

HOMO LUDENS AMONG CULTURES AND TRANSLATIONS – A PRACTICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT. *Homo Ludens among Cultures and Translations – A Practical Approach.* Not only once have we learned about the parasitic, mimetic structure of a translation, or the inauthenticity of the invisible translator, a performer *without a stage*, as Robert Wechsler² would describe it. Yet, beyond such a shallow disparaging perspective, (good) translation obviously means art, being shaped by the translator's expertise, talent and imagination, and resembling a creative Lego game rather than an already set puzzle game, hence its uniqueness. The present study aims to briefly highlight certain key-concepts in this ambiguity-fraught domain, such as abusive fidelity, domestication and foreignization (covert and overt translation) or culture-bound terms, the so-called *culturemes*. Mainly relying on practical illustrations, encountered while translating a series of jokes from the German language into Romanian, during a translation course within the Leipzig University, the article will focus on the ludic aspect of translation, which paradoxically does not always trigger a laughter on the part of the translator, sometimes faced not only with difficulties, but with impossible equivalences. Ultimately, the study will try to

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² See Robert Wechsler. 1998. *Performing without a stage: the art of literary translation*, Catbird Press.

justify the reasons for which communicative translation should prevail over the semantic translation or why an authentic target-language text proves superior to a faithful-to-the-source-text translation.

Keywords: *abusive fidelity, communication, cultureme, equivalence, meaning, mediation, wordplay*

REZUMAT. *Homo ludens, printre culturi și traduceri – o abordare practică.*

Nu de puține ori ne-am confruntat cu diferite formulări referitoare la structura parazită, mimetică a traducerilor sau la lipsa de autenticitate a traducătorului invizibil, un interpret *fără scenă*, așa cum îl descrie Robert Wechsler. Totuși, dincolo de o asemenea perspectivă depreciativă, traducerea (de calitate) înseamnă, cu siguranță, artă, modelată de experiența, talentul și imaginația traducătorului. Comparabilă cu un joc creativ realizat din piese Lego, mai degrabă decât cu un joc de puzzle prestabilit, orice traducere este unică. Studiul de față își propune să evidențieze câteva concepte-cheie din acest domeniu plin de ambiguități, printre care conceptul de fidelitate abuzivă, adaptare sau înstrăinare (în alți termeni, traducere implicită și traducere explicită), și cultureme, acei termeni ancorați într-o cultură. Articolul se bazează, în principiu, pe o serie de exemple practice, oferite de traducerea unor glume din limba germană în limba română, în cadrul unui curs de traduceri de la Universitatea din Leipzig, astfel concentrându-se pe aspectul ludic al traducerilor, care, în mod paradoxal, nu stârnesc întotdeauna râsul traducătorilor, deseori confrunțați nu doar cu situații dificile, ci chiar cu echivalențe imposibile. Nu în ultimul rând, vom încerca să demonstrăm că o traducere comunicativă este de preferat unei traduceri semantice și că un text autentic în limba-țintă va fi, fără îndoială, superior unei traduceri aservite textului-sursă.

Cuvinte-cheie: *fidelitate abuzivă, comunicare, culturem, echivalență, sens, mediere, joc de cuvinte*

Motto:

*Translation is not a matter of words only:
it is a matter of making intelligible a whole culture.
(Anthony Burgess³)*

As You Like It. Preliminary Remarks

In an already punning note, “the history of translation theory [can] be thought of as a discussion of the polysemy of the word ‘translation’” (Söll quoted by Gutt, in Hickey 1998: 47), hence the difficulty to provide only one comprehensive definition. Besides interlanguage translations, be they literary

³ *Goodreads Inc.*, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/3211247-translation-is-not-a-matter-of-words-only-it-is>, accessed on January 7, 2023.

texts or special-purpose translated texts (legal, medical, technical, etc.), there are also other forms of ‘translations’ in our highly meaningful world, for example converting a discourse into sign language or regulations into traffic signs, the last ones being out of the scope of the present article.

