genre of political interview conducted to record a persona acting in the epicenter of one of the most important geopolitical events in recent time, a full-scale Russian invasion into Ukraine;

b) AI technology used to produce multiple language versions of the documentary film based on the Fridman – Zelenskyy interview;

c) its linguistic and translatological aspects which are bringing to life pragmatic issues in digital humanities.

Every single aspect mentioned above has been studied by modern scholars to a different extent. However, to the best of our knowledge, very little to no academic research has ever tried to put all of them together as a case study of any high-impact communicative event involving some nascent AI technology. At least L. Fridman's experiments with interviewing methods and techniques have totally stayed out of the linguistic scholars' reach.

Interviews as a genre have been covered by a wide range of language scholars in Ukraine and abroad whose work has been concisely reviewed by Kh. Diakiv [3, c. 21] with only few of them researching traditional audiovisual format of TV [4; 5; 6] and none of them exploring podcasting as a phenomenon in Ukraine or globally. Even fewer scholars address the issues of the televised/broadcast interview interpretation, like M. Alvesson [7] or P. J. Castillo Ortiz [8]. However, in some papers we see quite a few detailed explorations of a naturally occurring interpreter-mediated interaction [9, p. 184–185]. A range of researchers have studied specific aspects of a political interview, in particular, misunderstandings [10], interpreter's non-cognitive constraints [11], and the general matter of co-operation [12], including political discourse and diplomacy [13]. A considerable input into the general topic of studying translation in politics has been made by Ch. Schäffner [see 14].

The earliest research into the algorithms for automated dubbing in audiovisual products dates back as far as 2010 [15]. Further AI dubbing studies encompassed mostly engineering and technological issues [16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21] and informational aspects [22] as well as social matters highlighting AI applications in arts and entertainment [23; 24; 25; 26] or their consequences in legal sphere, including the cases of 'deepfakes' which are treated through defamation/libel laws, copyright infringement, privacy laws, and cybersecurity laws, i.e. on AI used to injure one's reputation [27; 28; 29; 30].

So far, the translation study of AI application for dubbing purposes has been very limited both in terms of quantity and scope. It has already gained its way to the graduate papers, but their authors need to admit that "there seem to be very little ongoing research addressing these developments" [31, p. 118], although extremely useful data on what is called an "epistemic trust" issue are being collected right now [32; 33].

Data. The audiovisual product under consideration is an edited documentary film (podcast episode) over 3 hours long (3:06:39) with a proper Fridman—Zelenskyy interview lasting for 2 hours

and 28 minutes. Also, it has an 11-minute-long introduction [00:03:28–00:13:55] and final remarks by L. Fridman covering personal, political, and technical issues of the "*future of Ukraine, choice of language, podcast prep and research process, travel, setup, and conclusion*" [02:43:50–03:06:36] [2]. A complete set of files includes four equivalent interview videos in three full overdubs in different languages (English, Russian, Ukrainian) and an original film with a mixture of languages, "*We spoke in a mix of languages, continuously switching from Ukrainian to Russian to English*" [00:04:00–00:04:05]. There are also three transcript files for respective English, Russian, Ukrainian overdubbed versions of the podcast. Interestingly, **there is no transcript** for the original mix-of-languages video. Also, there is a **discrepancy** between how the video with the original mixture of languages is called on different platforms: it is "English (UK)" track on L. Fridman personal website, but "English (US)" on the Fridman's official YouTube channel.

The edited interview supplied infographics ('title cards') for various data that, in L. Fridman's opinion, required additional explanation for the international public: map of the Russia-occupied territories, details on Ukrainian legislation, historical references explicated, some Ukrainian acronyms used by Zelenskyy ("*ППО*") while speaking Russian, etc.

Results and discussion

Political interview as a psychological portrait

Any philological research ranging from psycholinguistics, psychopoetics to translation study would certainly involve the psychology of creating senses, judgements, opinions which are implemented in verbalized statements, texts in the broad sense, and communicated through different media [e.g. see 34; 35]. These texts cannot exist beyond and without a human being who is creating them. Likewise, these texts serve a legitimate source to study the mental landscape and the psychoworld of any person. All mental constructs, intentions and senses deliberately (or subconsciously) expressed in words and syntax of the text are viable for linguistic analysis. However, any implied subjectivity of the text is an area for sweeping interpretations [e.g. see 36].

Whenever researchers deal with the documentary genre, they absolutize both intrinsic linguistic features of the text under analysis and potential scope of its possible interpretations finding and refinding senses even in the smallest semantic units and pragmatic patterns. The data received from such an analysis multiply manyfold with translated texts and their cross-cultural nuances.

As experienced practitioners of interviewing claim, "a portrait interview is comprised of […] informal, filmed conversations […] We talk about your stories, your values, your hard-earned truths, your version of things, in your own voice with all your expressiveness" [37].

Documentaries based on live interviews represent human beings broadcasting some facts and precise information as well as subjective matter, their emotions, bias and worldview. Audiovisual media enhance and objectify all the aspects of interpersonal communication amplifying verbalized text by the correlated parallel channel of visual and audial information rendering non-verbal signals, body language, facial expressions, postures, etc.

By changing these audiovisual texts in their broadest meaning within a documentary genre, by substituting and even doctoring them one can distort the understanding of their source, which is a human being, and manipulate the perception of a specific person by wide audiences. Whenever the interviewed person is a public figure such misperception can be extended and artificially promoted in bad faith.

The interview hybrid translation procedure

As A. Fetzer and P. Bull claim, "a political interview can no longer be conceived of as a non-fuzzy, predictable event, as has been implicit in the earlier conceptions of a political interview as a relatively stable communicative encounter based on a clear-cut division of labor […], or as an exchange of questions and answers anchored to the leitmotif of neutralism as is reflected in interactional and discursive roles, and style […]. By acting in dis-accordance with the constraints, for instance by interviewer and interviewees presenting themselves as multiply voiced, agents tran-

scend boundaries and go beyond the constraints and requirements of non-fuzziness, linearity and predictability" [38, p. 88].

In the modern world, where "current affairs interviews […gave] rise to new categories such as infotainment, confrontainment, and even politainment" [39, p. 354], political interviews are inherently seen as a *hybrid* genre in which traditional political discourse drifts toward the format of a talk show "where public discourse is privatized and power relations between the media and politics are blurred" [Ibid., p. 391]. After the Digital Age arrival political interviews became "an important means for ordinary people to encounter politics" [40, p. 3]. With the Fridman – Zelenskyy interview, it is true not only because of the well-established understanding of this discourse, but also due to the technology usage crossing its regular boundaries.

