

Book review

Gian Luigi De Rosa, Francesca Bianchi, Antonella de Laurentiis & Elisa Perego (eds.)
(2014). *Translating Humour in Audiovisual Texts*. Bern: Peter Lang, 533 pp.

That we live in a globalised world is a common assumption that clashes inevitably with reality when we discuss culture-specific aspects such as humour. Few aspects of our identity are more idiosyncratic and more intimate than the way in which we laugh at the world, which is to say, at the way in which we conceptualise it. The globalisation process, nevertheless, which can be described in terms of a translation process, needs to tackle this issue in depth, and to do so, it requires the assistance of a series of theoretical and practical models that are able to deal with the multi-layered connotative elements that are found in any text, particularly when humour is involved.

Both academics and professionals are aware that the history of translation, and especially of humour translation, is one of loss and compromise, but one not without its small victories and truces. In the constant struggle to convey humorous content in translated audiovisual texts, many are the tactics used by professionals who face a series of different obstacles that have to be dealt with.

The book *Translating Humour in Audiovisual Texts* attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of different resources and translation strategies used to convey humour in different kinds of audiovisual texts, primarily, but not limited to, films and television series. This is achieved through a series of case studies that rely on different theoretical contributions to deal with a multifaceted issue that can only be explained through a similarly multifaceted approach. The reader will not only find a series of case studies of comedies, but also analyses of films which are not traditionally classified into the comic genre itself, but which draw from comic resources to convey a sense of drama, in line with Pirandello's *umorismo*. Both dubbing and subtitling are considered here, together with the particular features they present, and including subtitling for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing and the localisation of humorous content in videogames. This last category deserves special attention for the specific mixture of modes it contains and the differences in its relation with the viewer/user/player.

The authors in this carefully edited volume draw from different theoretical sources and implement a series of different models in their studies, including the classifications put forward by Chiaro (2006), Zabalbeascoa (1996), Romero Ramos (2005), Raphaelson-West (1989), or by the authors themselves. This variety in theoretical approaches is best explained by the need to tackle a wide range of problems regarding humour transfer, starting from the differences between merely linguistic, cultural, and visual humour, and including the different modes, languages, situations, and play.

The book opens with three introductory texts that serve three different purposes. The foreword by Elisa Perego presents the volume and its contents, together with some brief

background information on the evolution of Audiovisual Translation within the field of Translation Studies. The preface by Delia Chiaro provides an overview of the general problems in humour translation in audiovisual texts, and also reviews the evolution of the original audiovisual products that started with cinema and moved on to other media, namely television and the web. Finally, the introduction by Patrick Zabalbeascoa shows a theoretical apparatus with a detailed classification which can be used for the analysis of multilingual audiovisual texts and, more particularly, for the translation of humour in said texts. These three preambles focus on the question with which the entire volume deals and offer the reader an excellent starting point for the different sections that will follow.

The first section of the book, *Humour and Cartoons* starts with a chapter by Judit Mudriczki. The author analyses transfer strategies in dubbing from English into Italian, German, and Hungarian in the Christmas television special *Shrek the Halls*. The perspective she adopts is that of the task of the audiovisual translator and the nature of audiovisual humour itself, and she also develops her own classification which draws from different sources in order to present her results on three different scenarios.

The chapter by Vincenza Minutella is more specific in focus, and presents a qualitative analysis that deals with the translation of verbally expressed humour, both in dubbing and subtitling, along the *Shrek* tetralogy in three different categories of jokes. The author remarks the differences between both translation modes in the way they tackle verbal humour, and highlights compensation as a common resource in those cases in which the constraints of audiovisual texts make it impossible to preserve the exact same type of humour.

The next two chapters tackle a different aspect of humour translation: that of sociolinguistic variation as a means to conveying hilarity. Silvia Bruti's analysis of the cartoon *Rio* focuses on the humorous aspects of accent and dialect and compares the translation strategies in the Italian dubbing with those used in another animated film, *The Aristocats*. The author aptly summarises the alternative scenario that emerges when the translation flattens any heterogeneous sociolinguistic feature, and the techniques that are used to deal with this situation.

Gian Luigi De Rosa, on the other hand, presents an analysis of the same cartoon which is more ambitious in scope, with an analysis of the translation of sociolinguistic variation and cultural stereotypes through dubbing in European and Mexican Spanish, European Portuguese, Brazilian Portuguese, Italian, and English. Of special interest is the comparison between the divergences in the translation of different instances of verbally expressed humour in different languages, both at the lexical, syntactic, and prosodic levels.

