



**Title**

Difficulties and strategies for the translation of humour: a case study

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## **Abstract**

Sometimes, a clear, straightforward, instinctive translation is not possible when dealing with humorous texts. Linguistic and cultural hindrances pose specific difficulties to the translator, who has to seek specific strategies to overcome them. Researchers have turned attention to this field and have for the past few decades tried to decipher the workings of humour, and find ways to transpose humour from one language to another. This paper offers an overview of the theoretical framework concerned with humour translation and a case study which is an attempt to apply the main ideas to the practice of humour translation.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Definition of humour

We all know what humour is. However, it seems appropriate to try and give a definition of the concept before getting into a discussion related to it.

According to the online version of the *Collins English Dictionary*, humour is “the quality of being funny; the ability to appreciate or express that which is humorous; situations, speech, or writings that are thought to be humorous.” This inevitably leads us to check the definition for humorous: “funny; comical; amusing; displaying or creating humour.” These broad, general definitions, however, do not seem to suffice given this paper’s purpose, so a look at a more scholarly definition of the term is called for.

In search of this academic definition, it becomes clear that there is not one to be found. As Chiaro (2010a) puts it, there is “no universal consensus amongst scholars over the definition of the term.” Ruch (1998) offers an explanation on the evolution of the term from its original medical meaning in Latin to its present status as a ‘multiple-usage’ umbrella term encompassing concepts such as comedy, fun, the ridiculous, or nonsense. Chiaro (*ibid.*) also highlights that stemming from the lack of a suitable definition, the classification of a text type qualifying as being humorous in nature becomes somewhat arduous, since there are no explicit genre specific features or linguistic markers which signal at all times that a text is humorous. Nonetheless, as claimed by Chiaro (*ibid.*), according to Attardo and Raskin, there is a way to recognize humorous texts: they consist of two overlapping scripts which can be read in two different ways, one more readily discernible and a more obscure one.

Attardo (1994: 4) posits that “Linguists, psychologists, and anthropologists have taken humor to be an all-encompassing category, covering any event or object that elicits laughter, amuses, or is felt to be funny.”

Evidence, thus, undoubtedly points to the difficulty to define humour in a straightforward way. But this does not mean humour is unidentifiable by the reader/hearer. Again, we all know what humour is. Having said that, it is likewise true that considering something funny, comical or amusing is not always a universal fact, but a culturally or linguistically bound one. Some examples follow in the next section to illustrate this point.

## **1.2. Why humour poses difficulties to the translator**

Shipley (2007) underlines the basic difficulty –suggested, as the author claims, by some theories– posed by the translation of a humorous text, that is, the intuitive and talent-related nature of humour comprehension. The author goes on stating how while the reproduction of humour requires some theoretical underpinning, the grasp and understanding of the humorous effect or intention does not so. Yet, a translator, as Shipley states, cannot reproduce a humorous text without previously comprehending it.

Raphaelson-West (1989) divides humour instances in several categories and comments on the specific difficulties their translation entails. She claims that language-based jokes are among the most difficult to translate, given not only the nature of the joke but also the relationship of the languages in question. This author explains that cultural jokes may mean the same thing semantically, but in terms of pragmatics and culture, something may be missing which makes the joke untranslatable. In the case of satire, Raphaelson-West (*ibid.*) deems it difficult to translate because it mocks things that may be sacred to the target culture, although she believes there is a chance for effective translation when the cultures share some proximity. As for parody, as the mockery of a specific work, she considers it among the most difficult things to translate, since besides the cultural and linguistic similarities necessary, the work being parodied needs to be commonly known in order for the parody to be effective.

Another author offering her thoughts on the difficulties of the translation of comedy is Marta Mateo. Mateo (1995: 16) explains that “The elements constructing humour in a comedy include the speaker’s intentions, the shared

conversational expectations, the cultural context, the dialogue's implications, the connotations of each word, the relationship between the linguistic signs and the proxemic and paralinguistic signs, the scene component, etcetera.

Therefore, a concept of translation that understands it as a simple process of transporting "sense" does not account for the intricate phenomenon of humour translation since the real sense of a comic text does not only depend on its semantic part, but also often also on its form" (my translation).

Nord (2005: 166) makes a distinction between *translation problems* and *translation difficulties* –the former being defined as objective and pertaining to differences between communicative, pragmatic, cultural, linguistic, and textual systems; the latter, defined as subjective and relating to individual translators' pragmatic, cultural, linguistic, and textual competence–. Popa (2005) uses this distinction to study methodological difficulties when there is no obvious 'equivalence' between source and target languages and cultures in the pursuance of a good translation.

As the above reflections show, therefore, and although sometimes it is possible to do so (example 1), jokes –and humoristic speech in general– are instances of language that often cannot be directly or easily rendered in another language. Culturally biased (example 2) or linguistically bound (example 3), humour needs an extra effort on the part of the translator when trying to convey meaning from source text into target text.

Example 1: What's the definition of a pessimist?

A pessimist is a well-informed optimist.

Example 2: Doctor, I can't stop singing the *Green Green Grass of Home*.

That sounds like the Tom Jones syndrome.

Is it common?

*It's not unusual.*

Example 3: What is the longest word in the English language?

"Smiles": there is a mile between the first and last letters!

Example 1 should present no difficulties to the translator, since a successful version of the joke in Spanish would consist in a straightforward rendering of the source text in the target language, that is, encoding the meaning presents no additional problems. In cases like this, meaning and the humorous connotations can be transferred without special difficulty, thus getting through and amusing the target language audience with the translation as successfully as the original text did.

Example 1:           ¿Qué es un pesimista?  
Un pesimista es un optimista bien informado.

However, things are not always so simple. The translation of humorous lines may sometimes force the translator to stop and look for a strategy in order to produce the same reaction of the source recipient to the source text from the target recipient of the translation, due to the fact that the stimulus producing this effect in the source audience will not work with the target audience. This is exemplified by 2 and 3:

Example 2:           Doctor, no puedo dejar de cantar *La Bamba*.  
Habrá que ponerle en tratamiento.  
¿En qué consiste?  
Pues se necesita una poca de gracia.

Here, in order to be faithful to the context, the situation has remained the same, but with certain changes. A reference to a popular song has been kept, but it has been chosen to adapt to the target language audience, and the second reference to a song has been changed to a line of the song referred to in the target text.

Example 3:           ¿Cuál es la palabra más larga en español?  
“Arroz”: empieza por la a y termina por la zeta.



In this case, the first part of the joke remains unchanged, but the answer needs to be modified in order to make sense, be witty and play with the language as the original does.

In conclusion, when the translation cannot be rendered matter-of-factly, and meaning cannot be conveyed by merely transposing the linguistic elements of the humorous utterance, the translator needs to come up with an appropriate strategy to abide by the original features as much as possible but making the necessary changes to achieve the same reaction in the new recipient.

This is a challenge because, to begin with, one needs to understand how humour is created in the source text, and also because it requires some more creative writing than other translations in order to elicit the same reaction with different linguistic elements, while keeping as faithful as possible to the original text.

So, from the above examples, one can already assume the term translation does not refer to a homogeneous concept or process. Hatim and Mason (1997: 1) go through the dichotomies and supposed divisions in the field of translation. They mention professional divisions –between the technical translator, the literary, the legal, the religious, and so on–, differences in the modes of translating –written, oral, and written-from-oral translation–, dichotomies related to the translator’s priorities –literal versus free, form versus content, formal versus dynamic equivalence, semantic versus communicative translating, translator’s visibility versus invisibility–. In summary, they state this proliferation of terms and categories reflects the diversity of the translation world. I think this is important in order to establish the difficulties certain types of translations may present, and the awareness of their existence should be a condition to solve the problems posed by specific texts or utterances, like the humoristic.

However, these authors (*ibid.*) point out the importance of investigating the areas of mutual interest and to uncover the uniformity which emerges when translating is looked upon as *an act of communication which attempts to relay, across cultural and linguistic boundaries, another act of communication.* These

cultural and linguistic boundaries are the ones referred to above, and need to be overcome by the translator's informed decisions. Likewise, attention to pragmatic features as presupposition (what speakers/writers assume hearers/readers are likely to accept without challenge) and implicatures (as additional meanings which may be intended and/or perceived when communicative norms are flouted) mentioned by Hatim and Mason (1997: 12) will also prove key to the translator's work.

In the same line, Bassnett (1991: 14) claims that, besides transferring 'meaning' contained in one set of language signs into another set of language signs through competent use of the dictionary and grammar, the process of translation involves a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria too.