Translation is plainly defined as the alteration of an original in another language. Some critics would naturally emphasize the parasitic character of such translations, accused of lacking ideastic originality and frequently being regarded as mediocre quality. Others, however, would praise the translator’s adaptability, diplomacy and wits when mediating between two languages and cultures. In a complex interpretation,

Translation is a cross-linguistic sociocultural practice, in which a text in one language is replaced by a functionally equivalent text in another. The fundamental characteristic of a translation is therefore that it is a text that is doubly bound: on the one hand to a text in the source language, the ‘source text’ or the original and, on the other hand, to the communicative-linguistic conditions holding in the culture to which the addressees belong (House, in Hickey 1998, 63).

Actually, Juliane House has coined the term *linguaculture* (House, in Hickey 1998, *passim*), as synonym for any language, which is intrinsically anchored in the respective culture.

The aforementioned functional equivalence is of utmost importance, since translating individual words would often turn into meaningless laughing stock (a real case in point was the ludicrous literal translation of the Redox reactions into Romanian as the ‘red ox’ reactions – *reacțiile bouului roșu*). Fortunately, this is not the case with certain extremely well-selected literary names or book titles, such as Astrid Lindgren’s fictional character Pippi Longstocking/Germ. *Pippi Langstrumpf*/It. *Pippi Calzelunghe*, translated into Romanian as *Șosețica* (‘little sock/little short stocking’) and not the literal *Ciorap lung* (even though her father bears the name of *Efraim Cioraplung*). The preference for the first variant certainly took into account the difference between the masculine noun *ciorap* and the feminine *șoseță*, its diminutive *șosețică* turning out to be the best option for the funny red-haired girl.

It is worth mentioning here three further ingenious titles in the contemporary Romanian-Moldovan literature – in the original, *Vârstele jocului. Strada Cetății* (*The Ages of the Game – Citadel Street*), by Claudiu M. Florian, Ioana Pârvulescu, *Inocenții*, and Liliana Corobca, *Kinderland*.

The first novel is a self-translation into Romanian of *Zweieinhalb Störche* (*Two storks and a half*), the titles bearing abstract and respectively concrete references to the author’s childhood in Transylvania, in a Romanian – German (Transylvanian Saxon) family, hence the presence of more than one stork to

have delivered the multicultural baby. The next title, *The Innocents*, would have been reckoned another identical name in a long series of miscellaneous books. Focusing on the same childhood topic in Transylvania (this time, at the confluence of three different identities – Romanian, German and Hungarian), the German translator wittingly changed it to: *Wo die Hunde in drei Sprachen bellen* (*Where the dogs bark in three languages*). Although the original title of the last novel is German (in the author's confessions, an echo of the reality in post-communist Romania and Moldova, when children have dreamt not only of Kinder chocolate eggs but also of their parents as labour migrants to return home from their jobs abroad), it would have plainly meant children's land, a playground, so its translation was poetically entitled: *Der erste Horizont meines Lebens* (*The first horizon of my life*), a reference to the 12-year-old narrator. Such inspired titles surely obey the communicative-linguistic conditions stated above.

Even if its object of study may be intrinsically associated to the mythological Tower of Babel, which dates back to the Old Testament Book of Genesis, Translation studies as a separate domain or research field was actually born in the mid-20th century, a fact explained by the marginal importance it has been granted over the time, thus having been included in various literary, linguistic, sociocultural or historical studies.

Does the perfect translation exist? Could jokes be translated? What does *abusive fidelity* or *domestication* mean? The present study will aim to provide answers to such questions, illustrating the theoretical issues with examples excerpted from a consistent book of jokes, *Das Superbuch der Witze* [The Great Book of Jokes], written in German and published in 2012, in Munich. The concrete samples represent translations into Romanian of a series of quips, a common endeavour of four Erasmus students (native speakers of Romanian) at the Leipzig University, between October and December 2022. No matter how simple the translating process seems at first sight, it implies various connective multifaceted procedures, ranging from tact, linguistic and cultural competences, to flexibility, mediation skills, astuteness and persistence. The strategies that a translator should appeal to mainly when translating culturemes or word-plays are detailed in what follows.

