

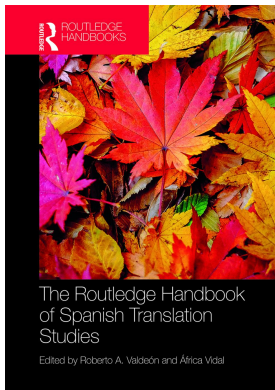
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TRANSLATION AND HUMOUR

Marta Mateo and Patrick Zabalbeascoa

A case for humour translation studies (HTS)

The paradox that exists in humour translation studies (HTS) is that while few dispute its importance and its complexity, there is a woeful lack of awareness and research in this area. A popular metaphor in Translation Studies is invisibility, at various levels within translation practice and theory (e.g. the translator's invisibility, hidden agendas, degrees of manipulation). Thus, we are forced to ask the question of why HTS is still in the shadows given its academic importance as well as its much greater visibility (and enjoyment) in actual texts and their translations. As argued elsewhere (Zabalbeascoa 2005), part of the answer lies in the problems and shortcomings of Translation Studies and Humour Studies, despite the social, cultural, communicative and historical importance of both humour and translating practices.

An important consideration is that translation practice and its theorization have historically evolved by looking almost exclusively at serious texts and their salient features, especially the Bible, in Europe and many of its Christianized former colonies; the main concern being on lexical meaning and an idea of a single meaning conveyed through words and a notion of equivalence as a guarantee of success and acceptability, achieved by being faithful (notice the *faith* in faithful). Another likely factor is an interest in machine translation, which can deal much better with straightforward informative texts than with tongue-in-cheek, innuendo, allusion, nonsense, wordplay and all the stuff that humour is made up of. The final factor is a prevalence of linguistic research into verbal communication rather than a holistic semiotic approach to communication (monolingual, monosemiotic or otherwise). This surely explains why humour is such a latecomer in translation studies, once all the serious texts (legal, trade, poetic, technical and scientific) had been gone through, and after it was obvious that the presence of humour within communication, popular culture and society at large (without disregarding elitist humour) especially in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, was too pervasive (television, comic books, film, advertising, internet, comic literature) to ignore any more.

Both translation and humour share the complication within their respective fields of study that they are deceptively simple to define, initially, but as one wades deeper and deeper into the respective swamplands, they become quite frustrating and elusive. This might be why many researchers see them as quicksand and prefer to tackle them separately or at least take on the

challenge while holding onto some safe vine with one end wrapped around a sturdy tree. One tends to find studies of a translation of a given author (Shaw, Carroll, Wilde, Allen) or genre (diaries, plays or essays) or a linguistic unit within them (idioms, names, swearing, linguistic variation, etc.). Or linguistic (monolingual or comparative) studies of humour, or even psychological or social studies, leaving translation on the fringe of any theory, expecting it to be ‘applied’ rather than integrated at the theoretical level.

Humour is easily defined as what makes you laugh. But this is immediately complicated by the realization that not all humour can make you laugh (physically), it can make you smile, sometimes only inwardly, and you can laugh for reasons unrelated to humour (e.g. nervous laughter). Humour is fun but fun can be got by other means of entertainment (e.g. sport), too. Humour is further complicated by being (a 6th or an nth) sense, a sense that is often regarded as almost exclusive to human beings within the animal kingdom. This sense can vary considerably from one person to the next, just as some people have a better sense of balance, and it can most probably also be trained or educated, starting from how gifted one is from the start, somewhat like the sense of smell. In this respect humour is like language, although the latter is not a sense (it is sometimes referred to as an instinct). A key factor here is the dual nature of humour, having a productive side and a receptive side, enabling us to produce humour as well as appreciate it (like music). This means that there must be a research for humour production and a (possibly different but complementary) research for humour perception and appreciation. In turn, this is key for translators who are expected to be both on the perception end (ST) and the production end (TT).

Some genres are defined by the requirement to include a minimum amount of humoristic elements, i.e. various types of comedy, such as limericks and sitcoms, parody and satire. Having said that, it is also true that humour can appear in almost any genre (advertising, novels, textbooks, songs, journalism, children’s literature), except when explicitly forbidden or implicitly taboo or without precedent (not including parodies of these cases), e.g. laws and rules. Moreover, we might add that “humour is in the eye of the beholder” (understandably, as it is a sense) so some people can see humour where others cannot. It is culturally determined as well as socially, historically, politically, linguistically, cognitively and by individual innate characteristics, personal taste, experience and values. It is already difficult to research into much more tangible elements of communication and social interaction; moreover, there is the fact that humour is also a matter of degree and quality, things can be more or less humorous and, independently, more or less bad or good.