In addition to all the considerations mentioned, the translation of humour in audiovisual media can be even more challenging due to the fact of the visual scenario often reinforcing the humorous effect of the dialogues.

### **1.2.1. Equivalence and untranslatability**

Innumerable papers and books in the field of translation studies go over these two seemingly thorny issues once and again when dealing with the topic of translation difficulties posed by one or another type of text. Following this trend, the two concepts are also dealt with by many a researcher when focusing on the translation difficulties posed by humour. Let's first see some general views on these concepts and then go over what some authors note on them in connection with the translation of humour.

With regard to the notion of equivalence, Kenny (in Baker and Saldanha, 2009: 96-99) explains how this is a central concept in translation theory but a controversial one as well. When contemporary theorists posit relationships of equivalence, she says, they do so without appeal to language-neutral, objective meanings, and they acknowledge the role of translators in creating and maintaining these relationships. Toury (quoted in Kenny, *ibid.*) states that "the question to be asked [...] is not *whether* [the] two texts are equivalent [...], but

*what type and degree* of translation equivalence they reveal.” Finally, I would like to give Newman’s definition of equivalence (quoted in Kenny, *ibid.*) as “a commonsense term for describing the ideal relationship that a reader would expect to exist between an original and its translation.”

As for translatability, Hermans (in Baker and Saldanha, 2009: 300-303) similarly states that debates about translatability concern primarily the question whether translation is possible at all, or in what sense or to what degree it is possible. He believes the day-to-day practice of translator shows that translation is indeed possible. Untranslatability, according to Hermans (*ibid.*) mostly appears in relative form, as a matter of aspect, kind or degree. “There always remains an untranslatable rest, for instance in the shape of connotation, nuance or poetic quality”, he claims. The author also believes that among the least translatable texts would be those that consciously exploit the idiomatic resources of a given tongue, or those that are encoded in multiple ways –just like many humoristic texts, I dare add.

Popa (2005) posits jokes are products of social interaction, and as such, they foreground the cultural and social contexts in which they are negotiated. She states that jokes belong to the same type of texts that people negotiate in order to make meaning. It is her assumption, as she herself explains, that jokes can be translated, yet, for a translation product to be adequate, Popa claims “the translator must bear in mind that: 1) joke translation is a complex phenomenon that has to take into account the transfer of the situational, cultural, and linguistic content of the source language joke to the target culture and, at the same time, must not lose sight of the *skopos* of the translation; 2) a successful transfer of all the situational, cultural, and linguistic features to the target joke does not necessarily mean that the translation is successful.”

Idioms, like puns, are culture bound, as Bassnett asserts (1991: 23). She explains that when in the process of interlingual translation one idiom is substituted for another, that substitution may be made not based on the linguistic elements in the phrase, nor based on a corresponding or similar image contained in the phrase, but on the function of the idiom. The key fact is for the

translation to serve the same purpose as the original. However, as the author explains, once the translator moves away from close linguistic equivalence, the problems of determining the exact nature of the level of equivalence aimed for begin to emerge.

The classic problem issues in translation studies of equivalence and translatability are also raised by Chiaro (2010a) in relation with the difficulties found in the translation of humour. She claims that the translation of humour touches upon these, the most essential and highly debatable issues of the discipline. Chiaro explains how it is generally agreed among translation scholars that equivalence between source text and target text need not be total. She mentions the difference other authors establish –like Nida dividing translations between ‘formal’ and ‘dynamic’; or Newmark’s distinction between ‘semantic’ or ‘communicative’ translations–, which emphasizes the choice between formal (*ad verbum*) and functional (*ad sensum*) equivalence. And choice is to me the key word here, since it is the translator’s responsibility to make an informed decision when striving for equivalence.

Regarding translatability, Chiaro (*ibid.*) points out that the problem with translating humour is that it is ‘untranslatable’ in the sense that an *adequate degree of equivalence* is hard to achieve. She claims, for instance, regional and ethnic connotation to be one humorous feature inevitably lost in translation. The author explains how during the translation process, there is a kind of cultural give and take which reconverts the original text into the target language text. According to Chiaro (2010a: 10), “There will, or at least should be, an area of overlap between ST [source text] and TT [target text]. The greater the area of overlap, the closer the equivalence between the two texts will be. The greater the area of superimposition, the greater the osmosis between Source and Target and, in the case of VEH [verbally expressed humour], the greater the likelihood of amusement in the Target Language.” She goes on and adds, “Naturally, the degree of osmosis also depends on cultural factors –it would not be the case when what is funny in the Source Culture is not funny in the Target.” The problem then, she explains, is usually that the target text has to be substituted by a text that bears little or no resemblance to its source. In some

cases, a lowest common denominator of similarity between original and translation is missing.

Chiaro (2010a: 6-9) posits that a faithful translation does not necessarily mean word for word equivalence. She claims that recipients of translated humour expect to be amused by it, and this, according to her, justifies functional equivalence even if it entails an extreme departure from the source text. She believes the problem with translating humour is often that it is 'untranslatable' in the sense that an adequate degree of equivalence is hard to achieve. The author explains that as far as the translation of verbally expressed humour is concerned, formal equivalence, namely the similarity of lexis and syntax in source and target versions, is frequently sacrificed for the sake of dynamic (pragmatic) equivalence. In other words, as long as the target text serves the same function, it is of little importance if it has to depart in formal terms from the original.

With respect to translatability, Raphaelson-West (1989) asserts it is possible to translate humour if one keeps in mind that the translation will not always be as humorous as the original. She highlights the importance to keep the cultural context in mind, to locate the humorous aspect of the text, and to try to duplicate these aspects. If the dual script is amusing in the original but not in the translation, then Raphaelson-West suggests it may be easier to write a new, target-culture based joke instead of trying to translate the original.

### **1.3. Objectives**

It is clear, therefore, that sometimes, a clear, straightforward, instinctive translation is not possible when dealing with humorous texts. Humour may, and actually does, pose specific difficulties to the translator –as I have just shown– who has to seek specific strategies to overcome them.

With this paper, I will try and review the strategies and possible solutions offered by the researchers in the field. My aim is, thus, to explain ways to overcome the difficulties presented by the translation of humour as faced and

overcome by the translator with the aim of losing as little as possible in the translation.

Apart from the theoretical overview, the paper is completed with a case study. This is intended to offer hands-on material to analyse the application of translation strategies to consistently render humour as such in the target language.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

An overview of the theoretical frame on the topic of humour seems a sensible way to present it and see how far into it the research community has gone and what their findings have been. This will offer a general insight into the matter and will help understand to what point the field of translation studies has produced relevant research.

In order to lay out the ideas, this section is structured so that it starts from a more general perspective and moves to an increasingly closer look at the topic. I chose to skip the general theories of humour rooted in fields like psychoanalysis (with Freud as the main author) or philosophy (with Bergson's views), and start with the most interesting findings brought by the specifically linguistic theories of humour, to end reviewing the output from researchers on humour within the field of translation studies. This way, I intend to narrow the scope and length of this paper.

### **2.1. Linguistics research and humour**

In order to provide a sample of the research devoted to humour in the field of linguistics, I will offer Ritchie's views in this section, since this author gives a good account of the linguistic factors in humour, and I will then tackle the main semantic and pragmatic theories studying humour from a linguistic standpoint.

Ritchie (2010) points out that when we make a statement about the workings of an example of humour, such statement should relate to some state of knowledge (taken to comprise facts about the world, cultural beliefs and social conventions). Knowledge about language, he states, can contribute to humorous effects, and this knowledge can play a variety of roles that make it difficult to simply divide texts into the easily translatable and the completely untranslatable.

This author explains the difference between referential and verbal humour: referential humour uses language to convey some meaning which is itself the

source of humour; verbal humour, on the other hand, relies on the particular language used to express it (so that it may use idiosyncratic features of the language). Ritchie underlines here the idea of language as narrative medium, where its sole function is to convey a description of a situation, so that the humour is clearly referential: the facts are stated baldly, with no linguistic devices or tricks. The only contribution of language here is to convey information. He quotes this example from Parsons:

Nineteen-year-old Texan Roger Martinez set a world record by swallowing 225 live goldfish in 42 minutes in a San Antonio contest. His prize: a free fish dinner. (*Sun*)

He goes on describing a common way of using language to narrate humour giving the text a definite humorous ending, the punch line. "A simple sequence of events, or a situation, is recounted, but the humour is created by some particular effect of the ending" (*ibid.*: 36). Here, he quotes Suls 1972: 83 with the following joke, where the only contribution of language is the placing of the punch line at the end:

Fat Ethel sat down at the lunch counter and ordered a whole fruit cake. 'Shall I cut it into four or eight pieces?' asked the waitress. 'Four,' said Ethel, 'I'm on a diet.'