To be or not to be... the same. Perspectives on translation

Subsequent to Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, Maitland (2017, *passim*) discusses at length the stages which any translator should take into account: firstly, interpreting the text to be translated, after properly reading and understanding it; secondly, distancing oneself from the original space and time; thirdly, incorporating the translated text into the new spatial and temporal context; fourthly, transforming it to an autonomous text. These stages are perceived

differently, according to the perspectives translation theoreticians or linguists have adhered to.

The rather obsolete distinction between literal or faithful (word for word) and free or communicative (meaning for meaning) translation hardly holds nowadays. It is rather a lucid selection to the type of text to be translated (a contract, a set of instructions, a lesson or a poem, for instance) or a reasonable combination of the two (the highest percentage still held by the second approach), filtered through the fine judgement of the translator-mediator.

A second classical dichotomic perspective would be faithfulness to the author and the source-text or to the readers and the target-text. A compromise represents the ideal solution also in this situation, since the “loyalty to the author is meaningless if it does not coexist with a loyalty to the receptors” (Di Jin, in Leppihalme 1997, 17). Faced with a text fastened to another linguistic and cultural context, the translator must rewrite it not only interlingually, but also interculturally. Permanently aware of all the subtleties and nuances of both languages, s/he must be simultaneously faithful to the original meaning and to the target-language (TL) choice of words. Lawrence Venuti distinguished between domestication and foreignization as translation strategies, namely adapting the text to the new TL conditions and norms to such a measure that it creates “a transparent, fluent style in the TL” (Palumbo 2009, 38) or, on the contrary, having a lesser influence on the translated text, which will thus appear unnatural, for the sake of sounding like a translation. More than often, reformulating no matter the costs or irrespective of the original may interfere with the author’s style (sparse nouns, verbs, repetitions or punctuation), that will be changed too drastically by a controlled systematic translation.

The ultimate “creative transposition” (Jakobson, in Gentzler 1993, 41) in the target-language highly relies on equivalence, one of the most debated concepts in the translation studies:

A single primary denotation may be shared; but the constellation of secondary meanings, the movement of rings of associations, the etymological echoes, the sound and its own levels of association, do not have an equivalent because they cannot (Merwin, in Gentzler 1993, 39-40).

Such a perspective has been shared by most critics⁴, convinced that total equivalence is rather idealistic (not only on the semantic level, but also on the grammatical and formal levels). Theoretically, the shorter and the more concrete

⁴ For closer information see Radegundis Stolze, *Übersetzungstheorien: eine Einführung* [Translation Theories: An Introductory Guide] (1994), Mona Baker, *In Other Words. A Coursebook on Translation* (1997) or Mary Snell-Hornby, *Handbuch Translation* (2003).

a sentence is, the higher the chances are to find equivalence in another language. Yet compare the examples:

(1.1) Rom. *Ana are mere.* (Ana has apples.)

(1.2) Rom. *Ana are șapte ani.* (*Ana has seven years./Ana is seven years old.),

the expression of age in English being rendered by a different verb (*to be*, not *to have*) plus the adjective *old*.

Thus, Chomsky's theory about deep and surface structures can be also adapted to translation, as the two examples show. Moreover, an approximate and dry translation in its first variant(s) should eventually reach natural and living equivalence, in need of what Pound calls the vortex, "the point of maximum energy" (Pound, in Gentzler 1993, 21) it will acquire in the new language. At the same time, things are more intricate than such a black-and-white situation – translators should mediate between the two linguacultures, thus applying 'cultural filters' (House, in Hickey 1998, 66), "often so expertly integrated into the fabric of the text that the seams do not show" (House, in Hickey 1998, 66).