To analyze this interview properly, we would need to step back and have a look at the bigger picture of L. Fridman's interviewing activities. He is a well-known U.S. podcaster with 4.68 mln global subscribers on YouTube who also entered the Top 15 podcasts in the U.S., according to Spotify ranking, at least as of 2024 [41]. Apart from that, L. Fridman holds a PhD degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering occupying the research scientist position the at the Laboratory for Information and Decision Systems at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (LIDS MIT). With his academic interests encompassing artificial intelligence, deep learning, human-robot interaction, and reinforcement learning, L. Fridman is naturally experimenting with information technology solutions for the podcast. On November 19, 2024, he released an interview with the President of Argentina Javier Milei. It had two language versions in English and Spanish, however, unlike Zelenskyy interview, those are **not full overdubs**, but rather voice-over translations with a weakly discernible original audio track in the background [42]. Still, three main technological components of Fridman's method were used already then: a) text-to-speech generation, b) AI voice cloning, and c) AI dubbing with synthetic voice generative models provided by the U. S. company ElevenLabs [43].

For undisclosed reasons, this method of an international talk hasn't been accepted by L. Fridman as a standard and he moved on with amplifying AI involvement in his dubbing projects. His decision led to the **total removal** of the original background audio in the President Zelenskyy and Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi's interviews, released on January 5 and March 16, 2025 respectively. The former episode also provided L. Fridman's simplified explanation delivered to President Zelenskyy:

"*So first of all, I should mention that our conversation today will be translated and dubbed into Ukrainian, English, Russian, other languages… Spanish. So you're in your voice. So, there are great guys originally from Poland. It's a company called ElevenLabs. They've trained an AI… Искусственный интеллект на вашем голосе, и [он] прекрасно звучит. То есть вы можете танцевать на каком языке хотите, но всегда в конце будете говорить на украинском. То есть, когда вы говорите о Трампе, можете на украинском, на русском […] Everybody understands*" [01:58:08–01:58:56], as well as his detailed comments on the language and translation issue in the final remarks of the Zelenskyy episode:

"*After the conversation was recorded, the next challenge was to translate all of this and overdub it and do it super quickly. These words I'm speaking now have to be translated and dubbed into Ukrainian and Russian. ElevenLabs were really helpful here, especially in bringing the president's voice to life in different languages*" [02:48:24–02:48:45].

"*The translation is separate from the text to speech and was done in part by AI and a lot by human. This is where the fact that we had constant switching between three languages was a real challenge. There are six transition mappings that have to be done: English to Ukrainian and Russian, Ukrainian to English and Russian, and then Russian to English and Ukrainian continuously, sentence by sentence, sometimes word by word. And each combination of language to language translation is best done by a person who specializes in that kind of mapping. It was all a beautiful mess, all of it*" [02:49:05–02:49:40].

So far, this has been the most in-depth explanation of L. Fridman's international podcast procedure from the interviewer himself, however, it is still rather vague for the public, even specifically trained.

In the wake of the Fridman – Zelenskyy interview, language professionals expressed their opinions and evaluation of the podcast episode Ukrainian version that clearly showed they believed the whole stint was fully done with AI without any human interference [44; 45]:

(1) «*Загальну думку в цьому сумбурі вловити можна, і* **ШІ непогано з цим впорався**, *але синхронно перекладати чи вести якусь динамічну розмову – це мало бути пекло*» (Ростислав Паранько);

(2) «*Склалось враження, що пан Фрідман усіма способами хотів прорекламувати ту фірму, яка займається ШІ, зокрема в перекладі, з посилом* **"професія перекладача-людини вже не потрібна"**. *Можливо, то спонсор його подкасту?*» (Олена Тимошенко);

(3) «*До речі,* **англійський переклад дуже вдалий** *і непогано приховує "риторичну потуж-ність" нашого президента, англомовна аудиторія у своїй більшості сприйняла це інтерв'ю позитивно*» (Igor Sakovskiy);

(4) «*Так вони ж* **АІшку на це пустили**» (Igor Trubik Trubenok).

The provided reactions highlight the biggest drawback of the AI dubbing practices for documentaries as the public, even professionally capable, do not receive clear signals about the non-authentic nature of the AI synthesized voices, blurring the perception and shifting the focus from a true-to-life event into an easily manipulated manmade virtual reality.

The translators who participated in the Zelenskyy episode translation shed some additional light in the discussion of the specialized Facebook group post [Ibid.], so that now we have a complete picture how different language versions appeared.

After the interview was recorded the unnamed speech-to-text recognition software produced its written copy (an MS Excel file) with gaps for specific languages whenever speakers switched to a different code. Human translators postedited the recognized text and translated its missing parts (segments) in the respective target languages based on the available video records. The final version of this text amplification and postediting in three different languages has been given the status of the 'tapescript', no matter how massive translators' intrusions into the text were. The whole procedure was aggravated by the extremes in code-switching to which the speakers sometimes went breaking a single sentence with all the three language changes.

E.g. (1) "*…і як тільки Трамп* даст[1], *for example… я… піде на ceasefire без серйозних гарантій безпеки для України, він даст[ь] пас Путіну…*" [01:04:40–01:04:50];

(2) "*…*Потому что в башке у Путина рассорить меня с Трампом. В башке у Путина *закінчити окупацію нашої території.* Это всё есть в его *хворій голові*" [01:05:57–01:06:13]

(3) "*…Тому я вам і* сказал*, don't wait for Putin's will, press him*" [01:05:32].

We can see that sentence structures have been regularly violated, which positively made translators introduce changes even if original phrasing coincided with their target language.

Further on, those hybrid 'transcripts' underwent AI text-to-speech generation and dubbing with the cloned and synthesized voices of President Zelenskyy and L. Fridman, all provided by ElevenLabs software. As far as we can understand, there was no visible attempt at any lip sync morphing[2] while completing the AI dubbing of videos, either intentionally or due to the technical limitations. The whole algorithm of the event and its representation in media could look like that:

Multilingual source text → Multilingual speech-to-text recognition (machine) → Postediting (human) → Recognized and postedited text translation (human/machine) → Monolingual text-to-speech generation / Monolingual dubbing (machine) → Monolingual target text.

The final written target texts ('tapescripts') were used as the basis for captioning the video. This approach is totally unacceptable for documenting specific statements and judgements.

Here we need to mention the interview researchers who highlight that, "**detailed transcript** of all taped (or in other ways recorded) interviews is optimal. This makes interpretation work more

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[1] In illustrative examples, regular font is used for the Russian phrases.
[2] Another factor substantiating distrust for the overdub viewers.

precisely and easier in some ways and means that exact quotations can be presented. Against this the enormous time involved must be considered, both for transcription and for reading and sorting the material" [7, p. 60].

The interference and overlapping of the actual spoken text in the interview with its **written** translations pose a permanent danger of distorting information and wording. Here are some clear examples how this confusion amasses on a regular basis.