The chapter by Alessandra Rollo focuses on a film (*Astérix et Obélix: Mission Cléopâtre*) which, if not a cartoon in itself, is based on previous animated cartoons and comics, and shares many of their characteristics, particularly concerning the humorous elements. The author argues that in order to maintain the spirit of the original text and to avoid artificiality without compromising the quality of the translated product, attention must be paid to all its semiotic elements (text, image, and sound), and that the cultural nature of humour and language must be approached through different translation strategies.

Finally, Elena Manca & Daesy Aprile present different examples of verbally expressed humour and their adaptation in the Italian dubbed version of *Wreck-it-Ralph*, and they make a point of introducing creativity as a powerful tool to compensate instances of humour in what is essentially a product that is targeted to the audience.

In its second section, called *Translating Transcultural Humour*, Brigid Maher opens with the study of *Muriel's Wedding*, a film that combines tragedy and comedy, and an analysis of the

translation of culture-specific humour in the Australian culture and its transfer into the Italian context. Her remark that culture and, more specifically, the humour derived from culture pose specific problems for the translator which may not always be transferred exactly and often need to be compensated through different resources, will be constantly present in this part of the volume. In addition, her study of different illustrative examples shows that the creativity of the translator as a cultural mediator is essential to prevent what different authors refer to as “Drops in Transitional Voltage”. These are cases in which the transfer of the message to a new target audience is disrupted. The author also emphasizes the importance of the creativity of the viewers themselves, who become co-creators in the process of reception of the translated audiovisual product.

In his chapter, Giuseppe de Bonis analyses multilingualism in Billy Wilder’s *One, Two, Three*, together with the humorous possibilities that may arise with the loss of linguistic and cultural identity in an intercultural context on two levels: the interaction of the characters and the perception of the viewers. The author studies the role of multilingualism (created by the combination of an English, German, and Russian context) as a tool that creates realism, conflict, and, ultimately, confusion; not with languages, but through them.

Lucía Ruiz Rosendo presents a remarkable chapter which goes beyond case analysis and includes a reception study on the subtitled English version of the Spanish film *Crimen Ferpecto*. In a context where dialogues are often subordinated to images, the author defends the idea that different translation strategies must be used to convey the humorous ideas behind the cultural references based on a *skopos* approach. Her analysis of different examples and the reception study presented in the chapter reveal that the reception of humour is not only interlinguistic and intercultural, but also intralinguistic and intracultural, which reveals the importance of the verbal- iconic information.

The study presented by Elisa Lupetti in her chapter focuses on *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis*, a film that fared differently in its original French version and in the Italian dubbed adaptation. According to this author, a reading of different cultural levels and a comprehensive view of the context are essential in the translation of humour, which, unlike laughter, is not a universal concept. Her study focuses on situational and linguistic humour and illustrates the different translation strategies that can be applied in each case.

Beatrice Garzelli presents a comprehensive analysis of the Italian dubbing and subtitling of three films by Pedro Almodóvar: *¡Átame!*, *La Flor de mi Secreto*, and *Todo Sobre mi Madre*. She underlines the fact that, in these cases, humour emerges from the grotesque, which distorts reality and changes it, and that this leads to a mixture of drama and comedy that needs to be addressed with specific translation strategies and from a multisemiotic approach. Her study takes fully into account the fact that many of the translation decisions are constrained by the specific characteristics of dubbing and subtitling.

In the last chapter of the section, Antonella De Laurentiis compares the original Italian version of *Bienvenuti al Sud* with its translation into Spanish. She focuses on the transfer of historical and cultural Italian aspects into a different language. In her excellent analysis, she draws on the model proposed by Romero Ramos (2010) to study the linguistic problems derived from the fact that social and geographic dialects employ lexical choices that are sometimes difficult for translators to reach. She also focuses on the extralinguistic issues caused by the pragmatic problems at stake, that is, the intentionality of the dialect, the characterisation or the struggle for the recognition of an identity within a community, and so on.

The third section of the volume is entitled *Dubbing Humour* and starts with a most interesting reflection by Juan José Martínez Sierra. He moves beyond the dated conflict of dubbing versus subtitling and considers instances of humour translated into Spanish from the English original in dubbing and in subtitles, in order to analyse the different solutions offered to preserve humour type. With his study of different episodes from *The Simpsons*, the author points out the differences between both modalities, not in terms of better or worse quality, but in terms of the disparity of methods that the translator may employ.