So, researchers tend to favour something like studying Shakespeare’s puns or Wilde’s witticisms, or Carroll’s allusions, or even more vaguely, children’s literature or comic books (and their translations), rather than the translation of Shakespeare’s humour, or Wilde’s, or humour for children, or whatever. This is because puns and other forms of wordplay can be isolated and analysed formally. Many of these studies go into lengthy discussions about formal linguistic, discursive, textual and cultural aspects, where humour is mistaken for the sum of certain ingredients. This leads us to study the translation of comedy (and humorous elements in other genres) by the same methods as serious texts and elements, for example cutting a text up into parts of speech, and also applying traditional concepts of translational equivalents and shifts, such as literal translation, compensation and modulation, in the hope that counting the number of literal translations as opposed to the number of modulations for a given text will shed some sort of light on how equivalent the result is in terms of humour. This is the case of Nord’s (2003) study of the translation of proper nouns for foreign-language versions of *Alice in Wonderland*. We are presented with all sorts of statistical data on formal features of the Proper Nouns in the various versions, but little is said about the factor of humour.

The difficulty of translating humour and researching its translations lies in all of the factors mentioned above, which entail that a translator must have a sense of humour, or substitutory skills to recognize and produce humour (or, at least, show a humorous intention); it may also require that researchers be able to detect humour either through their own senses or through formal training, since humour might be produced from people who swear they are not trying to be funny, and likewise, failed humour is not the same as being serious, just as a bad translation is not the same as non-translation.

The elusiveness of humour, then, is its main challenge. It requires therefore a materialization of some sort; the prime candidate would be the *joke*, in its broadest sense. A joke can be defined as any concrete instance of humour produced (or assumed to be produced) by human design. This definition distinguishes jokes from amusing accidents or funny cats, etc. Of course, a joke can be textual (verbal or visual gags) or non-textual (e.g. a practical joke), and textual jokes can be verbal, non-verbal or semiotically complex and multimodal, involving words and other sign systems or paralinguistic or performance (delivery) features. Thus, a joke can constitute a unit for analysis, can be described according to certain features, and jokes can be labelled and classified – hopefully, according to humour-specific parameters and variables, and not only typologies based on linguistic units or features, e.g. lexical, grammatical, stylistic or pragmatic.

On the other hand, in a completely different attempt to distinguish jokes from humour, and in terms of translation, Gillies (1997) establishes a personal distinction between *jokes* and *humour* whereby translating *a joke* would require ‘getting it right’ at the first reaction while translating *humour* would rather depend on the cumulative effect of a series of wise choices (in Martínez Sierra 2008, 125).

The preceding explains why so many translational studies of comic authors, texts and their translations do not really develop insight into the nature of humour translation. Conversely, titles like “A study of So-and-so’s work as a translator” or “A study of 19th century literature in translation” may hide, for those of us interested in humour translation, rich nuggets of valuable research in our topic. Unfortunately, this implies that the search for HTS is often arduous work, for the subject of humour is frequently not made visible in titles; it may simply constitute a more or less important component in the study of another topic: e.g. the translation of a particular work, writer, genre or field; of a particular translation modality like subtitling or dubbing; or of certain features, like proper nouns, idioms, ambiguity, irony, etc.

Historical review

Despite the fact that humour has travelled across linguistic boundaries in various textual forms throughout the centuries, it is, only quite recently that the subject of humour translation has started to receive the attention it deserves. This has been the case both in Spain and elsewhere: as Chiaro describes, “the area of humour and translation has not always been so popular in academia. Before the mid-nineties academic literature on the subject was scarce and often more anecdotal than scholarly in nature” (2010a, 2). Indeed, only the odd article could then be traced on the subject.¹

Apart from the factors mentioned in the previous section, this scant attention may also have to do with the fact that humour, like poetry, puns or metaphor, has often been considered among the greatest challenges facing translators (Vandaele 2001, 30). In fact, the issue of its (un)translatability was often the focus of those early isolated studies. A well-known example in Spain is Santoyo (1987), which considered comedies as essentially untranslatable due to the difficult combination of linguistic and cultural elements which is typical of these texts.

