



THE RENDERING OF HUMOR IN CARTOON TRANSLATION

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Abstract: The translation of humor in animated films is one of the most challenging areas of audiovisual translation because humorous effects are often based on linguistic ambiguity, cultural references, wordplay, irony, and interaction between verbal and visual elements. Translators are expected not only to transfer the semantic content of the original dialogue but also to preserve its humorous function and make it understandable and entertaining for the target audience. This issue becomes particularly significant in cartoons because animated films are frequently intended for audiences of different ages and cultural backgrounds. The present article examines the major characteristics of humor in cartoons, discusses linguistic and cultural difficulties encountered in its translation, and analyzes the principal strategies used to reproduce humorous effects in the target language. Particular attention is paid to adaptation, substitution, equivalent translation, compensation, and translation transformations. The article argues that functional equivalence and audience response are often more important than literal correspondence when translating humor in animated films.

Keywords: audiovisual translation, cartoon translation, humor, wordplay, cultural adaptation, dubbing, subtitling, translation strategies.

Introduction. In the contemporary world, animated films have become an important part of global popular culture. Cartoons produced in one country can quickly reach audiences belonging to different linguistic and cultural communities. Consequently, translation plays a significant role in making animated productions accessible to international viewers. However, cartoon translation is not limited to transferring information from one language into another. Translators also have to reproduce emotions, character personalities, cultural meanings, and humorous effects.

Humor is particularly difficult to translate because it is closely connected with the linguistic and cultural characteristics of a particular community. A joke that is immediately understandable to an English-speaking audience may lose its humorous effect when translated literally into another language. This problem is especially noticeable when humor depends on polysemy, homonymy, idiomatic expressions, cultural references, rhyme, or wordplay.

As Chiaro (2010) observes, verbally expressed humor creates particular



difficulties in audiovisual translation because the translator must consider linguistic meaning as well as contextual and cultural factors. In animated films, these challenges become even more complex because verbal humor frequently interacts with images, gestures, sound effects, music, and the personalities of individual characters.

The purpose of this article is to examine the representation of humor in cartoon translation and identify the major strategies that can be employed to preserve humorous effects in the target language.

Humor as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon. Humor is a complex phenomenon that can be studied from linguistic, psychological, sociological, and cultural perspectives. From a linguistic point of view, humor may arise from unexpected meanings, ambiguity, violations of conversational expectations, stylistic contrasts, or unusual combinations of words.

Attardo (1994) emphasizes that linguistic theories of humor seek to explain how particular language structures produce humorous interpretations. Humor may be based on several mechanisms, including lexical ambiguity, phonological similarity, irony, exaggeration, understatement, metaphor, idioms, and pragmatic incongruity.

At the same time, humor cannot be separated from culture. People belonging to different societies may have different expectations about what is funny or socially acceptable. References to celebrities, historical events, traditions, food, literature, television programs, or social stereotypes can create humor for the source audience while remaining unfamiliar to the target audience.

For this reason, humor translation requires more than linguistic competence. The translator needs intercultural knowledge and the ability to determine which elements of the original joke are essential for producing its humorous effect.

The Specific Nature of Humor in Cartoons

Cartoons contain various forms of humor, ranging from simple visual comedy to sophisticated linguistic jokes. Contemporary animated films are often designed for both children and adults. Children may enjoy physical comedy, funny voices, exaggerated movements, and simple jokes, whereas adults may recognize irony, intertextual references, parody, and culture-specific allusions.

For example, films such as *Shrek* contain numerous references to fairy tales, popular culture, films, and social conventions. Some humorous scenes function on more than one level: younger viewers understand the basic situation, while older viewers recognize additional cultural meanings.

This multilayered character of animated humor creates a considerable



challenge for translators. A translation should ideally remain accessible to children without eliminating meanings intended for older audiences.

Another important characteristic is the relationship between verbal and non-verbal information. In audiovisual texts, dialogue is accompanied by images, facial expressions, gestures, music, and sound effects. According to Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007), audiovisual translation operates under constraints that distinguish it from conventional written translation. In dubbing, translated dialogue has to correspond reasonably well with the timing and movements of characters. In subtitling, translators face restrictions concerning space, reading speed, and screen time.

Thus, even an accurate translation of a joke may be unsuitable if it is too long for a subtitle or cannot be synchronized effectively in a dubbed version.

Major Problems in Translating Humor

One of the most significant difficulties is the translation of wordplay. Wordplay exploits different meanings or forms of linguistic units. A humorous expression may depend on words that sound similar, have multiple meanings, or create unexpected associations. Because languages organize vocabulary differently, equivalent wordplay does not always exist in the target language.