Ritchie (*ibid.*) next describes language as misdirection. In this case, the early part of a text (the set-up) can be interpreted in more than one way, but the audience will not notice the less obvious reading of the text until the meaning of the final line (the punch line) raises doubts about this default understanding of the initial part, and causes the audience to seek an alternative way to interpret the set-up. The following joke exemplifies this.

An old man was driving on the freeway when his car phone rang. It was his wife. 'Herman,' she cried, 'I just heard on the news that there's a car going the wrong way on 280. Please be careful.' 'Hell,' exclaimed Herman, 'It's not just one car. It's hundreds of them!' (Tibballs, quoted in



Ritchie, *ibid.*)

It might appear here that the only linguistic contribution to the joke is simply placing the punch line at the end. However, the set-up has been constructed so as to avoid revealing the alternative interpretation prematurely.

Taking this a bit further, the next example (Yamaguchi, quoted by Ritchie, *ibid.*) is a joke, translatable to another language only provided that the same degree of equivocation can be maintained in the set-up. Here, linguistic devices are employed, as the author explains, in support of referential humour. There is deliberate vagueness in the language used.

A pair of suburban couples who had known each other for quite some time talked it over and decided to do a little conjugal swapping. The trade was made the following evening, and the newly arranged couples retired to their respective houses. After about an hour of bedroom bliss, one of the wives propped herself up on her elbow, looked at her new partner and said 'Well, I wonder how the boys are getting along'.

The author next offers further examples to illustrate a more pronounced form of this technique where actual linguistic ambiguity is used to create the two readings, like the following one.

Do you believe in clubs for young people? Only when kindness fails.  
(Attardo, quoted in Ritchie, *ibid.*)

### **2.1.1. Semantic approaches**

We have just seen how language can be used to construct humour. Now, I would like to turn to some of the most solid, long-standing and influential linguistic theories of humour. In this field, the works of Raskin and Attardo are a reference not to be missed. These authors adopted a semantic approach to develop their theories, which I will try and overview in the next subsections.

### 2.1.1.1. Victor Raskin and the Semantic Script Theory of Humor

I will use Attardo's (1994: 196-219) words to summarize his colleague's theory. Attardo gives a clear account of Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH). He explains the SSTH is meant to account for the native speaker's humour competence: because a speaker can tell if a sentence is grammatical, the speaker can tell if a text is funny or not. The main hypothesis of this theory, as condensed by Attardo (*ibid.*) states that a text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying-text if both of the following conditions are satisfied: i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts; ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite.

The question arises of what exactly is a script. Attardo goes on with the following definition: "A script is an organized chunk of information about something (in the broadest sense). It is a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how things are done, organized, etc." I take this words to mean that a script, in this context, are the two (or more) interpretations of a humorous text that render it funny by first misleading the hearer, then briefly confusing him and finally forcing a switch of interpretations that make a joke what it is.

In Raskin's view, Attardo continues, a semantic theory must consist of the following (abstract) objects: the set of all scripts available to the speakers and a set of combinatorial rules. The function of the rules is to combine all the possible meanings of the scripts and discard those combinations that do not yield coherent readings. The combinations that yield coherent readings are incorporated with other successful combinations until all the elements in the text have been processed. If there is (at least) one coherent, well-formed interpretation, that interpretation of the text is licensed as "the meaning" of the text, and the semantic theory classifies the text as "well-formed".

Attardo adds that the SSTH presupposes access to the complete semantic network of a language and the usage of the combinatorial rules to establish readings of a text, and pass judgements on their "well-formedness". Attardo

(*ibid.*) goes on explaining how a judgement on “funniness” is passed by the SSTH.

During the process of combining scripts, Attardo claims, the semantic theory will occasionally encounter stretches of text that are compatible with more than one reading (fit more than one script). The following joke provides a good example of this overlapping:

“Is the doctor at home?” The patient asked in his bronchial whisper. “No,” the doctor’s young and pretty wife whispered in reply. “Come right in.”

Raskin introduces the “script-switch” trigger, i. e., the element of the text that causes the passage from the first to the second script actualized in the text.

“But the overlapping of two scripts is not necessarily a cause of humour per se. Ambiguous, metaphorical, figurative, allegorical, mythical, allusive and obscure texts present overlapping scripts, but they are not necessarily (if at all) funny”, Attardo (*ibid.*) argues. This, he explains, is because the second condition of the SSTH is not fulfilled in these non-humorous texts. The scripts need to be “opposed” to do so. The script oppositions (which can be divided into actual/non-actual, normal/abnormal, and possible/impossible) entail a basic opposition between real and unreal situations in the texts.

Attardo (*ibid.*: 213) concludes his summary of the SSTH theory with an assessment of its value. In his words: “Since it is the first (and only) formal, full-fledged application of a coherent theory of semantics to humor, the SSTH has no term of comparison. [...] The SSTH is a formal theory that makes predictions and can be tested against “hard facts”; therefore, there is little contention that the SSTH is the most powerful epistemologically and promising theory available in the field of linguistic-based humor research.”

#### **2.1.1.2. Salvatore Attardo and the General Theory of Verbal Humor**

A “revision” of the SSTH was presented in Attardo and Raskin, 1991 (Attardo 1994: 222-225). This revised version is called the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). This is a linguistic theory, as the author defines, “at large”, that is, it includes other areas of linguistics as well, including textual linguistics, the theory of narrativity, and pragmatics.

This broadening is achieved by the introduction of five other so-called Knowledge Resources (KR) to the script opposition posited by Raskin (see above) needed to generate a joke. The six KR described in this theory (Attardo, 1994) are the script opposition (SO), the logical mechanism (LM), the target (TA), the narrative strategy (NS), the language (LA), and the situation (SI). The GTVH also incorporates the idea of “joke similarity” and establishes the concept formally. Here is the overview Attardo (*ibid.*) gives on the KR:

Language (LA) contains all the information necessary for the verbalization of a text. It is responsible for the exact wording and the placement of the elements that constitute it. Jokes can usually be worded in a number of ways without changes in their semantic content and keep meaning intact, although puns make an exception to this rule, and although the punch line usually needs to be worded in a specific manner and also be placed at the right place in the text (which would be the end).

Narrative strategy (NS): any joke has to be cast in some form of narrative organization, either as a simple narrative, as a dialogue, as a riddle, as an aside in conversation, etcetera. A related, and unresolved issue, as pointed by Attardo, is whether all jokes are narratives.

The target (TA) selects who is the “butt” of the joke. This category attains only aggressive jokes, which contain the names of groups or individuals with (humorous) stereotypes attached (*ibid.*).

The situation (SI) of a joke can be thought of as the “props” of the joke: the objects, participants, instruments, activities, etcetera. Any joke must have some situation, although not all rely equally on it (*ibid.*).

The logical mechanism (LM) is the parameter that accounts for the way in which the two senses in the joke are brought together. It can range from juxtapositions (as in the tee-shirt slogan reading “Gobi Desert Canoe Club”) to more complex errors in reasoning, such as false analogies, as in:

Madonna does not have it, the Pope has it but doesn’t use it, Bush has it short, and Gorbachev long. What is it?

Answer: a last name.

As for the concept of joke similarity mentioned above, Attardo (*ibid.*) explains the GTVH was developed in part as a response to the issues establishing relationships of similarity among jokes. Jokes are predicted to be more similar in direct proportion to the number of parameters they have in common.

Before closing with a summary, Attardo devotes some lines to the issue of the homology between jokes and other types of humorous texts. He states for this purpose only one of the parameters needs to be considered, i. e., narrative strategy. The NS deals with the way the context is organized, and a joke is taken in the GTVH as only one of the many forms that a humorous text can assume; thus, the same humorous material can be presented as a joke, as an anecdote, as a short story, or as part of a novel, each case entailing different formal requirements.

### **2.1.2. A pragmatic approach**

Apart from the more formal theories we have just succinctly gone over, linguistic research concerning how language functions to create humour has come up with some associations between some linguistic theories and the creation of humour. These constitute pragmatic approaches and include humour seen through Grice’s conversational maxims and through the Cooperative Principle or Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory. The former, more basic and far-reaching, will be looked at in the following subsection.

### 2.1.2.1. Grice's conversational maxims and the creation of humour

When people function in humorous mode they are breaking the Gricean maxims of quality and manner, according to Chiaro (2010a), as well as perhaps the maxim of relevance and even quantity.

Let's outline Grice's postulates to understand how Chiaro's statement is realized. In order to do so, I have resorted to the outline of the Gricean views as offered in Thomas (1995: 55-86).