In the original Russian phrase President Zelenskyy says,

"Да, да, это не *great success for us, but if we see diplomatic way of **finishing** the war* [to end – in official 'transcript'], *this is one… one of the way*[s]. *Тобто це… вибачте*. Так, это… первое. Второе – пакет оружия. Я не готов сейчас говорить публично, что это, [оно написано – this part is **missing** in the 'transcript'] и *President Trump can have it or have it or… I mean no secrets from him…*" [01:08:05–01:08:35].

In AI dubbed versions **all the original parts in respective languages were substituted for manipulated (doctored) phrasing**, cf. **both** in the official English 'transcript' and respective English dubbing we have, "*but if we see **a** diplomatic way **to end** the war, this is one of the ways. So it is, sorry, that is a start. Secondly, weapons, arms aid package, I'm not ready to discuss this publicly right now. It's all written down and President Trump **might have seen it or not, but we've got** no secrets from him.*"

"Отец, который потерял детей […] Он взрослый мужик, взрослый. И закончилась война, а *він*… а он не получил… *didn't get accountability, real* [*one*]. *For example, somebody decided that's* [i.e. the war] *frozen…*" [01:13:53–01:14:25]. The official transcript and English dubbing run, "*[I]f you were a father who lost his children, a grown man. A grown man, a man, an adult, and the war has ended and he **never got justice for real**. For example, somebody decides **to freeze support**.*" Pay attention that the last phrase is totally different on the semantic and pragmatic levels from what was really said and what was really informed to the viewer in the overdubs.

To sum up, what public believes to be an "AI translation" or even "AI interpreting" was in fact a **mostly human** translation, a complex audiovisual product of hybrid origin whose true nature was overshadowed by realistically cloned voices of the speakers. Machine intellect was used only at the initial and final stages for speech-to-text recognition (STT), text-to-speech generation (TTS), and dubbing. **This translation amassed mistakes in transcribing the actual speech, interfered with the lexis, grammar, and syntax, multiplying the effect by written translations which were used as a basis for a further incorrect and misleading dubbing result**.

Translation analysis

The quality assessment of the Fridman – Zelenskyy interview translation is yet more complicated beyond the multistage translators' workflow described above. What the recipients now treat as the target texts (either the 'tapescripts' or the dubbed audiovisual product) in any of the languages under consideration are **not** the original live translation (more precisely interpreting) of the talk.

As of now, *Lex Fridman Podcast* has three international episodes with foreign officials that were presented to the English-speaking audience in translations. All three instances involved professional interpreters who did their simultaneous translations on spot, guaranteeing the two-way exchange of information between L. Fridman and his guests. Only Ukrainian episode has more or less detailed explanation of how the translation was done, so we believe the whole procedure can be extrapolated on every international event.

Basically, in every case we have a two-fold translation event presented to the public in a limited scope: 1) through an AI-enhanced and mediated audiovisual product on the basis of **written translation** made and edited by humans post factum, and 2) a live communicative act mediated by a **human interpreter** whose simultaneous translation is known only to the participants of the interview.

We literally **don't know** what L. Friman or President Zelenskyy heard in their interpretation as the audio track wasn't recorded, saved and delivered to posteditors while they were preparing the final-

ized multilingual versions of the event. However, we literally hear in the interview something that **wasn't said** but was presented to the viewer as a **fact** in AI overdubs.

This workflow functionally disables any proper linguistic, pragmatic or any other kind of analysis. This is an inadequate way to discuss the quality of translation and/or interpretation of any linguistic output as translation and interpreting are different fields in language training, services and industry, education, standardization and academic research. It is the interpreter's text that moves and fuels a conversation during the interview, triggers questions, responses and general feedback reactions. In the case of Fridman Podcast workflow, recipients receive a surrogate alternative parallel translation created within the framework that utilizes **totally different criteria of quality**. So, whether the host (L. Fridman) praises or criticizes interpreting and/or translation, his viewers and listeners have to take his words for granted.

With Javier Milei episode, L. Fridman admitted there was a mistake in the English 'transcript,' "*The English translation at 23:23 says 'fiscal deficit' when it should say 'fiscal balance'. We fixed the captions, transcript, and will try to fix the audio soon*" [42]. With Narendra Modi episode, L. Fridman merely praised the interpretation, "*And since I spoke English and Prime Minister Modi spoke Hindi, I have to comment on the interpreter who was doing simultaneous interpreting for both of us. She was absolutely amazing. I can't sing her enough praises. From the equipment used to the quality of the translation, to just the human touch of it all*" [46]. It is worth mentioning that L. Fridman doesn't speak either Spanish or Hindi, so it's hard to say what his opinion is grounded on.

The Ukrainian episode has become an outstanding exception in this practice. Firstly, L. Fridman brough up the issue of the Ukrainian idiom "*бити когось по руках*" on his official Telegram account [47],

"*Hi everyone, I would like to fix a translation in the audio / subtitle that better captures what President Zelenskyy was saying. I will delete this post once we find a good translation. The President said:*
Ukrainian:
І там, де ми бачили ризики, що щось може бути зброєю, ми били по руках всіх.
Russian:
И там, где мы видели риски, что что-то может случиться с оружием, мы били по рукам всех.
English:
And where we saw risks that something could be a weapon, we would slap everyone on the wrist.
'Ми били по руках всіх' [02:25:13] was translated to 'We would slap everyone on the wrist', which for some people implies a mild reprimand, so we want to better translate the intent of the statement that implies a strong punishment. Options:
1. We slapped everyone's hands
2. We hit everyone's hands
3. We beat everyone's hands
4. We cracked down on everyone
5. We cracked down hard on everyone
6. We firmly reprimanded everyone
7. We punished everyone
Let me know your thoughts. Again, I'll delete this post in a few minutes. I'm just working on fix subtitles and audio at this moment and need a second opinion.
Thanks.
UPDATE: I think 7 (punished) is clear, but is not exactly accurate. 'Punished' to me implies an act was fully committed, and a procedure was followed to make the person accountable. I think the President meant more: Before the act could even be committed, they were stopped harshly. So I think I prefer 2 or 4, as it is still clear, firm, but doesn't carry the extra meaning that 'punished' implies which I don't believe the President meant in this case.
UPDATE #2: I'm leaning more and more toward 4, because it will be clear, firm, and follow the meaning of the rest of what the President was saying.

UPDATE #3 (FINAL): I went with 5: 'We cracked down hard on everyone' to make intended meaning absolutely clear. Fixes are being implemented."