A literal translation in such circumstances can preserve the basic meaning but destroy the joke. Therefore, translators frequently have to recreate rather than simply reproduce wordplay.

A second major difficulty concerns culture-specific humor. A joke may refer to an institution, personality, custom, product, historical event, or cultural phenomenon familiar to the source audience. If target viewers do not possess the necessary cultural knowledge, the humorous meaning may disappear.

The third problem is linguistic difference. English and Uzbek, for example, belong to different language families and differ considerably in grammar, vocabulary, phraseology, and stylistic conventions. Consequently, English idioms, puns, forms of address, or humorous grammatical constructions cannot always be reproduced directly in Uzbek.

Another challenge is audience adaptation. When cartoons are primarily intended for children, translators have to consider their linguistic competence and cultural knowledge. Complicated expressions may need to be simplified, while unfamiliar references may require adaptation. Nevertheless, excessive simplification can reduce the artistic and humorous value of the original work.

Different translation strategies can be applied depending on the type of humor and the relationship between the source and target languages.

Literal or equivalent translation can be effective when a joke has a close linguistic and cultural equivalent in the target language. In such cases, the translator can preserve both the original meaning and humorous function



without substantial modification.

Adaptation is useful when the original humorous reference would not be understood by the target audience. A culture-specific element can be replaced with another element that performs approximately the same communicative function in the target culture. The objective is not necessarily to reproduce every lexical element but to create a comparable reaction among viewers.

Substitution involves replacing an untranslatable joke or wordplay with a different humorous expression. Although the linguistic structure changes, the communicative purpose of the original passage can be maintained.

Compensation is another important strategy. When humor cannot be preserved at the exact point where it occurs in the source text, a translator may introduce a humorous element elsewhere in the dialogue. This helps maintain the overall humorous tone of a scene or character.

Translation transformations, including lexical replacement, grammatical restructuring, addition, omission, and modulation, may also be necessary. Such transformations allow translators to make dialogue natural and understandable while preserving its pragmatic effect.

These strategies demonstrate that successful humor translation cannot always be measured according to word-for-word accuracy. In many situations, functional equivalence is more appropriate. The important question is whether the translated joke performs a function similar to that of the original.

The method of audiovisual translation also influences the way humor is rendered. Two of the most common methods are dubbing and subtitling.

Dubbing replaces the original speech with dialogue recorded in the target language. It provides translators with opportunities to adapt jokes creatively because viewers hear the translated version directly. However, dubbing involves synchronization constraints. The translated dialogue should correspond to the duration of the original speech and, where possible, to visible mouth movements.

Subtitling presents translated dialogue in written form on the screen. Since viewers need enough time to read subtitles while following visual action, the translator has limited space. Long explanations of cultural jokes are therefore usually impractical. Condensation and reformulation are frequently necessary.

Humor based on pronunciation, accents, or sound similarity can be especially problematic in subtitling because the humorous effect may depend on spoken language. In such cases, translators need to find concise textual alternatives that preserve as much of the original effect as possible.

The success of humor translation should ultimately be evaluated not only through linguistic correspondence but also through audience response. If an



original expression makes the source audience laugh while its literal translation is confusing to the target audience, formal accuracy has not necessarily resulted in communicative equivalence.

This principle is particularly important in cartoon translation. Translators should consider the age of viewers, cultural background, context of the scene, personality of the character, visual information, and function of the joke. A humorous statement made by a sarcastic character, for instance, should ideally preserve that character's distinctive manner of speaking.

Therefore, creativity is an essential element of humor translation. Translators operate as intercultural mediators who reconstruct humorous meaning under linguistic and audiovisual constraints. Their task is to find a balance between faithfulness to the source text and naturalness in the target language.

Conclusion. The translation of humor in cartoons is a complex process involving linguistic, cultural, pragmatic, and audiovisual factors. Humor may be expressed through wordplay, irony, idiomatic expressions, cultural references, exaggeration, parody, and the interaction between verbal and visual information. Many of these elements cannot be transferred directly from one language to another.

For this reason, translators employ strategies such as equivalent translation, adaptation, substitution, compensation, and various lexical and grammatical transformations. The choice of strategy depends on the nature of the joke, the target audience, cultural differences, and the technical requirements of dubbing or subtitling.

The analysis of cartoon translation demonstrates that preserving humorous function is often more important than maintaining the exact linguistic form of the source text. A successful translation should sound natural in the target language, correspond to the audiovisual context, reflect the personality of characters, and create an effect on the target audience comparable to that of the original. Consequently, translating humor should be understood as a creative form of intercultural communication rather than a purely linguistic replacement of words.

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