As Thomas explains, Grice's theory (his work on the cooperative principle and its related conversational maxims) is an attempt at describing how a hearer gets from what is said to what is meant, from the level of expressed meaning to the level of implied meaning. "Grice distinguished two different sorts of implicature: conventional implicature and conversational implicature. They have in common the property that both convey an additional level of meaning, beyond the semantic meaning of the words uttered. They differ in that in the case of conventional implicature the same implicature is always conveyed, regardless of context, whereas in the case of conversational implicature, what is implied varies according to the context of utterance" (Thomas, *ibid.*: 57). The word *but*, for instance, always carries the implicature that what follows will run counter to expectations (this is a case of conventional implicature). In the case of conversational implicatures, a speaker may imply something he knows to be untrue and hearers may understand exactly what a speaker has implied, without in any sense believing it. Thomas gives an example to illustrate this point:

Late on Christmas Eve 1993, an ambulance is sent to pick up a man who has collapsed in Newcastle city centre. The man is drunk and vomits all over the ambulanceman who goes to help him. The ambulanceman says: 'Great, that's really great! That's made my Christmas!' (Thomas, *ibid.*: 55)

In order to show the mechanisms by which people interpret conversational implicature, Grice, as Thomas explains, introduced four conversational maxims and the Cooperative Principle (CP).

Cooperative Principle (Grice, in Thomas, *ibid.*): “Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.” Grice argues that without the assumption that the speaker is operating according to the CP, there is no mechanism to prompt the hearer to seek for another interpretation. The observation that the speaker has said something that is untrue combined with the assumption that the CP is in operation sets in motion the search for an implicature. This is the case in the following example with a sarcastic reply (Thomas, *ibid.*: 63):

A: Do you want a coat?

B: No, I really want to stand out here in the freezing cold with no clothes on.

The four Conversational Maxims, Thomas continues, help us establish what the implicature might be. This is how Grice formulated these maxims:

Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality: Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relation: Be relevant.

Manner: Avoid obscurity of expression. Avoid ambiguity. Be brief. Be orderly.

The least interesting case is when a speaker observes all the maxims as in the following example (*ibid.*):

Husband: Where are the car keys?

Wife: They're on the table in the hall.

The wife has answered clearly (manner), truthfully (quality), has given just the right amount of information (quantity) and has addressed her husband's goal in asking the question (relation). She has generated no implicature: there is no distinction between what she says and what she means.

As Nieto (2011) states, humour is seen as a violation of Grice's Cooperative Principle. The CP is violated without the intention to let the hearer arrive at an implicature. Humour, he says, differs from other modes of communication that involve violations of the CP, such as lying, in that its purpose (amusement) is largely approved socially and that significant amounts of humour are incorporated in everyday conversations. But, although humour is seen as part and parcel of communication, this should not obscure the fact that humour as a mode is non-cooperative.

In relation with the non-observance of the Gricean maxims, Nieto outlines the five ways of failing to observe a maxim (including the above mentioned violation) Thomas points out:

. Flouting a maxim: Quoting Grice in Thomas, Nieto explains a flout occurs when a speaker blatantly fails to observe a maxim, not with any intention of deceiving or misleading, but because s/he wants the hearer to look for a meaning which is different from, or in addition to, the expressed meaning. There is a deliberate intention of generating an implicature.

A speaker flouts the maxim of Quantity by blatantly giving either more or less information than the situation demands. The maxim of Quality may be flouted in several ways: saying something for which the speaker does not have enough evidence, exaggerating (as in hyperboles), using metaphors, using conventional euphemisms, irony (an apparently friendly way of being offensive), banter (an offensive way of being friendly and sarcasm (like irony, but intended to hurt). If the speaker flouts the maxim of Relation, his utterance does not have any relation with the previous one (the hearer is expected to imagine what the utterance did not say and made the connection between the last utterance and the preceding one). Speakers flouting the maxim of Manner appear to be



obscure and deliberately ambiguous, but they intend to be recognised by the hearer; they may approach the matter at hand in a roundabout way (Nieto, *ibid.*).

. Violating a maxim is the “unostentatious non-observance of a maxim”. An intentionally misleading implicature is generated, as Nieto states quoting Thomas.

. Opting out a maxim is what the speaker does when he is unwilling to cooperate in the way the maxim requires (Nieto, *ibid.*, quoting Grice).

. Infringing a maxim is what the speaker does when he fails to observe a maxim with no intention of generating an implicature and with no intention of deceiving. This could occur because the speaker (Thomas in Nieto, *ibid.*) has an imperfect command of the language (a child, a foreigner), is nervous, drunk or otherwise impaired.

. Suspending a maxim means not observing it because there is no expectation that this is done (hence, the non-fulfilment does not generate any implicatures). Nieto quotes Thomas again to point out the suspension of the maxim of Quality in funeral orations, of the maxim of Manner in poetry, of the maxim of Quantity in telegrams, and of all three maxims in the case of jokes. It is difficult to find examples in which the maxim of Relation is suspended.

As Nieto (*ibid.*) claims, the reason for linguistic interest in the maxims is that they generate inferences beyond the semantic content of the sentences uttered.

These inferences, which are instruments for irony, sarcasm, and other tropes, as we have seen, may create humour and are actually exploited when intentionally seeking to do so.

Attardo (1990) makes some interesting observations regarding the violation of Grice’s maxims and the construction of jokes. He makes a point of the fact that jokes actually violate, not flout or exploit, the maxims, that is, they fail to conform to their ‘recommendations’ and therefore constitute examples of non-

cooperative behaviour. Nevertheless, his examples, as he says, make sense, and are understood and recognized as jokes. He gives the following examples:

Quantity: 'Excuse me, do you know what time it is?' 'Yes.'

Relation: 'How many surrealists does it take to screw in a lightbulb?' 'Fish!'

Manner: 'Do you believe in clubs for young men?' 'Only when kindness fails.'

(Attributed to W. C. Fields)

Quality: 'Why did the Vice President fly to Panama?' 'Because the fighting is over.' (Johnny Carson 1-19-90)

The author explains that in spite of violating the maxims, humorous texts do not become non-cooperative or lose meaningfulness, but they are understood and are not perceived as 'lies', or as ill-formed, or cryptic texts. To account for this fact, Raskin, quoted by Attardo (*ibid.*), suggested that joking involves a different kind of 'communication mode', governed by a different set of maxims. The maxims for that 'non-bona-fide' mode are the following:

Quantity: Give exactly as much information as is necessary for the joke.

Quality: Say only what is compatible with the world of the joke.

Relation: Say only what is relevant to the joke.

Manner: Tell the joke efficiently (Raskin, quoted by Attardo, *ibid.*)

A successful joke is so because, according to Attardo, part of the information is present only in the implicit part of the text. In other words, some information must be left unsaid: i. e., Grice's maxim of quantity must be violated. Attardo makes reference to a study carried out by Van Raemdonck which examined what maxims are most frequently violated in jokes. The study found that the maxim of relevance was always violated; thus it seems, as Attardo highlights, that the maxim of relevance subsumes the other three, in the sense that in order to be relevant, one must first be sincere, orderly, and exhaustive. He concludes that both quantity and relevance, as discussed, are necessarily infringed upon in a joke.

## **2.2. Translation studies research on humour**

This section is intended to narrow the circle a bit more and look at what research has been carried out and what it has come up with in the field of translation studies with relation to humour.

Conveying verbal humour entails fascinating challenges, according to Chiaro (2010b: 1), and, as she suggests, this may well be the reason why since the mid-nineties, this particular aspect of translation has attracted significant attention among researchers with the publication of special issues of renowned journals dedicated to the subject.

Next, moving now from theory to a more practical ground, I have tried to gather the strategies and methods suggested by several authors to be applied by the translator of humour.

### **2.2.1. Difficulties and strategies**

Here, I try to tackle the paper's objectives directly and this section contains probably the most useful pages of my work, from a practical point of view.

Difficulties entailed by the translation of humour have already been discussed quite extensively in the introduction pages, so, in spite of the title of this section, what will be found here are mainly the strategies, guidelines and solutions propounded by several academics.