This is the most detailed discussion of any translation matter with L. Fridman in any of his international interviews that underwent interpreting, translation and dubbing. Yet even more strange was L. Fridman's obvious dissatisfaction with the language professional who provided simultaneous interpreting of the talk. From the introduction to the interview we get to know that they "*spoke in a mix of languages, continuously switching from Ukrainian to Russian to English, so* **the interpreter was barely hanging on**" [00:04:00–00:04:06]. The irritation and dissatisfaction from the translation expressed by L. Fridman was far from euphemistic, "*the most dynamic and powerful conversation between us would be* […] *without an interpreter, who in this case added about two to three second delay and* **frankly translated partially and poorly for me at least**, *taking away my ability to feel the humor, the wit, the brilliance, the pain, the anger, the humanity of the person sitting before me*" [00:04:58–00:05:13], "*He* [President Zelenskyy] *did need an interpreter when I spoke English, and just like I was,* **was visibly encumbered and annoyed by the process of interpretation**" [02:43:28–02:43:38].

There are some extralingual factors to the opinions expressed by L. Fridman which will be discussed below, so here we would just say that his words signify extremely limited understanding of how simultaneous interpreting works with humans.

Firstly, L. Fridman admits in all three international interviews that all his 3-hour-long events were translated by a single interpreter which is a clear violation of the standing AIIC (Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence) standard: "Article 6: Teams of Interpreters 3. Simultaneous Interpretation. Teams of interpreters must be put together in such a way as to avoid the systematic use of relay. However, when there is no alternative to the use of relay for a given language, the team shall comprise at least two interpreters able to provide a relay from that language. In addition, if the relay is provided from a two-way booth, at least three interpreters shall work in that booth. As a general rule, a team is composed of at least two interpreters per language and per booth. This is to ensure adequate coverage of all language combinations and to guarantee the necessary quality. The number of interpretation booths is the same as the number of target languages, except for the case of two-language conferences where a single booth may suffice" [48].

Secondly, by claiming that "*an interpreter* […] *added about two to three second delay*" L. Fridman proves he doesn't understand the nature of interpretation as a professional activity at all. A décalage (delay, ear-voice span, time lag, etc. between the original and its simultaneous delivery in interpretation) is an absolutely normal and acceptable technique extensively employed in professional conference interpreting [e.g. 49, p. 305–306; 50]. A 2–3-second-long lag falls into appropriate practices and standards [see 51; 52; 53][3]. In the interview we permanently see that L. Fridman is clearly confused, frustrated and irritated about **any** delays in interpretation, like at mark 00:28:52–00:29:05.

The persona of the interpreter is never mentioned in the episode. Due to the non-disclosure limitation we cannot name him/her, however, we can vouch that his/her qualification has been verified by the professional record, colleagues' opinion, jobs s/he took and membership in the AIIC, one of the most renowned professional associations of conference interpreters around the world.

Thirdly, L. Fridman complains about the procedure and quality of simultaneous interpreting without understanding its best practices. E.g. he was trying to listen to the original words of President Zelenskyy (in real time) while keeping his working earpiece in one ear and listening to the interpreter (with an expected time lag) which obviously couldn't help but aggravate the confusion at the two desynchronized audio streams. Also, L. Fridman often demanded literal translation of the highly idiomatic, slangish, and sometimes even vulgar phrasing of the President's vernacular:

[3] For the further review of the literature please see 54, p. 94–95.

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Zelenskyy: …а этот [Путин] стоит **с голой жопой** и рассказывает про племена… [00:48:45]

Fridman: Кстати, мне надо сказать, что когда вы сказали "голую жопу" – **мне не перевели**. Пожалуйста, я прошу переводчика переводить.

Zelenskyy: Это так, чтобы вам было понятно.

Fridman: Ну, нет, **он мне объяснил все** [00:49:15–00:49:22].

From L. Fridman's latter remark we understand that the interpreter just avoided literal translation of the idiom having chosen to render it in a descriptive way, which is a totally acceptable technique. While the literal delivery provides considerable risks of misunderstanding the message.

The English 'transcript' at this timestamp is more than misleading, it is illogical and further on it is false,

Zelenskyy: … *And this guy Putin is standing there **bare-assed** pontificating about tribes…* [00:48:45]

Fridman: *By the way, I must say that when **you said bare-assed, it was not translated**. Could the interpreter please translate?*

Zelenskyy: *This is so that you can understand.*

Fridman: ***Now** he explained everything to me, I understand* [00:49:15–00:49:22].

Obviously, the team of translators, who postedited the autorecognized speech and translated the original Russian phrasing, had to follow L. Fridman's demand and provided a literal rendering of the idiom which is **a wrong translation**. In this case, "с голой жопой" means to have nothing, to be poor which is substantiated by the previous context:

Zelenskyy: Вы думаете, вы можете говорить про технологии с Путиным? Ваши ребята брали интервью, и он им рассказывал про племенную историю [00:48:27–00:48:31]

While English "bare-ass(ed)" ranges between literal "naked" to figurative "minimal, naïve, unarmed"[4] which is not even close to what President Zelenskyy meant. Or could anyone consider Putin naïve or unarmed?

Interestingly, M. Baker also claims that for a political interview an interpreter would tend to go literal,

"Miriam Shlesinger, an experienced interpreter, recognises this type of client behaviour as highly stressful and says, 'Many of us who have been raised on the what-counts-is-the-meaning-and-not-the-words approach are in a real quandary when a literal-minded client. who (thinks s/he) understands English, is breathing down our necks' (personal communication). Another cause of stress which I have already mentioned as a common feature of the political interview is the fact that the interpreter is working into a foreign language, and one of which he clearly does not have all that adequate a command. Again, this encourages literal translation, or at least it does not make it easy for the interpreter to use strategies which involve rewording for style"[5] [11, p. 121].

It is with such cases of AI dubbed multilingual versions of *Lex Fridman Podcast*s that we see how potentially harmful this practice is. The authentic recording has been substituted (say doctored?) by the naturally sounding synthetic voices which preserve all acoustic qualities of the real person, but easily change the content under the auspices of those who manage the project.

Apart from traditional difficulties of interpreting a political leader who expresses "highly sensitive contexts which involve interpreting for political leaders at times of great international crises are likely to be subject to various types of non-cognitive constraints which may influence interpreter performance in specific ways" [Ibid., p. 111], President Zelenskyy's interview has become challenging for translation in many other ways:

(1) permanent code-switching between Ukrainian, English and Russian:

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[4] See anywhere, like in *Green's Dictionary of Slang* at https://greensdictofslang.com/ or *Urban Dictionary* at https://www.urbandictionary.com/.

[5] We need to admit that this opinion has been contested by the actual Zelenskyy's interpreter in private communication, "Now, in simultaneous interpreting, it is not relevant at all" without any further substantiation of the judgement.