A case in point would be the mediation of *culturemes*, the culturally specific terms which have no exact equivalence in other languages. In a German context, culturemes such as *Apfelschorle* (a traditional drink made of apple juice and mineral water), *Volkshochschule* (a lifelong learning institution), *Schultüte* (or *Zuckertüte*, a traditional giant cone filled with sweets on the first day of school) or *Ampelmännchen* (the plain little man on the traffic light, actually a dispute symbol between the West and East Germany)⁵ represent a challenge for any translator. For instance, their counterparts in Romanian range from literal to non-equivalence, so the most appropriate translation strategies ought to be carefully sought for. The *Ampelmännchen* literally reads as *omulețul de pe semafor*, but the cultural and social dimension will be surely lost in absence of further details; the *Apfelschorle* could be reduced to *suc de mere* (apple juice – a case of the so-called cultural mediation through omission – Katan 1999, 177, instead of the cumbersome *suc de mere cu apă minerală carbogazoasă/sifon*). Lacking its reference in Romanian, the *Volkshochschule* should be retained as such and explained by means of a footnote or endnote. The existence of a foreign term in the Romanian translation illustrates Venuti's 'abusive fidelity':

[T]he translator seeks to reproduce those very features of the foreign text that "abuse" or resist the prevailing forms and values in the receiving culture, thereby allowing the translator to be faithful to aspects of the

⁵ See also Diana V. Burlacu. 2021. "Translating Culturemes." In *The Proceedings of the 20th International Scientific Conference Limba română – modernitate și continuitate în cercetarea lingvistică*, Edited by Cezar Bălășoiu et al.. 229-238. Bucharest: Bucharest University Press.

source text, but still participate in effecting cultural change in the target language (Venuti, in Gentzler 2001, 39).

On the contrary, the *Schultüte* has an approximate cultural equivalent in the Romanian mentality, the bouquet. Yet, the latter is frequently offered to the class teacher or favourite teachers every year, on various occasions, in comparison to the *Schultüte*, presented to the schoolboy or -girl only once, on a special ceremony, short before the beginning of the 1st class, as a symbol for the new stage in life. A perfect commingling of both cultures would eventually be *buchet cu dulciuri* (bouquet of sweets).

In a Romanian context, probably the legendary Păcală, Caragiale's Mitică, or Bulă and Bulișor, father and son (translated as little Johnny or the German *Fritzchen*), are some representative culturemes, as the epitome of Romanian (sometimes bitter) humour, Bulă being a symbol of the ultimate hope and a witty yet risky means of venting under Ceaușescu's communist regime. In a sociological explanation, "[w]here there is anxiety, there will be jokes to express that anxiety. Thus, a society with political repression will generate an abundance of political jokes" (Dundes quoted by Muhawi, in Vandaele 2002, 346-347).

Even if still hard to be translated or mediated, culinary names, such as *sarmale* (stuffed cabbage), *mămăligă* (polenta), *bors* (borscht) or *jumări* (greaves/pork-scraps) do not represent Romanian culturemes per se, since they belong to a much broader area than Romania or the Balkan states.

The Comedy of Errors. Translating jokes

Although laughter is universal, not every joke is enjoyable: local wisecracks are hardly understood by outlanders, lexical or cultural puns are relatively opaque, while the individuals or categories that are laughed at would be embarrassed, frustrated or angry rather than amused. As a matter of fact, "laughter acts as an indexical with both discourse and social functions such that its significance can only be grasped in terms of the context in which it is embedded" (McLachlan 2022, 46). In another perspective,

Humor [...] depends on thought – it is not just a reflexive response to a stimulus that is inherently funny; it requires a certain category of information processing involving most of the faculties of thought, including memory recall, inference, and semantic integration (Hurley et al. 2011, 22).