#### **2.2.1.1. Specific translation strategies for verbally-expressed humour, irony, puns, jokes, and allusion**

Chiaro (2010b: 11-13) asks herself how translators handle verbally expressed humour (VEH). The answer she gives is they adopt one of the following strategies:

- a. leave the VEH unchanged: opt for a literal translation and maintain formal equivalence (sometimes at the expense of other features, like a wordplay, for instance)
- b. replace the source VEH with a different instance of VEH in the target language (formal equivalence is not so much preserved)
- c. replace the source VEH with an idiomatic expression in the target language (a wordplay, for instance, can be replaced by an idiomatic expression to achieve the same outcome)
- d. ignore the VEH altogether: a strategy inevitable in the case of visual jokes on screen

Chiaro explains that the translation of VEH should attempt to recreate the overlap and opposition of the two scripts mentioned by Attardo and Raskin. This, she clarifies, will involve both matching the linguistic ambiguity in the source language with similar ambiguity in the target language, and finding solutions to culture-specific references. Functional translation, rather than formal equivalence seems, in the eyes of Chiaro, a preferable option. In this case, this involves replacing the jokes with quite different ones in the target language with the aim to retain the *skopos* (the function of humour to evoke funniness), and thus obtain a successful translation. Retaining a core element present in the source humour can give a translation an extra degree of equivalence.

Researcher Marta Mateo (1995b: 13-15) makes a reflection on the translation of humour and summarises the common advice given to the translator: not to change what is easily translatable; to adapt the text to the target culture when an equivalent can be found; not to explain the comic text since such explanations destroy humour; to concentrate on the essence of the joke in order to keep it while adapting it to the rules of the target language, even when the sense or the facts in the text are changed; to give priority to the effect the joke has on the recipient, etcetera.

In another work, the same author (Mateo, 1995a: 175) investigated the translation of irony from source text (ST) to target text (TT). The mechanisms she mentions to do so are as follows:

- 1) ST irony becomes TT irony with literal translation
- 2) ST irony becomes TT irony with 'equivalent effect' translation
- 3) ST irony becomes TT irony by means of different effects from those used in ST (including the replacement of paralinguistic elements by other ironic cues)
- 4) ST irony is enhanced in TT with some word / expression
- 5) ST ironic innuendo becomes more restricted and explicit in TT
- 6) ST irony becomes TT sarcasm (i.e. more overt criticism)
- 7) The hidden meaning of ST irony comes to the surface in TT (no irony in TT)
- 8) ST ironic ambiguity has only one of the two meanings translated in TT (there is no double-entendre or ambiguity in TT therefore)
- 9) ST irony is replaced by a 'synonym' in TT with no two possible interpretations
- 10) ST irony is explained in footnote in TT (not applied in dubbing)
- 11) ST irony has literal translation with no irony in TT
- 12) Ironic ST is completely deleted in TT
- 13) No irony in ST becomes irony in TT

Delabastita (1996: 134, in Jabbari, and Ravizi, 2005) offers nine methods for the translation of word play / puns. The suggested strategies Delabastita puts forward are the following:

- 1) Pun to pun (pun rendered as pun): the ST pun is translated by a TL pun;
- 2) Pun to non pun (pun rendered as non-pun): a non-punning phrase which may retain all the initial senses (non-selective non-pun), or a non-punning phrase which renders only one of the pertinent senses (selective non-pun), or diffuse paraphrase or a combination of the above;
- 3) Pun to related rhetorical device [pun rendered with another rhetorical device, or punoid (repetition, alliteration, rhyme, referential vagueness, irony, paradox etc), which aims to recapture the effect of the ST pun];
- 4) Pun to zero (pun rendered with zero pun): the pun is simply omitted;
- 5) Pun ST = pun TT (ST pun copied as TT pun, without being translated);

- 6) Non pun a pun (a new pun introduced): a compensatory pun is inserted, where there was none in the ST, possibly making up for ST puns lost elsewhere;
- 7) Zero to pun (addition of a new pun): totally new textual material is added, containing wordplay as a compensatory device;
- 8) Editorial techniques: explanatory footnotes or endnotes, comments in translator's forewords, 'anthological' presentation of different, complementary solutions etc.

Another interesting contribution is made by Zabalbeascoa (1996). This author offers a classification of jokes from the translator's perspective:

- . International joke: a funny story or one-liner where the restrictive force of the language and cultural differences is greatly reduced insofar as the comic effect does not depend on either language-specific wordplay or familiarity with unknown specific aspects the source culture.

- . National-culture-and-institutions jokes: there is a need to adapt references of the original to retain the humorous effect for a foreign audience.

- . National-sense-of-humour joke: certain joke-types and joke themes that are apparently more popular in some countries or communities than in others and constitute a kind of tradition or intertextual frame of understanding.

- . Language-dependent jokes: depend on features of natural language for their effect, such as polysemy (a word or phrase has more than one meaning), homophony (different words or phrases sound alike), zeugma (one word is made to refer to two or more other words, but has to be differently understood in the different contexts)

- . Under visual jokes, we could discriminate between humour derived solely from what one sees on the screen and the kind of joke that may seem entirely visual but is really the visually coded version of a linguistic joke, as in a rebus (i.e. a newspaper-style hieroglyphic puzzle). The second type is therefore language-

dependent; an example would be the image of a button, not representing the word button but meaning 'be quiet' from the idiom button (up) your lip.

. The complex joke, finally, combines any two or more of the abovementioned types of joke.

One of the aspects Davies (2005) studies concerns the translation of ethnic jokes. Like the popular jokes in Spain about people from Lepe (*leperos*) based on the assumption that they are stupid, Davies claims many jokes depend on local ethnic scripts that by convention pin a comic characteristic on a particular ethnic group such as the canny Cardi in Wales, the slow Swiss in France, the stupid Belgian incessantly eating fries in the Netherlands. He asks himself how these jokes are to be translated and moved from one language and culture to another. There are, according to Davies, three cases with which the translator will be confronted:

. First, the "transposable jokes", those where a script is either shared between countries or is easily available to those who have no experience of the jokes but knows of the historical events that makes them understandable.

. Second, there are "switchable jokes", those that exist only in one European country but have a more or less exact equivalent in another in which they are pinned on a local group within the second country.

. Finally, there are the "problematic" jokes and scripts which are confined to one country, indeed unique to that country and which in consequence pose particular problems.

Davies (*ibid.*) claims the first kind of jokes is the easiest to deal with because they are easily understandable throughout most of Europe and indeed also the English-speaking world.

The second category of jokes are those where local equivalents exist in many countries and languages. Examples of these are the "stupid" and "canny" scripts

used in jokes. The possibility of switching stupidity and canny jokes to another local target when translating has been noted by translators, if only in a rather sporadic way. Davies provides a table which shows by country the stupid and canny jokes and the correspondences and differences can be seen between countries. Nonetheless, the author warns, there are a substantial number of jokes about stupidity that depend on a play on words and these can cause problems.

The third category of jokes depends on scripts that are only known locally and do not exist in other countries, which can create problems when rendering them comprehensible abroad (for example, French jokes about the Swiss being slow).

Some jokes involving local knowledge are easy to translate in such a way that they work. This can be achieved by restructuring a short joke (for example, a riddle joke) as a longer narrative joke in which an extra person is introduced to whom the necessary information is *directly* conveyed, thus conveying it *indirectly* to the listener without appearing didactic. Another technique is for the speaker to feign naivety and to explain to his audience how the foreigners enlightened him. Here is the example Davies offers to illustrate this point:

A Protestant minister, a Roman Catholic priest and a rabbi were talking about the miracles they had experienced. The minister said: "I was once travelling on a plane when all the engines cut out one by one and we were falling out of the sky. I prayed and prayed to God and then one of the engines began to work again and we were able to land safely. It was a miraculous response to my prayers". The priest then said: "Once I was walking along the edge of a cliff when I stumbled and fell down towards the beach. I cried out 'St. Anthony save me, I'm lost' and to my amazement, I landed on a holiday maker's trampoline. The rabbi listened with interest to his colleagues' stories and said, "I was walking to the synagogue one Saturday when I saw a large bundle of banknotes lying at the side of the road and, as you know, I'm not allowed to carry money on the Sabbath. So I prayed and prayed and suddenly for a hundred



yards around me it was Tuesday”.

Davies explains how the key line that is necessary for the gentile, though not Jewish listeners, is the one where the rabbi says “As you know, I’m not allowed to carry money on the Sabbath”. It conveys the information necessary if the gentiles are to grasp the full humour of the joke but this is not done directly.

As a conclusion, Davies (*ibid.*) asserts, “Where the potential understanding of a script by an audience from one group might be impeded by differences in knowledge and cultural assumptions there are, then, often ways in which a translator can surmount this. What is really tricky is when this problem is fused with the far more difficult problem of how to translate a subtle play on words.” The biggest difficulties, he claims, do not stem from the comic ethnic scripts but from the use in the scripts of the idiosyncratic qualities of a particular language which can not easily be reproduced in another language. To illustrate this, Davies quotes the following joke (from Françoise Vreck’s essay *Fidélité en Humour*, in Fabrice and Wood 1999:32):

(An Irishman) bought a bath and was just leaving the shop with his purchase when the shop assistant called “Do you want a plug?” “Why?” asked the man, “Is it electric?”

