ANALYSING THE TRANSLATION OF HUMOUR IN THE AMERICAN SITCOM “FRIENDS”

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The main goal of the research is to examine strategies for effectively translating humour in subtitles, balancing fidelity to the original and adaptability to the target language. The diploma paper provides opportunity to explore theoretical material regarding humour and its transfer from one language into another as well as a comparative analysis of the source language and target language segmenting it into four parts: translation of sarcasm, irony, allusions, puns and jokes.

The vast changes of the 21st century are the exact factors that pushed to the development of the Translation Studies (TS). As an academic discipline, TS emerged only in the mid of 20th century when scholars like Eugene Nida and Roman Jakobson published their first works. In this article we shall cover only a part of the Translation Studies’ field, to be more precise, the audio-visual translation or AVT which has emerged as a separate field of study within the TS in more recent years. This discipline centres mainly on the difficulties and techniques involved in the transfer of a material from source language (SL) into target language (TL).

Humour Studies is an interdisciplinary subject that observes the co-dependency of comedy with the context, culture and other linguistic nuances. Humour translation has been defined as one of the hardest genres of translation only because it is linked to different cultural aspects that cannot be understood without a strong linguistic and cultural background. [1] Translators need to consider the pragmatic aspects of both the source text (ST) and target text (TT) and this is where comes into the view the Skopos theory by Katharina Reiss and Hans J. Vermeer in the 1970s. According to Skopos theory the purpose of a translation determines its translation strategy. [2] According to Caleb Warren and C. Peter McGraw, humour is “a psychological response characterized by the positive emotion of amusement, the appraisal that something is funny, and the tendency to laugh.” [3]

Generally speaking, there are two types of audio-visual translation: revoicing and subtitling. [4] In this article, we will primarily focus on “subtitles” because the research paper is based on a corpus of 150 examples derived from subtitles, out of which 30 examples were analysed in the practical chapter.

There are multiple types of humourous elements, but the primary ones are: *puns* or *word play, allusions, jokes and sarcasm*. [5] These types of humorous elements were prevalent in the American sitcom “Friends” which aired for the first time on NBC on September 22, 1994, lasting ten seasons.

When we analysed the main 30 examples, it got to our attention that the most used translation strategies were literal translation and contextual adaptation. In some cases, these strategies were the key for conveying the inferred ideas behind the original humour, though in some parts literal translation failed to achieve the desired result. The sarcastic lines did not require a lot of adaptation because the intended ideas were very clear either in SL or in TL. Another topic worth mentioning is the "word play" which according to the examples were the hardest to translate. Puns are play on words which rely on specific language and cultural nuances, that is why the use of literal translation resulted in the loss of humour. Puns also rely on rhyme that make them more effective at keeping the humour. In the Romanian version the translator did not keep the rhyme which lead to loss of humour. The choice of the strategy used in the process of subtitling belongs solely to the translators and their understanding of the SL.

Presented below are several examples extracted from the practical chapter and their Romanian translation:

Irony:

EN: Ross: Talk a little louder. *There's a man on the 12th floor in a coma who didn't hear you.*

RO: Ross: Vorbește un pic mai tare. *Cred că la etajul 12 e un tip în comă care nu te-a auzit.*

The Romanian translation was done by contextual adaptation in order to convey the irony and make it more effective into the TL. The irony is set on the fact that Ross does not believe there is a man in coma who did not hear him, he was using his remark as a request for his friend to speak louder. The translation captured the exaggeration expressing the absurdity of the situation itself.

Allusion:

EN: Chandler: I don't know but I think it's about to attack *the Enterprise.*

RO: Nu știu, dar cred că e pe cale să atace *Enterprise.*

The translator used literal translation for the line itself and borrowing for the word "Enterprise", preserving the teasing suggestion that the baby looks like a character from a science fiction movie. The humour was preserved by keeping the original name and the audience who is familiar with the movie Star Trek will most likely find it funny.

Word play:

EN: Chandler: I just think it's time for you to settle down you know. Make a choice, *pick a lane.*

Joey: *Who's Elaine?*

RO: Chandler: Cred că e timpul să te potolești. Să te hotărăști. *Să alegi femeia.*

Joey: *Care femeie?*

"A lane" and "Elaine" are homophonic puns and in this example contextual adaptation did not fulfil the intended humour. The Romanian version failed to save the word play resulting in the loss of comedy.

Joke:

EN: Monica: I bring a guy home and within five minutes they’re all over him. *They’re like coyotes picking off the weak members of the herd.*

RO: Monica: Aduc un tip acasă și, în cinci minute, toți sunt grămadă pe el. *Sunt ca niște coioți care aleg exemplarele mai slabe.*

The strategy used in this example is literal translation which was used to maintain the structure and the idea of the original joke though the second part of it was done by adapting it to match the context.

In conclusion, this study highlights the complexities of humour translation, emphasizing the need for translators to consider cultural and linguistic nuances. Practical analysis of subtitles from the sitcom “Friends” reveals that literal translation and contextual adaptation are common strategies, though some elements like puns remain challenging. Overall, achieving a balance between source and target languages is essential for effective translation in AVT.

References:

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