To put it differently, various cognitive mechanisms come into play when decoding jokes or even more, when translating jokes and adapting them to a

new cultural and linguistic context. Translators should particularly retain the ‘dynamic equivalence’ (Nida’s “mode of translation in which the message of the original text is transported into the TL in such a way that the response of TL receivers is essentially the same as that of the original text receivers” – Palumbo 2009, 39-40) or the perlocutionary effect – the amusement or the laughter should occur in both the original and the translated jokes.

Quoting Raskin, Attardo underlines the specifics of jokes:

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 two scripts with which some text is compatible are said to overlap fully or in part in this text (Raskin, in Vandaele 2002, 181).

Arguing about the mechanism of jokes, Attardo and Raskin have categorized six parameters in relation to their coined General Theory of Verbal Humour (Vandaele 2002, 176), namely: Script Opposition, Logical Mechanism, Situation, Target, Narrative Strategy and Language (Attardo, in Vandaele 2002, 183). When one or more parameters are flawed, humour is generated, yet in the case of translations, there is not only the challenge of finding equivalence in the TL, but also of triggering laughter on the part of the TL recipients. At the same time, Vandaele discusses on the incongruity and the superiority of humour, as its innate qualities. As a general rule, the “(humorous) effect [is] caused by a departure from normal cognitive schemes” (Vandaele, in Vandaele 2002, 156) and more than often appears from a feeling of superiority, which blends with “feeling of intelligence [...], stupidity, aggression, hostility, derision, disparagement, deprecation, in- and out-group feelings, solidarity, stereotyping [...], antipathy, pressure and relief/release, threat and safety” (Vandaele, in Vandaele 2002, 157).

Due to their conciseness, in comparison to other literary genres, jokes seem easy to translate but this is also one of the reasons why the translator can hardly ignore or delete parts of them. A further difficulty lies in the fact that jokes are rather told/performed than read, thus having an oral character. Moreover, because of their anchorage in a linguaculture, sometimes they may be partially or completely untranslatable, especially in the case of verbal plays or puns. The examples to follow are excerpted from the 380-page *Great Book of Jokes* (in German, *Das Superbuch der Witze*, henceforth labelled as SW), which provides more than 2000 jokes from all possible domains and for all tastes. To a certain extent similar to the canned laughter present in certain TV series, such a title already shapes the mindset of the readers, who will thus expect to have

fun by reading the texts, in every translated version (German, Romanian and their gloss into English). Several types of jokes will be approached, the focus being wordplays. “[A] labour-saving device and a bargain: two meanings for the price of one word or phrase; a bonus” (Redfern 1984, 26), puns result from “the projection of the paradigmatic onto the syntagmatic” (Sherzer, in Chiaro 1992, 34). As illustrated below, verbal plays introduce “variety and refreshment into saturation” (Redfern 1984, 131), since “the intellect is submitted to some sort of hot and cold douche in one shower. The mind half accepts, half rejects, what is being offered to it for recognition” (Feeney, in Redfern 1984, 117).

Some instances of ironic incongruity or *asteismus*, when “conversational markers are taken literally, [for example] a request for information is misunderstood to imply an offer” (Chiaro 1992, 43) and the situational context (here, the court) is distorted (2) or is deliberately ignored (3), as a strategy to postpone or to milden the penalty, are the following jokes:

(2) Der Richter verurteilt den Angeklagten mit den Worten:

«Und nun hoffe ich, Sie das letzte Mal gesehen zu haben.»

«Wieso, Herr Vorsitzender? Gehen Sie etwa in Pension?» (SW: 5)

Judecătorul condamnă inculpatul cu următoarele cuvinte:

- *Și acum, sper să vă văd pentru ultima oară.*

- *Cum așa, Onorată Instanță? Ieșiți cumva la pensie?*

[Gloss: *The judge condemns the accused by saying:*

‘I hope this is the last time I have seen you’.