Another difficulty for the translator, related to culture-bound challenges, is allusion. Leppihalme (1997) suggests some strategies for the translation of allusion, in the author’s words, “an indirect reference to a work of art or a person or an event”. Humour, Leppihalme claims, is also bound to cultural elements such as a reference to some customs or the name of some special places, works or people and application of proverbs, idioms or catchphrases. The strategies of allusion translation in the cultural humour category posited by the author are as follows (*ibid.*: 84):

A) Proper name allusion translation strategies:

1) Retention of name (either unchanged or in its conventional TL form); with three subcategories:

1. a) use the name as such
1. b) use the name, adding some guidance
1. c) use the name, adding an explanation, for example, a footnote

2) Replacement of name by another (beyond the changes required by convention); with two subcategories:

2. a) replace the name by another SL name
2. b) replace the name by a TL name

3) Omission of name; with two subcategories:

3. a) omit the name but transfer the sense by other means, for example, by a common noun
3. b) omit the name and allusion together

B) Key phrase translation strategies:

1) Use of standard translation;

2) Minimum change, that is, a literal translation without regard to connotative or contextual meaning –there is thus no change that would aim specifically at the transfer of connotation;

3) Extra-allusive guidance added in the text, where the translator follows his or her assessment of the needs of readers by adding information which the author with his or her source language view point did not think necessary; including the use of typographical means to signal that the material is performed;

4) The use of footnotes, endnotes, translator's prefaces and other explicit explanations not slipped in the text but overtly given as additional information;

- 5) Simulated familiarity or internal making, that is, the addition of intra-allusive signalling features (marked wording or syntax) that depart from the style of the context, thus signalling the presence of borrowed words;
- 6) Replacement by a performed TL item;
- 7) Reduction of allusion to sense by rephrasing in other words, making its meaning overt and dispensing with the allusive key phrase itself;
- 8) Recreation, using a fusion of techniques: creative construction of a passage which hints at the connotations of allusion or other special effects created by it;
- 9) Omission of the allusion

#### **2.2.1.2. Shipley's checklist for the translation of humour**

To round up the second part of this paper, I think it is interesting to look at Shipley's work. Adopting an eminently practical approach, Shipley (2007) provides a checklist for the translation of humour to guide the translator on this quest.

First, the author quotes Attardo 2002. In this article, Attardo provides clues as to how the Knowledge Resources of the General Theory of Verbal Humour might be used in decoding and later recoding humour. Below are some of his comments:

Language (LA): the simplest approach to translation is "substitute Language in TL for Language in SL".

Narrative Strategy (NS): if the format is unknown in other languages, the translator is left with the task of reproducing the joke using a different NS.

Target (TA): as ethnic and national groups invariably select different groups as the target of their humour, translation “can be done by substituting the appropriate group in the target culture”.

Situation (SI): if the situation is non-existent in the TL or unavailable for humour, replace the offending situation with another one, while respecting all other Knowledge Resources.

Logical Mechanism (LM): the logical mechanism of puns subverts the logical mechanism ‘same sound equals same meaning’, and is not readily translatable. Language-dependent abstract logical-deductive processes are involved which can be freely translated.

Script Opposition (SO): the translator should refrain from changing the Script Opposition, except when it is unavailable in the TL.

Shipley (*ibid.*) explains Attardo’s adaptation of the GTVH is useful for translating what might be considered the “internal” elements of humorous texts. However, he warns the translator to beware of a number of other hindering factors listed by the author as follows:

. Time Frame Considerations (TFC): if the ST contains references to events that are very recent (i.e. satirical news programs or cartoons), the receiver should be aware of such events to be prepared to grasp the humorous intention of the text.

. Social Class and Educations Considerations (SEC): a joke about the internet, for instance, might find a wide target audience in a technologically advanced culture and a very limited audience in a developing culture.

. Cultural Awareness Decisions (CAD): if all other elements are readily found in the Target Culture, only the language will be required to change. However, at times, this becomes a judgement call for the translator (Should the Spanish word “siesta” be changed for an American publication? The translator may decide to keep the word since although *siestas* are not a mainstay of American

life, most are aware of what a *siesta* is and would understand the connotation in the text.)

. Publication Background Information (PBI): the ideological, political and editorial positions of media companies play a factor in the choice of the text to be translated, and may well influence the type of translation requested.

The next step Shipley (*ibid.*) proposes is to combine all the factors to create a prototype checklist. The author clarifies the list is intended as a sound beginning for translation students and claims future contributions in humour translation will add more insight and perhaps more elements to it. This is the final shape of Shipley's checklist as offer by the author:

“Item to be translated: ...

External Factors:

- . Time Frame Considerations (TFC): ...
- . Social Class and Educations Considerations (SEC): ...
- . Cultural Awareness Decisions (CAD): ...
- . Publication Background Information (PBI): ...

Internal Factors:

- . Language (LA): ...
- . Narrative Strategy (NS): ...
- . Target (TA): ...
- . Situation (SI): ...
- . Logical Mechanism (LM): ...
- . Script Opposition (SO): ...

Translation: ...”

In spite of the fact the checklist is intended for translation students, I think it is a useful tool to be considered by any translator of humour seeking start-up guidelines.

### **3. Case study: analysis of the translation of humorous lines (from English into Spanish) taken from the American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory***

To round up this paper and give it a bit of a practical application in translation, I deem it necessary to include an exercise of analysis. In this section, I offer a brief case study to illustrate some of the main points discussed in the previous pages.

The humorous exchanges that follow are dialogue lines taken from the American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*. The show has run so far from 2007 to 2013. The situation the series exploits for humour is the relationship between Penny and her neighbours, Leonard and Sheldon. Penny is a waitress who would like to become an actress. She is practical, outgoing and street-wise. Leonard and Sheldon are two brilliant physicists who work at the university and are depicted as grown-up nerds, who lack social skills in spite of their successful scientific careers. Other characters also appearing in the series are Raj and Howard (Sheldon and Leonard's colleagues), Bernadette (Howard's girlfriend), Amy (Sheldon's girlfriend), Leslie (another scientist at the university), and other minor characters who need not be mentioned given my purpose here.

My objective is to try and see the specific difficulties posed by each example, rather than judging or assessing the Spanish translations of the humour lines I decided to analyze. Therefore, I will not include the actual broadcasted translated Spanish version for the dubbed text.

I have chosen some random funny excerpts that called my attention when watching the series on television. I made a note of them because these made me wonder what the best translation to be offered to the Spanish audience could be, since I sensed the decoding and recoding was not a straightforward process in these cases.

To sum up, I chose the humorous lines, next I examined the difficulties their translation entailed. Then, while trying to take into account what has been laid out in previous pages of this paper, I made an attempt to figure out a plausible

strategy for their translation. And finally, I offer my best shot at their translation into Spanish. To avoid this section to become too long, I have only included here the difficulties found and the strategies applied, and have put the original excerpts and my translations at the end, as an annex. I am aware this is not the most comfortable way to read the section, but I am afraid it was the only possible way to present my work and not exceed the permitted number of pages. I thus, thank the reader for the extra effort.

My translation of the excerpts does not take into account any dubbing constraints (length of text, accordance of lip movement, etcetera) the real translator most probably had to adjust to. Also, I did not consider the convenience of my translation choices for every instance a particular linguistic item may appear all through a chapter or the whole series. It is also worth noting that in the difficulties and strategies comments I will only include those relevant for the humorous effect of the text and leave out any other type of translation difficulties.

I would like to add that the website <http://bigbangtrans.wordpress.com/> was of great help to accurately render the words and quote the dialogues correctly. I checked it systematically after choosing and making preliminary notes of the excerpts I chose to analyze in this section.

Excerpt 1: Season 1, Episode 6 (attending a party at Penny's):

Difficulties:

Of cultural nature: Mention of the concept "middle name", non-existent in Spanish.

Of linguistic nature: Leakey, a proper name (of a real person, also mentioned later in the dialogue, so it needs to be kept), as a word that connects indirectly with the idea of enuresis, being "leaky".

Strategies:

Opt for a Spanish similar concept, "segundo nombre".

Try and create a similar funny effect and achieve a similar connection with different linguistic elements.