True, as Vandaele puts it (2010, 150), “[t]he specific trouble with humor translation [. . .] is that humor has a clear *penchant* for (socio)linguistic particularities [. . .] and for metalinguistic communication”, two aspects which are often associated with cultural and linguistic untranslatability – not just in the realm of humour. The problem with this type of approach was that it failed to explain, objectively and systematically, the processes and contexts in which humour *did* travel. Nevertheless, from the mid-nineties, and particularly in the present century, the translation of humour has attracted growing attention from researchers, evidenced by the publication of international monographs both within translation studies and humour studies, some of which include articles by Spanish researchers or about translated Spanish humour. For instance, Chiaro’s latest two-volume compendium (2010b) has contributions from four researchers from Spain (Fuentes Luque, Mateo, Valdeón and Zabalbeascoa). The increase in the pieces of research focusing on the topic has brought about a broadening of the approaches, topics and translation modalities studied in relation to humour. The following paragraphs will present a brief historical review of how research and attention paid to humour translation in the Spanish-language context have evolved.

Del Corral (1988) already introduced some systematization and relativism in the issue of the (un)translatability of humour. Claiming that “we need not offhandedly abandon the translation of humor simply because we have traditionally dismissed it as untranslatable” (1988, 27), she identifies some broad categories of humour – universal, national and literary – in order to observe which of them defy and which permit successful translation (1988, 25). Some key concepts are introduced in this study, like the *role of the translator* – who needs to gauge “how much humor will be lost, how much retained, and how much understood in a different way” (1988, 27) – and a culture’s *perception* of, and a receptor’s *predisposition* to, humour, to which we will go back in the text to follow.

Along these lines, Mateo (1995a) (the published version of the author’s 1992 doctoral dissertation) stands as one of the first thorough studies on humour translation adopting a Descriptive Translation Studies approach. Analyzing a series of English comedies from different periods, and their various translations into Spanish, the author goes beyond evaluating whether the humour has or has not been retained in each case or prescribing what translators should have done, so as to observe the solutions actually found by translators and the factors involved in the decision-taking process. Considering the various elements involved in comedy – for which she draws concepts from Humour Studies, Theatre Studies and Pragmatics – Mateo looks at the translation strategies taken for different aspects, assessing their role in comedic humour and in the complex process of its translation: titles, wordplay, irony, the reversal of expectations, and the cultural component.

Another doctoral dissertation of the time, Zabalbeascoa (1993), was the first to focus on audiovisual texts, thus initiating a series of studies on audiovisual humour translation (from now on, AVHT). Adopting a systematic theoretical² approach, the author arranges the diverse *priorities* that humour may have in different types of text: high (as in jokes or television comedies), medium (in love stories with a happy end, for instance) and low (when used as a pedagogical device). Zabalbeascoa also discusses the *restrictions* which will operate in humour translation, mostly dependent on the audiovisual modality in question, besides other factors deriving from culture; and he suggests considering what type of humour (or joke) is exportable and why. (Cultural issues in television humour and how exportable they are were also the object of Sopenña-Balordi 1993). Zabalbeascoa (1996a) expands on this by presenting a classification of jokes according to “the way jokes lend themselves to translation” (1996a, 251) and the different translational solutions associated with each type. The author distinguishes between international or binational jokes, national-culture-and-institutions jokes,

national-sense-of-humor jokes, language-dependent jokes, visual jokes and complex jokes (1996a, 251–5). This classification has been used as a point of departure for other analyses, both within Spain (for instance, Martínez Sierra 2008 – presented in the following) and abroad (e.g. Ptaszynski 2004, which discusses the (un)translatability of jokes, analyzing Polish jokes and their translation into English with Zabalbeascoa's typology).

Zabalbeascoa (1996a) introduces other, more practical, issues, which reflect the functional approach that – together with DTS – was then clearly making its way into the analysis of humour translation and which are crucial to its understanding in an audiovisual context: for instance, the issue of time – how the commonly tight deadlines affect quality in AVT – and consumers' expectations about translators' ability to convey humour across linguistic and cultural borders – often, either naïvely high or excessively low (1996a, 236).