‘Why, Your Honour? Are you retiring?’]

(3) «Zeuge Lehmann, was ist Ihr Vater?»

«Erkältet, Herr Richter!»

«Was er tut, will ich wissen!»

«Er niest schrecklich, Herr Richter!» (SW: 5)

- *Martor Lehmann, ce este tatăl dumneavoastră?*

- *Este bolnav, domnule judecător.*

- *Ce face, vreau să știu!*

- *Strănută întruna, domnule judecător.*

[Gloss: *Witness Lehmann, what is your father?* (the intention: job-related, thus *to be* plus a noun)

‘He is sick, Your Honour!’ (the incongruous answer: current state of health, thus *to be* plus an adjective)

‘I want to know, what he does’. (the intention: again professionally, what he does for a living)

‘He sneezes a lot, Your Honour!’ (the incongruous answer: again current state of health)]

Regarding (3), the laughter is already initiated in the ‘jab line’ (or the non-final punch line – Antonopoulou in Vandaele 2002, 198) and reaches climax in the punch.

The translation differences are scarce: in (2), the Romanian version employs the present tense, in comparison with the present perfect; the punchline, which makes use of the typical English present continuous, has in German and Romanian a similar structure (only the verbs differ, namely *to go* and *to go out*) and the same adverb *probably* or *by any chance*, which is omitted in the gloss. In (3), the English text preferred the adverbial *a lot*, instead of the German *terribly* or the Romanian *again and again*.

A third joke from court is an illustration of “*antanaclasis*, ‘where the same word is used in two different meanings’” (Culler 1988, 5). It humorously hints to the illicit business some magistrates are part of, the pun lying in the homonymic verb *to give* – a sentence or money in exchange for something, the latter being actually a slip of the tongue. However, the perlocution of all three texts “depends on ‘seeing’ the fun or incongruity and enjoying it as a result of grasping both levels: the incongruity and an alternative congruity at the same time” (Hickey, in Hickey 1998, 231).

(4) Fragt der junge Richter seinen ergrauten Kollegen: «Ich habe da einen Schwarzbrenner, der Zwetschgengeist gemacht hat. Wieviel soll ich ihm wohl geben? »

«Auf keinen Fall mehr als fünf Mark pro Liter! » (SW: 5)

Tânărul judecător îl întreabă pe colegul grizonat:

- *Am un om care a vândut la negru țuică de prune. Oare cât să îi dau?*
- *În niciun caz mai mult de 5 mărci pe litru!*

[Gloss: *The young judge asks his grey-haired colleague:*

‘I have an illicit distiller of plum brandy. How much should I give him?’

‘Under no circumstances more than five mark per litre!’]

The translation went smoothly, the only differences being the loss of the verb *to make* (rendered in Romanian as *sell*) and of the particle ‘wohl’ in the gloss, an emphazier of the question itself.

The last examples gradually show the partial or total changes of the punchlines in the translations, since jokes should trigger a similar response in both the SL- and the TL-reader, namely smile or laughter. The next joke contains a literary reference (Robinson Crusoe and his friend named Friday), unintelligible to the non-connoisseurs:

(5) «Na, verehrter Herr Kollege, wie ist die Arbeitsmoral in Ihrem Institut? »

«Wie bei Robinson: Warten auf Freitag! » (SW: 6)

- *Ei bine, stimate coleg, cum este moralul angajaților la institutul dumneavoastră?*

- *Ca-n Robinson: așteptăm să vină Vineri.*

[Gloss: 'Well, my dear colleague, how is the employee morale in your institute?'
'Like in Robinson: Waiting for Friday!']