Excerpt 2: Season 1, Episode 13 (entering the Physics Bowl contest):

Difficulties:

Of linguistic nature with visual constraints: There is no concept with the initials PMS instantly recognizable in Spanish (“síndrome premenstrual” exists, but is not referred to as an acronym, even less the same as in English), not even unrelated to the meaning in the original. Plus, the existence of visual contents (the letters on the tee-shirts) forces the translator to keep the acronym as in the original text, which comes to add complexity to the process. It does not seem possible to keep the misleading effect the acronym has on the source audience (the dual script).

Strategies:

Reference to the visual hints is kept for the audience not to become confused. A different linguistic form is rendered to maintain the functional effect of the joke. A new meaning is given to the acronym, but something is lost: the dual script and funny first impression when the audience sees the tee-shirts.

Excerpt 3: Season 2, Episode 1 (on the stairwell):

Difficulties:

Leonard’s first lines, we discover later in the dialogue, make the situation funny by flouting the Gricean maxim of quantity (and relevance).

Strategies:

It does not seem difficult to keep the same effect in the target text just by rendering a straightforward translation.



Excerpt 4: Season 2, Episode 1 (at the laundry room):

Difficulties:

The pun achieved with the word tic/tick cannot be recoded without changing the dual words or the meaning of the utterance.

Strategies:

A new pun can be created, in this case, with the possibility to keep the word “tic”, but not the term “tick”. So the humorous function is kept even if the formal aspect is a bit bent.

Excerpt 5: Season 2, Episode 3 (Sheldon is using his laptop on the sofa):

Difficulties:

Of linguistic nature: Penny makes a joke, mimicking the protocols of acronym use with irony. The “acronym” she uses is self-explanatory, actually, the very fact of the sentence she uses having the shape of an acronym when it is not is what makes it humorous in the text. Finding an acronym/phrase in Spanish with the same features is the challenge.

Strategies:

Rather than using an acronym or a phrase to render Penny’s utterance funny in the translation, in Spanish we can use the spelling of the word “eso” and achieve a similar effect. Sheldon fails to understand it is a spelled word and seeks meaning in the wrong place.

Excerpt 6: Season 3, Episode 18 (Sheldon’s friends are teaming up to help him overcome his stage fear; Sheldon compares them to Professor X’s X-men):

Difficulties:

The allusion to the X-men is key in this humorous instance. First, the translator has to decide whether in Spanish there is such a reference (research must be

done in the science fiction genre, since the reference should adjust to the translated existing version if there is one), then the transposition of the original's C-men needs to carry the same double interpretation to be equally funny.

Strategies:

X-men is kept as is, since it is recognizable as a reference for the knowledgeable audience (and can be understood even if the audience is not familiar with the characters alluded). To achieve practically the same funny effect (keeping function and form), the C taken from a surname is changed by an S taken from a first name.

Excerpt 7: Season 3, Episode 23 (Leonard is feeling down because of his breaking up with Penny):

Difficulties:

Of linguistic nature: The intralinguistic confusion created is difficult to render in Spanish. On one hand, there is an idiom (to express one has to keep trying to succeed), on the other, there is the mistake concerning the words in the idiomatic phrase. On top of that, the image created by the words "get back on", adding and mixing with the sexual connotations not present in the correctly formed idiom but present in the wrong, make the exchange an especially complex one to translate.

Strategies:

Formal equivalence is a bit twisted but still quite faithful to the original, and functional equivalence seems plausible enough. This has been achieved with an idiomatic phrase used in quite a similar way as in the original: the meaning is comparable (forget past mistakes and go on), and Raj's use of it is equally wrong and linked to sexual activity (like in the original).

Excerpt 8: Season 4, Episode 8 (Leonard is trying to keep Sheldon from stealing a movie):

Difficulties:

Of cultural nature: The idea of a middle name does not exist in Spanish. Besides using this concept, Sheldon uses a word that is not a real name, collecting a term used immediately before by Leonard, in the shape of a much used quote (even in sci-fi movies of the taste of the characters, like the *Fantastic Four*). This cultural concept and the subversion of its use prove difficult to be rendered in the translation.

Strategies:

Sheldon also mentions his real second name, Lee, and the translation can use a word in Spanish recalling this proper name (“lío”) to achieve all the effects present in the original (except, maybe, for the allusive nature of the words “Trouble is my middle name”): it is not a real name, it is used immediately before by Leonard, and it will probably amuse the audience.

Excerpt 9: Season 4, Episode 8 (the girls are getting ready to go out):

Difficulties:

Of linguistic nature: The use of the acronym BFF is peculiar of the English language in this context. The translation should keep Amy’s seemingly enthusiastic statement followed by her despise of the term defining the relationship she seems to be longing for.

Strategies:

The use of an acronym is lost, since there is no satisfactory equivalent in Spanish. The expression plus the acronymic reference to it are rendered as two different expressions. The lack of complete formal equivalence is made up for by the achievement of functional equivalence.

Excerpt 10: Season 4, Episode 8:

Difficulties:

The dialogue involves a word play in the shape of a standard dialogue-structured joke (which I assume this is a known repeated joke for the audience rather than a creation of the two characters). The humorous effect is produced by the childish exchange being between two intelligent grown-ups who appear somewhat stupid under the infatuation of love.

Strategies:

Due to the lack of a readily available equivalent, I made up a similar exchange betraying meaning but keeping the formal aspect of the dialogue and the childish, stupidity tinge of the original. Functional equivalence is thus met.

Excerpt 11: Season 5, Episode 13 (the guys are playing a board game):

Difficulties:

Dual script difficult to transpose. It is a challenge to convey the two meanings of the word “wood” (used by Sheldon, as a construction material; heard by the other two characters as a synonym for “erection”) in one Spanish word.

The text should read well in the translation in both registers: formal and slang, as it does in the original. So the correct tone also needs to be attained.

Strategies:

Unable to keep the same meaning (changing “wood” for “caña”), the translation can render the same dual reading in formal register and slang and appear funny to the hearer.

#### 4. Conclusions

Relevant research papers prove that translating humorous texts indeed presents a challenge to the translator. Double scripts, wordplays, linguistic idiosyncrasies and cultural elements all conform and add complexity to these texts. If one tackles the translation of verbally expressed humour for cinema and television, it becomes clear that visual information can complicate matters even further. Academics in translation studies agree this text type is worth specific attention, just like technical, scientific or literary texts do.

There are not very many papers on the subject of humour translation within the discipline of translation studies before the mid-nineties. From then onwards, awareness and interest seem to increase and some journals even publish special issues on the topic (*Meta* 34 [1], 1989; *The Translator* 8 [2], 2002). For this reason, there is still much to be done in the field, which does not yet amount for a long research tradition.

Research related to the translation of humour seems to feed from other fields of study apart from translation studies alone. Sociolinguistics, pragmatics, psychology, are disciplines which have contributed to the definition and understanding of the workings of humour, necessary in order to lay out the basis for its translation into different languages. And the way seems to point at interdisciplinary research as an appropriate strategy.

The difficulties posed by the translation of humour mean the translator has a complex job to carry out. These texts demand more from the professional than other text types, and it appears the translator's skills, background, training, sense of humour, intelligence as a creative writer, are all the more important for a good job to be done. The translator of humour is constantly faced with the need to grasp all the meaning/s in a complex text and a decision-making process full of obstacles (compounded in text for dubbing, for instance, with constraints like length of utterances, lip movement, etcetera).

Academics have written papers attempting to propound translating strategies to apply to humour translation. The literature reviewed is mainly theoretical in nature; nonetheless, some practical advice and even guidelines are given in some cases, as a description of what the translator does or, alternatively, as what the process could be like. However, there are no full-fledged models to apply or comprehensive patterns to follow –and I wonder whether they would be too cumbersome to be practical if there were any. The recommendations and insights, although undoubtedly useful, are usually quite specific to one instance of humour (jokes, puns, irony).

What all the strategies seem to point out is that even if translatability and equivalence are asserted as possible in all cases, they are only achieved with a greater or lesser degree of sacrifice. Form is sacrificed for the sake of function in many cases. This means, to a greater or lesser extent, there is always something lost in humour translation.

Finally, the application of the information gathered to the case study has led me to the conclusion that however useful is the understanding of the workings and complexity of humorous texts, when faced with one, the translator needs to travel away from all theoretical mindsets, get into the text and come out with the best possible outcome his/her intuition, skills, knowledge, creativity, and constraints lead him/her to. It is a risky plunge to be taken.

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## ANNEX

### Case study excerpts: originals and translations

Excerpt 1: Season 1, Episode 6 (attending a party at Penny's)

Original text:

*Leonard:* Terrific. Um, this party is my first chance for Penny to see me in the context of her social group, and I need you not to embarrass me tonight.

*Sheldon:* Well, what exactly do you mean by embarrass you?