"И я считаю, надо здесь, надо силой, надо разговором. Здесь много **carrot and stick**, которые можно использовать, чтобы действительно договориться" [00:52:37]

"…Потому что в **башке** у Путина рассорить меня с Трампом. В **башке** у Путина *закінчити окупацію нашої території.* Это всё есть в его *хворій голові*" – "*Because in Putin's* **head***, he wants me to fight with Trump. Putin's plan is to end the occupation of our territory. This is in his sick head*" [01:05:00-01:05:10];

"…*Тому я вам і* сказал*, don't wait for Putin's will, press him*" – "*That is why I told you don't wait for Putin to want to stop the war. Pressure him*" [01:05:32];

"Это не просто гарантии безопасности. **На мою думку**" – "*This is not just a security guarantee, in my opinion*" [01:44:22];

(2) hectic and elliptical syntax with all grammar deviations pertaining to these syntactical fluctuations:

unlike Fridman, whose questions were all pre-prepared and who enjoyed very little impromptu, President Zelenskyy had no samples of answers. As the result, his grammar as well as lexis was often elliptical and sometimes erratic ("*поглощеніє*", "*запевненість*", "*пронаціоналістичний*", etc.), his syntactical means are redundant **which naturally complicated the work of interpreter** and caused those gaps and 'inaccuracies' L. Fridman complained about;

(3) substandard vocabulary including idioms, slang, realia, and profanities:

"А я не считаю, что это просто, можно вот так вот делать вид, что ничего не происходит, и **давать пас** к тому, чтобы в очередной раз Путин говорил, что мы же один народ" – "*And I don't think that you can just pretend that nothing's happening and* **give Putin a pass** *once again for saying that, 'We are one people…'*" [00:14:50–00:15:02];

"*Перед вами стоит* **мамонт**" – "*A* **mammoth** *stands before you*" [00:49:12];

"…*ми же домовились про ceasefire. У нас же є, ну, це ж не* **папірець в туалеті***, так, це серйозна історія…*" – "*We agreed on a ceasefire, didn't we? Well, it wasn't* **a piece of toilet paper***, was it? This is serious business*" [00:57:33];

"…**русские** *відмовляли, передавали* **яку-то хрєнь** *несли, вони не хотіли*" – "*…the Russians refused. They passed along some* **kind of bullshit***, made excuses. They didn't want it*" [00:59:06];

"*Чи хтось консультації провів? Ні. Чому? Да* **похєру***. Це ж зрозуміло російською. Правильно? От як російською було* **похєру***, так і всім іншим гарантерам безпеки Будапештського мемор[андум]а. Всім було* **похєру** *на цю* страну" – "*Did anyone conduct consultations? No, and why not? They* **didn't give a fuck***. This is understandable in Russian, that* **as Russia didn't give a damn**" [01:28:55–01:29:11];

"*Це ж потяг з* **макулатурою***, з гарантіями безпеки, на якому їде Україна впродовж довгих років*" – "*This is a train with* **wastepaper***, with security guarantees, which Ukraine has been riding for many years*" [01:30:15];

"*Це не іграшки, просто ми* **сядем втрьох***. Я просто вам кажу, те, що є, це… як вам сказати… ці* '**присядки**'*, вони повинні бути серйозними і підготовленими*" – "*This is not a joke, we'll just* **sit the three of us***. I am simply telling you what is. This is how can I tell you? These* **meetings** *must be serious and prepared*" [01:33:10–01:33:24]

"И никто в мире не способен **его поставить на место**" – "*and no one in the world is able* **to put him in his place**" [01:42:43–01:42:46];

"*У тебя просто забрали самое дорогое* [детей – Authors]. *Ты разве спрашиваешь: 'Кто забрал?' прежде чем пойти и* **отвернуть ему башку***? Просто мне интересно: вот у тебя забрали ребенка, ты будешь спрашивать: 'А кто это'? Тебе скажут: 'Это вот этот* **дядька**'*. Ты скажешь: 'А-а-а, ну всё, тогда нет вопросов'? Нет! Ты пойдешь,* **блядь***, и отвернёшь ему голову*" – "*…and they simply took away the most precious thing from you. Will you ask who ruined your life before going* **to rip their head off***? I'm just curious. They took your child away. Are you going to ask who did this? And they will answer that that* **dude** *did this. You*

will say, '*Oh, well then there are no questions.*' *No, no, no. You will go **fucking hell** and bite their head off*" [01:43:15–01:43:37];

"*А какого-то '**Дядю Вову**' раздражает слово НАТО?*" – "*Is some **Uncle Vova** irritated by the word NATO?*" [01:45:25];

"*Если считать, что президент какой-то страны **полностью сдвинутый**, тяжело с ним договариваться*" – "*If you think that the president of a country is **completely crazy**, it is really hard to come to an agreement with him*" [01:45:42]

"*Как он их убивал? С любовью? Думаю, с... **блядь**, в обіймах. Українською кажуть, як сказати: 'В обіймах. Тільки придушував'. Так кажуть. 'Так люблю, так люблю, що аж вбить хочеться'*" – "*How did he kill them? With love? I know **fuck** by hugging. In Ukrainian, as we say, 'Strangling by hugging. I love you so, so much. I love you so much that I want to kill you'.*" [01:46:40–01:46:52];

"*780 тисяч, 788 000 – убитых или раненых русских. Он же их русскими называет всех. Тех даже, которые по-русски не умеют говорить, у него там, на территории России. Всё, что они поработили. Да. **Варяги гордые***" – "*788,000 killed or wounded Russians. He calls them all Russians. Even those who don't know how to speak Russian on his territory of Russia, everything they've enslaved. Yes. **Proud Varangians***" [01:48:24–01:48:47];

"*Когось ми виміняли на наших військових, як то **кум** Путіна, Медведчук...*" – "*We exchanged some of them for our soldiers such as Medvedchuk **to whose daughter Putin is godfather***" [02:20:53–02:20:58];

"*тому що олігархи зазвичай **контролюють потоки** і людей, і впливають на політику*" – "*because oligarchs usually **control cash flows** and people and influence politics*" [02:36:19];

(4) inadvertent typological counterpoints emphasized by language structure differences and specific usage for emphatic purposes:

"*Но ты **поверь** мне, **Володя**, это был не я...*" – "*But **believe me**, that's what he told me. '**Volodymyr**, this is not me.*'" [00:38:10];

The usage of diminutives and grammatical T-forms is something that is permanently and inadvertently getting lost in translations. The podcast viewer/listener has no chance to see the switch from the last-name to the first-name basis in President Zelenskyy and L. Fridman's communication as well as the whole rendering of President Zelenskyy and President of Belarus Alyaksandr Lukashenka's exchanges in which President Lukashenka addresses President Zelenskyy not only by his first name, but also its diminutive form "*Володя*". There is a translator's inconsistency in rendering diminutive forms. For some reason "*Володя*" is "*Volodymyr*" in English, but "*Дядя Вова*" remains "*Uncle Vova.*"

Much of that multilingualism, translanguaging and code-switching which turned Fridman – Zelenskyy interview into a nice documentary ("*beautiful mess*" in L. Fridman's personal words at mark 02:49:40) revealing sociolinguistic portraiture and communicative strategies was a totally lost event in written translations and projected as such into AI overdubs.