The English text is a literal transcription of the original (in German, all nouns are capitalised, hence the completeness of the pun), excepting for the understated adjective *dear* instead of *esteemed*. However, the Romanian initial variants excluded each other:

(5.1). *Așteptăm vinerea/ziua de vineri.*

(5.2). *Îl așteptăm pe Vineri,*

since the meaning would have been partially retained to the detriment of losing the implicature, the cultural reference and naturally the punchline: either the fifth day of the week (as in 5.1) or the name of the character in Daniel Defoe's novel (as in 5.2, which contains a special grammatical structure used for persons only). After such approximate alternatives, the best option turned out to be the insertion of the verb *to come*, in order to ambiguate the reply:

(5.3). *Așteptăm să vină Vineri.*

On the contrary, the next quip relies on the reduction of the last question to one word. The punchline is complete in German due to the synonymy *Sie* (formal you) – *sie* (they), which is impossible to render either in Romanian (*dumneavoastră – ei*) or in English. Accordingly, the literal meaningless double question: *What vehicle do you have/do they have?* was reduced to a one-word request (although the interviewer should ideally be more polite, by asking complete questions: *Are you married?* or *Do you have children?*). The punchline reads as an implicature to not having any car or, quite the reverse, having a much too expensive car to be mentioned during such an interview.

Moreover, when translating jokes, finding the equivalent Romanian or English names enhances the humorous effect and lends authenticity to the TL-context. The German similar noun *Knolle* informally translates as potato, so Murphy seems appropriate, whereas in Romanian no successful variant could be found, the classical name *Ion* (John) being eventually selected:

(6) Knoelle stellt sich vor. Der Personalchef füllt den Fragebogen aus und fragt ihn: «Verheiratet?»

«Ja! »

«Kinder? »

«Ja – einen zweijährigen Sohn und eine dreijährige Tochter! »

«Welches Fahrzeug benutzen Sie? »

«Ein Dreirad und einen Roller! » (SW: 27)

Ion la interviu. Managerul de la Resurse Umane completează chestionarul și îl întreabă:

- *Căsătorit?*
- *Da!*
- *Copii?*
- *Da, un băiat de 2 ani și o fată de 3.*
- *Vehicul?*
- *O tricicletă și o trotinetă!*

[Gloss: Murphy has an interview. The staff manager fills in the questionnaire and asks:

'Married?'

'Yes!'

'Children?'

'Yes, a 2-year-old son and a 3-year-old daughter!'

'Vehicle?'

'A tricycle and a kick scooter!']

As already mentioned, the most difficult jokes to translate are the lexical plays on words, which appear when “*structural features* of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a *communicatively significant confrontation* of two (or more) linguistic structures with *more or less similar forms* and *more or less different meanings*” (Delabastita quoted by Attardo, in Vandaele 2002, 189). The following gag represents even a greater challenge, due to its non-translatability. Therefore, certain background information (allusive to bedtime) has been inserted in the Romanian and English translations, which eventually found rhyming correspondents:

(7) Sagt die Holzwurmmutter zu ihren Kindern:

«Husch, husch ins Brettchen! » (SW: 10) (instead of *Bettchen*)

Seara, la culcare, mama car, către copilași:

Hai-hai, în lemnuț! (instead of pătuț)

[Gloss: In the evening, the woodworm mother tells its children: 'Hurry up, in the slab!' (instead of *bed*)]

The last example represents a creative translation, explained by Hickey as follows:

If, however, the perlocution depends on a specifically linguistic or intertextual feature, then she should extricate the underlying formula on

which the potential effect is based and thereupon generate another, new, text or joke in the target language, keeping as close as possible, or relevant, to the propositional content of the original (Hickey 1998, 230).

Although the question is identical in all three texts, the replies are different in Romanian and English, the latter still finding a similar pun between *bear* and *beer*, impossible to relate in Romanian. However, the colour domain and the pronunciation similarity have been retained:

(8) Warum heißt der Eisbär Eisbär? Wenn er rot wäre, würde er Himbär heißen. (SW: 30)

De ce se numește ursul polar urs polar? Pentru că dacă ar fi galben, s-ar numi urs solar.

