

DELIA CHIARO

“Verbally Expressed Humour on Screen: Reflections on Translation and Reception”

Keywords:

audiovisual translation, dubbing, equivalence, films, lingua-cultural specificity, translation, Verbally Expressed Humour, visual code

### 1. Author information

Delia Chiaro, the author of the article discussed, is a professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Bologna's Advanced School in Modern Languages for Interpreters and Translators at Forlì (SSLiMIT). Since 1984, she has written several texts on translation, humour and translation and bilingualism, some of which have been widely recognised by professors and translators interested in the field of translation studies. Delia Chiaro is also a member of the executive committee of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies in Translation, Languages and Culture. She has taught at the University of Naples, Salerno and Potenza.

### 2. Abstract

The aim of the article is to present translation problems that arise in translating films or television series, concerning the linguistic and cultural barriers as far as humour is concerned. The author investigates how much the audience's (in her case, Italian audience's) response to translated Verbally Expressed Humour depends on cultural differences and on the translation itself. The author gives a number of examples excerpted from translations of films, such as *A Fish Called Wanda*, *Diary of Bridget Jones*, and compares them with the translation of dubbed television series, for instance *Ally McBeal* or *Friends*.

First, the notions of humour and screen translation are explained with several definitions formulated by different theoreticians, such as Beninca, Vandaele, Muller and the author herself. After the theoretical background on humour and translation, the author presents the

translational norms of Verbally Expressed Humour on screen; she also provides examples of translations of certain films and the phenomena connected with translating humour therein. Then, there are presented examples that illustrate the strategies available when dealing with translating Verbally Expressed Humour (substitution of VEH in the SL with an example of VEH in the TL, preserving the VEH in the SL with an idiomatic expression in the TL, preserving the VEH in the SL with compensatory VEH elsewhere in the TT). Finally, the author presents her thoughts on and her approach to the translation of Verbally Expressed Humour.

### 3. Terminology

Source text term	Meaning	Term in Polish
equivalence	Equivalence is a term that is used to describe the phenomenon of replicating the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different wording.	ekwiwalencja
good lines	Good lines are sharp and clever remarks which are hard to define in terms of VEH. Good lines are not dependent upon linguistic ambiguity, cultural ambiguity, or a mixture of both.	riposty ?
polysemy	Polysemy refers to a word that has two or more similar meanings.	polisemia
puns	Pun is a term that describes the use of words or phrases to exploit ambiguities and innuendoes in their meaning, usually for humorous effect; a play on words.	gry słowne/kalambury
Skopos	Skopos is a technical term for the purpose of a translation.	Skopos

VEH – Verbally Expressed Humour	VEH is a general term for any humorous item, such as a joke, which is conveyed in written or spoken form, as opposed to a joke conveyed in some other medium, such as visually.	humor słowny
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#### 4. Methodology

In this article, the author relies on methodology that was based on three approaches to the translation of the Verbally Expressed Humour:

1. the substitution of VEH in the Source Language with an example of VEH in the Target Language;
2. the replacement of the Source Language VEH with an idiomatic expression in the Target Language;
3. the replacement of the Source Language VEH with an example of compensatory VEH elsewhere in the Target Language text.

The author provided several examples for each of those strategies. The examples were derived from English films and then translated into Italian by the author (or the author used an existing translation) to illustrate the phenomenon.

#### 5. Links with other publications on the subject

Chiaro, D. (ed.). 2005. *Humor and Translation*. Humor. Special Issue of *International Journal of Humor Research*. 18(2).

Davies, C. 1988. *Jokes and their Relation to Society*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Raskin, V. 1985. *Semantic Mechanisms of Humour*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.

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Vandale, J. (ed.). 2002. *Translating Humour*. Special Issue of *The Translator*. 8(2).

Whitman-Linsen C. 1992. *Through the Dubbing Glass. The Synchronization of American Motion Pictures into German, French and Spanish*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

## 6. Critical commentary

In my opinion, the text shows that the author has a profound theoretical background and years of practice in the field of translation as she quotes herself among other theoreticians when describing certain phenomena. She has published many texts on humour, translation and cultural factors that influence the reception of humour in films. The text itself is well organised, it has a clear structure (theory, examples, conclusions) and is full of interesting examples.

The author tries to show that the same kind of humour was achieved in different ways in order to amuse the audience in different countries and the article shows that there are different difficulties that translators have to face when dealing with translation of the Verbally Expressed Humour. The examples chosen illustrate the strategies that have to be applied when dealing with such translation. Chiaro presents and explains each of them thoroughly, and offers conclusions. Sometimes, she even provides back-translation so that the reader can understand how the Source Text (English) was translated into the Target Text (Italian). She also quotes other theoreticians to prove that her way of thinking and analysing those examples is similar to what others have already written about certain phenomena. Another advantage of the text is the language used by Chiaro, i.e. it includes adequate terminology; still, it is written in a simple way and may be easily understood, even by someone who does not know much about translating Verbally Expressed Humour.

## 7. Quotation to remember the text by

“Given that it is highly unlikely to find the same words, sounds, forms and concepts in two different languages which must also happen to possess the same ambiguity that can be exploited for humorous means, this solution is extremely difficult and very much dependent on the dexterity of the translators and dubbing-scriptwriters” (Chiaro 2006: 200).

“In a comedy, which may well rely on several of these features concurrently in order to create the desired effect, if the verbal code is the only dimension which can be manipulated to aid the target culture in capturing the humour, the translator’s job is a delicate one” (Chiaro 2006: 198).

“Translation must surely play an important role. However, even if we may quite safely hypothesize that quality of translation can either make or break a comedy, it is only one single factor among many which contributes to a film’s success” (Chiaro 2006: 205).

## 8. References

Attardo, S. 1994. *Linguistic Theories of Humour*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

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<http://www.wordreference.com> (retrieved 19<sup>th</sup> Nov 2011)

<http://www.csd.abdn.ac.uk/~gritchie/papers/aisb00.pdf> (retrieved 19<sup>th</sup> Nov 2011)

[http://www.jostrans.org/issue06/art\\_chiaro.pdf](http://www.jostrans.org/issue06/art_chiaro.pdf) (retrieved 19<sup>th</sup> Nov 2011)

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[www.pfri.uniri.hr/.../EquivalenceinTranslation.ppt](http://www.pfri.uniri.hr/.../EquivalenceinTranslation.ppt) (retrieved 19<sup>th</sup> Nov 2011)

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