The notion of Russkiy mir remains untranslated,

"*Вони побудували теорію однієї нації, однієї раси, одного світу. Їх світу. Безумовно, безглузда ідея, абсолютно. Але вона радикалізувалася за роки і отримала навіть підтримку. **Одного** мира. І, в принципі, **русский мир**, та теорія, яку Путін показує, нав'язав...*" [00:31:20–00:31:52].

In the mixed-language original we have an opposition of Ukrainian "*світ*" versus Russian "*мир*". In translations it is lost, esp. in Russian:

"*Они строили теорию и воплотили её, захватив затем Европу, они построили теорию одной нации, одной расы, **одного мира** – их мира. Безусловно, нелепая идея, абсолютно. Но она радикализировась за годы и даже получила поддержку. **Одного мира**. И в принципе, **русский мир**...*" – "*They were in fact constructing and ultimately implemented a theory around this idea later seizing Europe. They created a theory of one nation, one race, one world, their world. Of course, this*

idea is absolutely senseless, but it has become radicalized over the years and even gained support. A vision of one world and in principle, the so-called Russian World."

Postcolonial background of the code-switching, communicative behavior and bias

The whole Ukrainian episode is worth attention in terms of postcolonial discourse, reflecting the choice of language for public communication, strategies of language behavior, and code-switching.

"Postcolonial-postmodernist discourse and cultural studies have laid the groundwork for a new approach to critical understanding in our globalized world where identities are articulated across hyphens, transitions or in-between passages rather than firmly located in any one culture, language or place" [55, p. 10].

In the interview, we have a face-to-face opposition of President Zelenskyy (a Soviet-born Russian speaker from an industrial city who had no choice but to develop a Ukrainian national identity) against L. Fridman (a Soviet-born Russian speaker with some Ukrainian background, turned a U.S. national who is now actively promoting Ukraine-skeptical pro-Russian narratives). As P. Bandia wittily noticed, it is an exemplary case of the "[p]ostcolonial-postmodernist discourse […] in our globalized world **where identities are articulated across hyphens, transitions or in-between passages** rather than firmly located in any one culture, language or place" [Ibid.].

In his very first international podcast, L. Fridman talked to President Milei who has some command of English and said, "in the year 1998, I came to the United States to take a series of courses to improve my English, **which I never use in formal terms because as president**" [42]. The interviewer never challenged this claim or commented on it. The Ukrainian episode became a tension point even before the interview itself. Lex Fridman (Aleksey Aleksandrovich Fridman) was born in a Russian-speaking Soviet family which emigrated to the U.S. when he was a kid. The Russian language was his mother tongue, and he still boasts he is fluent in it [00:04:48]. Four days before the interview took place L. Fridman had been still strongly arguing in favor of the Russian language to be used,

"I look forward to our 3 hour conversation.

I hope we can conduct it in the Russian language, a language we are both fluent in. Let me make the case for it and provide some context below.

For people who may not know, the Ukrainian language has increasingly become a symbol of the Ukrainian people's fight for freedom and independence. Unfortunately, it is a language I do not speak yet, but I am learning it. I do know how to speak fluent Russian, as does President Zelenskyy, and as does a large fraction of Ukrainian people.

Speaking in a language we're both fluent in will result in the most most deep, dynamic, and powerful conversation. We will of course, translate and dub it into Ukrainian and English" [56].

The language issue is extremely sore for the Ukrainian society, so obviously both the whole invitation to speak in Russian and the post-interview public discussion centered greatly on this topic (e.g. see in 57), which aggravated the unseen interpreter's performance reception. As M. Baker once observed, the interpreter was caught, "in the middle of […] hostility even before he commence[d] interpreting for the parties concerned" [11, p. 122].

Seemingly recognizing the identifying role of the Ukrainian language in Ukraine's fight for freedom and independence, L. Fridman still insisted on conducting this interview under false (as we will see later) pretexts. The fact that President Zelenskyy formally declined this request and resisted Fridman's communicative strategy became the factor that mostly defined the mixed-language nature of the interview and added much to the general interviewer's irritation and overtly expressed dissatisfaction with the employed interpreter.

For the beginning, any language expert dealing with the interview analysis needs to understand that L. Fridman was and is **not an unbiased** podcaster. We have numerous indirect hints that he uses language as a postmodern weapon of postcolonial (dis)information war and discreetly promotes pro-Russian narratives. Allegedly, he had an interview with the Volnovakha-born Mariupol State University-educated Ukrainian journalist Illia Ponomarenko, defense and security reporter at

the *Kyiv Independent* in 2021–2023 and a staunch Russia critic, whose X (Twitter) account has 1.1 mln subscribers; however, this talk **was shelved** for undisclosed reasons [58].

The Russian language is permanently praised and stereotypically cherished by L. Fridman, both in his comments to the interview with Zelenskyy and in other instances,

"*I was never good at speaking. I listen to think and understand better than I speak. For me, this is true for both English and Russian, but **it is especially true for Russian**. **The Russian language allows for much more room for wit, nonstandard terms of phrase, metaphors, humor, rhyme, musicality**, and let's say deforming of words that create a lot of room for creativity and how meaning and emotion are conveyed. **You could do the same in English, but it's harder**"* [02:45:09–02:45:30].

L. Fridman **hugely overestimates** his fluency and command of Russian,

"*I speak Russian fluently as well*" [02:43:17].

Below is a short list of mistakes L. Fridman made during his Zelenskyy interview:

"**На** телефоне или как?" [00:02:36] (which was kept in the original 'tapescript');

"…[П]оэтому **красота вашего ума**, души. Я не сразу вижу…" [00:17:35–00:17:38];

"…**делать решения**…" at [00:41:10] and repeated several times later;

pronunciation of Ukrainian cities names in Russian was "Лу**х**анск, Донецк, Запор**ижня** *and* Херсонская област**и** и *Crimea* [sic!]" [01:07:42] In the official Russian 'transcript' words have been **changed to remove mistakes**, "*Луганск, Донецк, Запорожье и Херсонская области и Крым*";

"Нет, честно, **не умею ни** [на?] чём разговаривать, вообще…" [01:13:00–01:13:02]. The official 'transcript' gives "Нет, честно, на чем разговаривать, вообще", however, the official Russian dubbing is identical to the mixed-languages version;

"Взять **оба**, Украину и Россию, в НАТО" [01:13:13];

"…я считаю, очень **хороший шанс** что Трамп такое сделает" [01:16:45]; obviously, "очень высокие шансы" would be correct.