[Gloss*: Why is the polar bear called polar bear?

Because if it were red, it would be called raspberry/*raspbear*.

Gloss: Why is the polar bear called polar bear? Because if it were yellow, it would be called solar bear.]

As a matter of fact, this is a case of the so-called paronomasia:

Depending on similarity of form and disparity of meaning, a pun evokes disparate meanings in contexts where each differently applies. But disparate meanings may be connected in numerous ways. Paronomasia or adnominatio, a broad figure of classical rhetoric closely related to the modern pun, 'is a figure in which, by means of a modification of sound, or change of letters, a close resemblance to a given verb or noun is produced, so that similar words express dissimilar things' (Culler 1988, 5).

All's Well That Ends Well. Concluding Remarks

In spite of reaching an end, the present study is far from being complete. Due to the length limitations, it offered merely a glimpse into this complex domain, focusing on the classical dichotomic perspectives on the translation process and the main translation strategies, as well as drawing attention to the translator's significant role while mediating among linguacultures. The semantic or communicative translation was mostly preferred, taking into consideration that "all jokes are translatable, at the perlocutionary level" (Attardo, in Vandaele 2002, 189); in other words, such humorous texts should further create amusement in any language they are translated into.

The chapters, whose subtitles purposely echoed the theatrical world of Shakespeare, one of the greatest masters of language and word-plays, ranged from slightly theoretical to mostly practical. They briefly presented several

culturemes in the German context and then examined various jokes originally written in German and rendered into Romanian and English (the glosses in English are semantic, rather than literal, acquiring an autonomous status – they read as jokes too).

It is also worth mentioning that a joke is a paradox – even if the others laugh, there is always a target to be laughed at (oftentimes perceived as cultural, national or social stereotypes). Consequently, “while humour can be used to strengthen the sense of belonging among members of a community, it can also be used within a community to *mock* the perceived non-belonging of a person” (Arab & Milner 2022, 4). Thus, behind the wit and the spontaneous laughter triggered by an anecdote, this type of a narrative actually contains a certain dose of aggressiveness, indirect criticism and blunt sincerity, observed in the current practical analysis. As illustrated before, certain puns were anchored linguaculturally to such an extent that they had to be almost completely altered in order to retain the humorous effect. The most convincing explanation for such creative translations has been provided by Maitland: “Translators must do more than read and interpret texts; they must also read and interpret the needs, knowledges and expectations of their target audiences and then they must create a text of their own to which their audiences can respond” (Maitland 2017, 52). Consequently, translated texts (pragmatically categorized by Mounin⁶ as ‘*les belles infidèles*’) should always strive to become readable, understandable and natural.

If we are to extend one of Redfern’s definitions of the pun, we may state that a joke is “an indirect mode that expresses most by specifying least” (Redfern 1984, 90). For example, deadpan humour or even one-liners can provide complex information on social or professional categories, regional or national stereotypes, linguistic or semantic subtleties. The appropriate understanding of verbal plays actually depends not only on the *homo ludens* in ourselves, but mostly on “the existence of common cognitive schemes, [...] based on a dichotomy of ‘inside-implicit’ (i.e., shared assumptions) and ‘outside-explicit’ (i.e., shared humorous stereotypes of the other)” (Vandaele quoted by Muhawi, in Vandaele 2002, 363). More than one hundred years ago, Bergson actually believed that humour could function as a ‘social corrective’ (Bergson, in Hurley et al. 2011, 85), struggling with the flaws of the society or with individual rigidities. Yet, even nowadays, unable to reach such an idealistic goal, humour continues to mirror, not to correct our world, thus offering us slices of life in a pleasurable and surprising manner.

⁶ Mounin, Georges. *Les belles infidèles*. Nouvelle édition [en ligne]. Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2016 (généré le 11 février 2023). Disponible sur Internet: <http://books.openedition.org/septentrion/76123>.

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