Giovanna Di Pietro presents an original analysis of different linguistic and paralinguistic elements in the original and the Italian dubbed version of a series of episodes of *How I Met Your Mother*. In her study of word order, kinesic synchrony, and comic timing, she underlines the fact that the differences inherent to the structure of both languages lead to unavoidable transformations in all these three areas, which may lead to new instances of humour through perlocutionary-oriented adaptation.

In her chapter, Claudia Buffagni studies the German film *Die Friseurin*, which mixes comedy and drama, and where the humour is based on culture-bound differences between East and West Berlin. Drawing on Raphaelson-West's (1989) classification of verbal humour, the author analyses the German subtitles for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing, and the resources through which humour is conveyed in them. After a review of the different kinds of subtitles for this audience and considering the use of pre-recorded subtitles, she puts forward a proposal to improve accessibility in this field.

Valeria Tocco studies *Canção de Lisboa*, the first Portuguese sound film, and its English and French subtitles. In her analysis she includes instances of wordplay, double entendres, and phonetic play that lead to comic situations, and draws on the results of this study to create her own proposal for a set of techniques that may be used in the creation of Italian subtitles.

The author of the next chapter, Laura A. Colaci, is aware of the high cultural component of comic script and warns against the difficulty of transferring humour from one society to another that do not share the same cultural backgrounds. She analyses *Maria, ihm schmeckt's nicht!* and the different strategies followed by the translator who created the Italian dubbed version along two categories, namely intralinguistic and extralinguistic resources. In her study, she discusses the cultural adaptations that can take place in the translation, including the use of politically correct versions of the original utterances, which may even come to the point of localising paralinguistic elements such as the soundtrack. She concludes that the role of the translator can be found somewhere between the poles of foreignisation and adaptation.

In the fourth section of the volume, called *Subtitling Humour*, the first chapter by Thorsten Schröter offers an interesting approach with an analysis of conversational humour from the perspective of Grice's *Cooperative Principle* (1975) in the original and the Swedish subtitles of the film *The Switch*. Since a large proportion of said humour can be accounted for in terms of violations of the Gricean conversational maxims (together with the maxim of politeness proposed by Leech 1983), the author rightly argues that this theoretical model is useful in the study of humour transfer.

Marco Cipolloni carries out an interesting intersemiotic review which connects the plot of the film *Mamma Mia!*, starring Meryl Streep, with the different songs that appear in it, together with the information provided by the image and the subtitles of the Italian and Spanish versions. In this network of information channels, the interventions of translators, dubbing actors/directors and subtitlers are brought into focus, together with their role as discourse creators.

In the last chapter of the section, Francesca Bianchi discusses the stages of creativity defined from a cognitive approach and applied to the translation process, and more specifically to the translation of humour, an area in which this resource is one of the main assets of the translator. She moves beyond existing classifications and descriptions of translation strategies, which rely on a descriptive approach, and develops a new strategy, the Stable Hyper-Islands Procedure. This new framework allows translation students and professionals to learn how to teach and foster creativity. This last concept is regarded here as a problem-solving activity.

The last section of the book, *Translating Humour in Video Games*, includes two interesting contributions to this field. The first one is the chapter by Ornella Lepre who focuses on specific humorous elements in video games that cannot be found in other audiovisual genres, namely the instances of humour that are part of the gameplay and are defined by their interactivity, and not part of the cut-scenes. In the context where the fourth wall can easily be broken and the consumers/players can customise to a large extent the experience they are going to receive, Lepre points out the importance of devoting special attention to the delicate relation between humour and gameplay in translated products.

The second contribution in this section is a chapter by Pietro Luigi Iaia in which the author presents a contrastive analysis between the English and Italian versions of three different videogames, and underlines the different strategies translators use to convey different instances of humour through transcreative rendering and the use of Italian diatopic and diastratic varieties. The chapter is completed with a reception study among players of one of the games in which their reaction to the original translation and to an alternative interactive rendering is analysed.

The readers of this volume will find different solutions for a wide range of problems that professional audiovisual translators face on a daily basis. Along its pages, they will observe that, although the theoretical basis for the analysis of translation of humour in audiovisual texts is still far from uniform, there is a clear trend to create classifications that lead to a typology which may be useful not only for other researchers but also for translators. The lesson to be learned as a result of the analysis exercise presented here might well be that, as in a gymnastics routine, translations need to be flexible, and so do their creators.

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