"Вот я опять же, 25 января, **в округе** этого, да?" [01:20:23] The mistake remained in the Russian 'tapescript';

"Но компромисс, к сожалению, нужен, чтобы **делать договорения**" [01:42:35]. The official transcript gives "…чтобы **делать договоренности**".

"А вы, кстати, **пока я не забуду**. Хотите, приезжайте 20 числа, *inauguration* президента Трампа" [02:30:50].

Below is a typical example how L. Fridman regularly backups his Russian phrases (as a proof that he actually struggles while speaking in Russian),

"У меня есть да, можно сказать, наивная мечта – *dream*, что вы сядете вместе с Путиным и с Трампом и договоритесь, как закончить огонь – *ceasefire*" [00:52:10].

Obviously, President Zelenskyy's active command of English is far from perfect, but his passive understanding of the language allows him communicating unassisted at the top level. It means L. Fridman could have addressed President Zelenskyy in English and listen to his response in Ukrainian or rely on President Zelenskyy's English. **Addressing his interviewee in Russian** did not facilitate the talk, as L. Fridman's Russian is faulty.

With his intentional code-switching, L. Fridman constantly **provoked** President Zelenskyy. One of the brightest examples goes at mark [00:20:37–00:20:41]. It is already three minutes as President Zelenskyy has switched into English already, and L. Fridman starts his new question with "*You know, I've been to a lot of...*" and then **abruptly switches again into Russian**, "…я по многим городам в Украине ездил…" [00:20:37–00:20:41] or "*No,* [I'm] *sorry I interrupted you first*… но я бы хотел… У меня есть да, можно сказать, наивная мечта…" [00:52:10]. With the most hilarious example being "И я считаю, надо здесь, надо силой, надо разговором. Здесь много *carrot and stick*, которые можно использовать, чтобы действительно договориться" [00:52:37] after which President Zelenskyy speaks in English at [01:05:42-01:07:25] and L. Fridman replies **in Russian** again!

Often, a trigger for code-switching was an English buzzword (i.e. *ceasefire*), when with Russian it's ether a strong emotion or effort to be more understandable for L. Fridman:

"*...написано було англійське слово, наскільки я розумію, 'assurance'. Що перекладається як 'запевненість'. Так? Запевненість. А російською це буде* 'уверение'…" [01:26:42].

Also, **quoting L. Fridman**, President Zelenskyy often switched in his replies into Russian too, "*Ви кажете* 'Надо ж разговаривать'…" [00:50:49] "*…треба бути в сильній позиції* и не разговаривать*, а закінчувати війну…*" [00:50:55] and Russian further on.

In his turn, President Zelenskyy switched into English whenever he believed his words could be heard by the President of the U.S. and he made this effort to directly impress Trump, either virtually addressing him or discussing some issues which are important for the Ukraine–U.S. relations. As a feedback from L. Fridman, President Zelenskyy gets **intimidation**, e.g. "*Your English is better than my Russian*" at [01:20:02] after Zelenskyy clarifies with a person behind the scene if he was correctly using the word "to prevent" in the meaning "запобігати".

So, the question researchers of such code-switching must permanently keep in mind is basically "**What are the power relations involved in translating/interpreting between a hegemonic language-culture and a dominated one?**"

Finally, the authors of the paper would like to let you dwell on question why L. Fridman also promotes designated Russian AI-dubbed versions of his other international interviews with President Milei and Prime Minister Modi which are otherwise available **only** in the languages of the speakers during the interview [42; 46].

AI technology implications for the genre of political interview and documentary film in general

AI applications in the study of translation quality belong to the newest field of translation science and practice. Changing landscapes of AI usage and perception of its results are a part of the bustling discussion about the latest roles played by artificial intelligence in modern industry. General estimates depend on the area of application of AI itself, among which there is the newest field of voice-over/dubbing of audiovisual materials using artificial intelligence.

Interestingly, even in 2022, the Language Technology Atlas by the well-known analytical and consulting company Nimdzi (U.S.) still presented *AI dubbing* as an unstable term giving it in quotation marks ('AI dubbing'), despite the fact that the study of algorithms for automatic and automated dubbing of television productions has been a regular subject of scientific research as early as 2010 [15].

We believe that *Lex Fridman Podcast* has been the first to use this technology to create a documentary (political) interview, however the concept itself is not new at all. In early 2024, the Davos speech of President Milei was directly translated from Spanish into English in his own accent and lip sync using HeyGen software [59]. The same years saw the introduction of an oral machine translation architecture for mobile devices SimulTron which was called revolutionary by its developers [60]. A number of feature films and TV shows were presented as fully translated and AI-dubbed: *Vanda* (Portugal), *Three* (U.A.E.) and *UFO Sweden* (Sweden) [61; 62; 63]. According to Nimdzi estimates, at least 63 companies around the globe were engaged in AI dubbing of some kind, as of 2024 [64].

One of the most concerning qualities of AI dubbing since its appearance was an underestimated potential of this technology to create seemingly true-to-life imagery. The world took a good decade to consider and act against AI tools used to undermine human-unique creativity in arts and/or copyright infringement, as AI is often trained on copyrighted material.

In comparison to subtitling, dubbing is also seen by the audiovisual translation researchers as a "more effective tool" in terms of censorship [66, p. 30]:

"In today's digital world, conventional censorship struggles to navigate the rapidly evolving media landscape […] This shift to digital platforms underscores how technological advancements have magnified audience agency […], empowering audiences to circumvent conventional censorship. The complex relationship between dubbing, censorship and audience choice exemplifies how socio-political and cultural factors shape media reception while highlighting the diminishing efficacy

of traditional censorship methods in the face of digital empowerment" [67, p. 63]. At the same time, the editors of the quoted publication don't have a single (!) passage exploring AI having any impact on censorship.

It is worth mentioning that ElevenLabs, which provided AI dubbing for *Lex Fridman Podcast*, has been already harshly criticized for allowing its software to be used "to generate clips of celebrities reading offensive content" [68].

The comprehensive legal act administering AI fair usage, first of its kind in the whole world, EU Regulation 2024/1689, entered force only on August 1, 2024. This legislation prevents AI product generation for unfair purposes, including those for **political misinformation** or **non-consensual** imagery which are further classified as high-risk and subjected to stricter regulation and classified as high-risk AI application. According to Paragraphs 29–31 of the preamble to this law, widely known as AI Act, whenever AI is used for manipulative, exploitative and social control practices, it shall be considered an **unacceptable risk** [69].

The problem is that legislation and the whole nascent legal sphere dealing with AI around the world provides coverage exclusively for the cases **that lack integrity**, like deepfakes, AI-generated or manipulated image, audio or video content that resembles existing persons, objects, places, entities or events and would falsely appear to a person to be authentic or truthful [Ibid., Art. 3 (60)].