*Leonard:* For example, tonight no-one needs to know that my middle name is Leakey.

*Sheldon:* Well, there's nothing embarrassing about that, your father worked with Lewis Leakey, a great anthropologist. It had nothing to do with your bed-wetting.

My proposed translation:

*Leonard:* Fantástico. Bueno, esta fiesta es mi primera oportunidad para que Penny me vea en el contexto de su grupo social y no quiero que me pongáis en evidencia.

*Sheldon:* ¿Qué quieres decir con que no te pongamos en evidencia?

*Leonard:* Por ejemplo, no mencionéis que mi segundo nombre es Leakey.

*Sheldon:* Es para avergonzarse, pero, ¿crees que sus amigos relacionarán lo de Leakey, el nombre del gran antropólogo, con el "líqui-do" con que mojaste la cama hasta cierta edad?

Excerpt 2: Season 1, Episode 13 (entering the Physics Bowl contest):

Original text:

*Leonard:* Here's your tee-shirt. *(Hands a tee-shirt with PMS on it. Takes jacket off to reveal similar.)*

*Leslie:* PMS? It's a couple of days early, but...

*Leonard:* No, It stands for Perpetual Motion Squad.

My proposed translation:

*Leonard:* Esta es la camiseta. *(Entrega la camiseta con las siglas PMS estampadas. Se quita la chaqueta y se ve que lleva una igual.)*

*Leslie:* ¿PMS? ¿Qué significa?

*Leonard:* Son las siglas de Patrulla del Movimiento Sempiterno.

Excerpt 3: Season 2, Episode 1 (on the stairwell):

Original text:

*Leonard:* So you see, what you're eating is not technically yoghurt, because it doesn't have enough live acidophilus cultures. It's really just iced milk with carrageenan added for thickness.

*Penny:* Oh, that's very interesting.

*Leonard:* It's also not pink and has no berries.

*Penny:* Yeah, but it doesn't really answer my question.

*Leonard:* What was your question again?

*Penny:* Do you want some?

*Leonard:* Oh, right, no, I'm lactose intolerant.

My proposed translation:

*Leonard:* Verás, técnicamente, lo que tomas no es yogur porque no contiene suficientes cultivos acidófilos. En realidad, solo es leche helada con carragenato añadido para que espese.

*Penny:* Ah, qué interesante.

*Leonard:* Además, no es rosa ni contiene bayas.

*Penny:* Ya, pero no contestas a mi pregunta.

*Leonard:* ¿Qué me habías preguntado?

*Penny:* ¿Quieres un poco?

*Leonard:* Ah, ya. No, tengo intolerancia a la lactosa.

Excerpt 4: Season 2, Episode 1 (at the laundry room):

Original text:

*Sheldon:* Secret keeping is a complicated behavior. One has to be concerned not only about what one says, but about facial expressions, autonomic reflexes. When I try to deceive, I myself have more nervous tics than a Lyme disease research facility.

*(Penny looks at Sheldon for several awkward moments.)*

*Sheldon:* It's a joke. It relies on the homonymic relationship between 'tick,' the blood-sucking arachnid, and 'tic,' the involuntary muscular contraction.

My proposed translation:

*Sheldon:* Guardar un secreto es complicado. No solo hay que vigilar lo que se dice, sino que hay que tener cuidado con las expresiones faciales, reflejos autonómicos. Yo, cuando intento mentir, tengo más tics nerviosos que una relojería.

*(Penny mira a Sheldon perpleja unos instantes.)*

*Sheldon:* Es una broma. Es un juego de palabras: tic significa movimiento convulsivo involuntario y a la vez remite al sonido acompasado del tictac de un reloj.

Excerpt 5: Season 2, Episode 3 (Sheldon is using his laptop on the sofa):

Original text:

*Penny:* What are you doing?

*Sheldon:* AFK. I'm playing Age of Conan, an online multiplayer game set in the universe of Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian.

*Penny:* Oh.

*Sheldon:* Sheldor, back online.

*Penny:* ¿What's AFK?

*Sheldon:* AFK. Away from keyboard.

*Penny:* Oh, I see.

*Sheldon:* What does that stand for?

*Penny:* Oh, I see?

*Sheldon:* Yes, but what does it stand for?

My proposed translation:

*Penny:* ¿Qué haces?

*Sheldon:* AFK. Participo en Age of Conan, un juego multijugador en línea ambientado en el universo de Conan el Bárbaro, de Robert Howard.

*Penny:* Oh.

*Sheldon:* Sheldor, en línea.

*Penny:* ¿Qué es AFK?

*Sheldon:* Del inglés, dejo el teclado.

*Penny:* Ah, E-S-O (pronunciado "e, ese, o").

*Sheldon:* ¿Qué significa?

*Penny:* ¿E-S-O?

*Sheldon:* Sí, pero ¿qué significa?

Excerpt 6: Season 3, Episode 18 (Sheldon's friends are teaming up to help him overcome his stage fear; Sheldon compares them to Professor X's X-men):

Original text:

*Penny:* So, what do you say, Sheldon? Are we your X-men?

*Sheldon:* No. The X-men were named for the X in Charles Xavier. Since I am Sheldon Cooper, you will be my C-men.

*Howard:* Oh, that's not a good name.

My proposed translation:

*Penny:* ¿Qué te parece, Sheldon? ¿Somos tus X-men?

*Sheldon:* No. Los X-men se llamaban así por la X de Charles Xavier. Como yo me llamo Sheldon, seréis mis S-men.

*Howard:* Oh, no es un buen nombre.

Excerpt 7: Season 3, Episode 23 (Leonard is feeling down because of his breaking up with Penny):

Original text:

*Raj:* I'm telling you, dude, the only way to feel better about Penny going out with other guys is for you to get back on the whores.

*Howard:* Horse.

*Raj:* What?

*Howard:* The phrase is get back on the horse, not whores.

*Raj:* That's disgusting, dude.

My proposed translation:

*Raj:* Ya te digo, tío, para superar que Penny salga con otros, tienes que usar condón con clienta nueva.

*Howard:* Borrón.

*Raj:* ¿Qué?

*Howard:* La expresión es hacer borrón y cuenta nueva.

*Raj:* ¿Seguro, tío?



Excerpt 8: Season 4, Episode 8 (Leonard is trying to keep Sheldon from stealing a movie):

Original text:

*Leonard:* Listen to me. You are over-tired. You're not thinking right. Put the movie back before we get into trouble.

*Sheldon:* Trouble is my middle name, Leonard. Actually, it's Lee, but I prefer Trouble.

My proposed translation:

*Leonard:* Escúchame. Estás agotado. No piensas con claridad. Deja la película antes de meternos en un lío.

*Sheldon:* Lío me llamo de segundo nombre, Leonard. Bueno, me llamo Lee, pero prefiero Lío.

Excerpt 9: Season 4, Episode 8 (the girls are getting ready to go out):

Original text:

*Penny:* So where should we go tonight? A bar? A club? A movie?

*Bernadette:* Or we could just stay here.

*Amy:* Yes, and continue to bond. I have a feeling that after tonight, one of you will become my best friend forever. Or BFF, if you prefer. Which I don't.

My proposed translation:

*Penny:* ¿Dónde queréis ir esta noche? ¿Bar? ¿Discoteca? ¿Cine?

*Bernadette:* Podríamos quedarnos aquí.

*Amy:* Y seguir forjando nuestra amistad. Presiento que esta noche una de las dos se convertirá en mi mejor amiga, mi alma gemela (término absurdo).

Excerpt 10: Season 4, Episode 8:

Original text:

*Bernadette*: Knock-knock.

*Howard*: Who's there?

*Bernadette*: Olive.

*Howard*: Olive you, too.

My proposed translation:

*Bernadette*: Toc, toc.

*Howard*: ¿Quién es?

*Bernadette*: Adivina.

*Howard*: La más divina.

Excerpt 11: Season 5, Episode 13 (the guys are playing a board game):

Original text:

*Sheldon:* Mm. I want to build a road, but I need wood. Do either of you fellows have wood? (*Raj and Howard snigger*) I don't understand the laughter. The object of Settlers of Catan is to build roads and settlements. To do so requires wood. Now, I have sheep; I need wood. Who has wood for my sheep?

My proposed translation:

*Sheldon:* Mm. Quiero construir caminos, necesito caña. ¿Alguien puede darme caña? (*Raj y Howard se ríen con disimulo*) ¿De qué os reís?. El objetivo de los Colonos de Catan es construir carreteras y asentamientos. Para ello hay que darles caña. A ver, tengo ovejas; necesito más caña. ¿Quién puede dar caña a mis ovejas?