Unlike those, *Lex Fridman Podcast* interviewees mutually **agree to AI enhancement** of their personas underestimating the fact that:

a) even tiny "inconsiderable" changes to the text **provide an accumulative effect on their media portraiture**, coverage, and specific words that could be used further on, with manipulative purposes, as the interviewees speak "in their own" synthetic voices;

b) the changes to the AI dubbing that is published by other platforms **can be introduced much later**, and the interviewee cannot possibly control this process, unless specific legal agreements preventing such action are made;

c) the hybrid nature of the *Lex Fridman Podcast* international interviews format generates **two types of texts**: actual simultaneous interpreting which drives the exchange of questions and answers in the specific interviews while remaining inaccessible to wide audience; and written 'transcripts' postedited and amplified by human translators, which are the **only source** to the AI dubbed videos

and basically forgetting that "dystopian realities of the technology have often been over-looked" and "part of the hype and 'magic' of AI is the presumption that it somehow works on its own without the need for humans" [70, p. 1323, 1325].

President Zelenskyy's code-switching, which was his obvious strategy to avoid L. Fridman's incentive to run the interview completely in Russian, is not clear in dubbed versions which makes some of his lines senseless or at least dubious:

Speaking in original Russian, "*Прекрасно я владею русским языком, конечно же. И я все понимаю, о чем вы говорите. Но я* не могу **все** интервью отвечать вам по-русски" [00:14:01–00:14:10];

English dub: "*I speak Russian perfectly of course, and I understand everything you are talking about. However, I can't respond in Russian the **entire** interview…*"

Ukrainian dub: "*Я чудово володію російською мовою, звісно, і я все розумію, про що ви говорите, але я не можу **все** інтерв'ю відповідати вам російською…*"

AI dubbing has also smoothed out accents and pronunciation peculiarities characteristic of both speakers. In one of his statements President Zelenskyy is speaking about Odesa as the city with special flavor, and he says,

"*Знаєте… "А шо в Адесе? А шо вона?* А в Адесе всё*"* [00:20:53–00:20:55]

with **artificially highlighted Odesa accent** and then switches into Ukrainian, **carouseling his pronunciation** of the city name from standard Russian [ɐˈdʲes(ː)ə] via Odesa accent proper [ɐˈdɛs(ː)ə] and to the Ukrainian standard pronunciation [ɔˈdɛsɐ]. This move can be interpreted as a rhetoric technique to challenge stereotypical Russian claims about "Russian Odes(s)a." Both in English and Rus-

sian AI dubs the flavor is all but lost and this gradual change of the city name through three variants remains imperceptible and basically unknown.

In the same way, L. Fridman **loses his strong English accent** while speaking Russian in the Russian-language version of the podcast episode in favor of more standard pronunciation. The latter is an important issue to undermine Fridman's claims about his "fluent Russian."

Interestingly, language mistakes of both President Zelenskyy and L. Fridman are preserved in 'transcripts' for the most part, however not completely. E.g. at mark 00:31:45 Zelenskyy says "*русский мир*" without any accent or buffoonery, but in the Ukrainian official transcript it has become "*руській мір*" which is either perceived as parroting Russian accent or mixing different linguistic and historical notions as "*руський*" in Ukrainian means the one characteristic of Old Rus/Ruthenia.

Conclusions. In late December 2024, L. Fridman, a U.S. podcaster with 4.7 mln-strong following, interviewed the President of Ukraine V. Zelenskyy in what became a talk with massive discussion in social media, seemingly neglected by the academia. The Soviet-born and Russian-speaking interviewer insisted on conducting the dialog in Russian, a mutually shared mother tongue. As the result, President Zelenskyy avoided the language strategy imposed on him by deliberate, although hectic, code-switching between English, Russian, and Ukrainian, despite having a professional simultaneous interpreter supporting his efforts. In the outcome, the *Lex Fridman Podcast* episode was released on the President of Ukraine's channel and L. Fridman's numerous platforms. However, in both cases public attention was shifted to the AI-dubbed videos instead of the original mixed-language version.

While preliminary, the present study raises the possibility that, although consensual with participants, AI dubbing poses an imminent threat and danger for the purposes of documenting real person's opinions in any political portrait interview. Among the issues that emerge are AI's capability to synthesize realistic voices and manipulate not only with translation, but also original words and phrases. Further research could help us understand how nascent technology is used in news-reorting and journalism discourse and which means society may have to fight back unfair AI applications.

This paper aims to demonstrate how technology is implemented in the most conservative genres disarming any orthodox ways of running psycholinguistic, linguistic, and translatological deconstruction of political discourse in modern technologically-capable media.

By analyzing the background L. Fridman's podcast incentives, his field of expertise and implementation of technological solutions, the authors of the paper have revealed the interviewer's bias which is expressed in his language behavior and communicative strategies, confusing the workflow that belittles human participation and enhances machine involvement to achieve greater options for the manipulation of any audiovisual product reception.

Instead of recording and diligently translating a political interview of a public person, L. Fridman's team produced a hybrid multimedia product with a complicated human-machine involvement creating AI overdubs which tolerated and promoted considerable discrepancies both in original and translated versions of the interview. The linguistic and translation analyses revealed the interviewer's biased communicative strategies which only emphasized his incompetence in translation and/or interpreting.

The established AI intrusion in the political interview creation, translation and dissemination is fraught with the enhanced capabilities to promote false senses and narratives, which is especially sensitive in cases where wars and hot conflicts are taking place.

AI dubbing can be considered, widely discussed and fairly applied for the purposes of entertainment industry, arts, education, advertisement and marketing as it does not harm and undermine critical thinking and realistic views on the world, society and international relations.

However, **AI dubbing is an extremely inappropriate, vulnerable and potentially dangerous practice to document storytelling, provide political portraits of top officials and any public figures as it is promulgating fake historical records.** We strongly believe it is unacceptable for the representation of real people and events, for news reporting or journalism based on quotations, world-

view, and multimedia image of public figures. It leads to the distorted reception of facts and fogs the boundaries between real events, their interpretations, providing for the not so obvious manipulation of human mind. Basically, AI dubbing of documentary records is one of the steps to create an unreliable AI environment and its surrogates.

The case of the Fridman – Zelenskyy interview is a hugely underestimated evidence of how overly normalized AI is becoming in regular media which go beyond traditional spheres of entertainment and tamper with documentary genres.

Prone to manipulations, AI tools become instrumental in dissemination of postcolonial narratives hiding them behind synthetic voices which could be edited anytime without another party's consent and remain totally unbeknown to the latter.

Only diligent content-wise analysis of the raw materials used for any AI-enhanced documentaries and interviews can guarantee that any public figures are presented without any deliberate changes to their phrasing, opinions and stance on any issue. Otherwise, in the worst-case scenario, AI-enhancement can become a source of sophisticated fraud and doctored messages being widely and falsely spread.

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