With the boom in AVT research, very noticeable in Spain, more and more studies on humour translation came from that field in the 1990s and at the turn of the century, eventually proving that AVHT could in fact become a specialized practice (Martínez Sierra 2008, 235). The combination of, on the one hand, the linguistic and cultural difficulties generally involved in humour translation and, on the other, the technical constraints imposed by AVT modalities like dubbing and subtitling, made this topic a particularly challenging but highly interesting one to investigate. As could be expected in a dubbing country, the first studies were devoted to humour in this translation mode, in which the challenge is probably greater than in other modes “since the target audience is supposed to laugh at exactly the same moment when the source audience's laughter is expected, as Zabalbeascoa suggests (1993, 237), particularly when the programme makes use of canned laughter” (Martínez Sierra 2008, 132) (our translation). Zabalbeascoa's studies (1993, 1994, 1996a, 1996b) can be said to have laid the theoretical basis for research on dubbed humour. Another important early contribution was Fuentes (2000), whose doctoral dissertation was the first reception study on translated humour, comparing the Spanish dubbed and subtitled versions of a film by the Marx Brothers. Fuentes presents a taxonomy of humour, distinguishing between verbal, gestural, visual, graphic and audiovisual humour, and also identifies other categories based on situational criteria – humour of the absurd, dark humour or US humour, for instance (2000, 14–17). The author also quotes a list of restrictions which can affect the translation of humour and of cultural references in an audiovisual text: image, noise, diachrony (the different situational and sociocultural contexts of source and target texts), the text title and taboo language (2000, 43–56). Another set of *limitations* was proposed at the time by Díaz-Cintas, whose seminal research on subtitling also paid some attention to humour, mostly focusing on the semiotic and cultural aspects of comedy in AVT (2001a, 2001b).

The translation of humour in comics and animated cartoons gradually started to attract researchers' attention too: two early articles on the former genre are Sopena-Balordi (1985), in the French-Spanish context, and Campos Pardillo (1992), focusing on a French comic, *Astérix*, and its English and Spanish translations, and concluding that humour can not only go across cultural and linguistic borders successfully but it can even improve along the journey, as happens in some instances of the English version of this French masterpiece. Animated films and cartoons took a little while to arouse academic interest, but they finally became the object of an exhaustive piece of research in Spain, Martínez Sierra 2008, which analyzes the success of *The Simpsons* in translation from a descriptivist and pragmatic point of view (see the Research issues and methods section).

With the arrival of the new millennium research has incorporated a greater variety of issues which reflect the complexity of humour translation, comprising diverse text types, kinds/aspects of humour and translation modalities. It is only natural, then, that scholars should now

often refer to the interdisciplinary nature of this field. An emphasis on functional criteria to analyse humorous source and target texts as well as the translation process is another basic tenet today (see section 3*b*). Other contextual parameters, such as the speaker's intentionality, the receiver's interpretation, presuppositions, or the value systems of the cultures involved, are commonly present in both practical and theoretical accounts of humour translation, showing the relevance of Pragmatics to both Translation Studies and Humour Studies. These various issues and methodologies will be presented in more detail in the next section.

Research issues and methods

Issues

A selection of the main issues will now be given, with a few relevant pieces of research from the Spanish-language context.

Factors determining the creation of humour and its translation

Like researchers elsewhere, after those initial stages academics within the Spanish context have continued to look into the different elements and aspects of humour, in order to better understand its complex mechanism as well as the diverse aspects involved in its (successful) translation. A good representative is Zabalbeascoa (2005), which identifies important parameters for the translator of humour to develop joke typologies, and suggests two complementary procedures: 'mapping', i.e. locating instances of humour according to relevant classifications, and 'prioritizing', or "establishing what is important for each case (in the context of translating), and how important each item and aspect is, in order to have clear set of criteria for shaping the translation in one way rather than another" (2005, 187). In this regard, Zabalbeascoa states that we should not simplistically presume that humour will be equally important in the source and the target texts, concluding "that sameness, or similarity, may have little to do with funniness" (2005, 185). Mateo (2010a) examines well-studied concepts from Humour Studies and Pragmatics – such as incongruity, logical thinking, superiority, social signification (which includes the social group's degree of inhibition), good mood, cuing, function, text and context – in order to show that they "can be of use not just to the translation scholar but also to the translator, that is, not only for the analysis and understanding of *translated* humour but for the actual process of *translating* it" (Mateo 2010a, 71).

The role of the translator in the linguistic and cultural transplantation of humour is in fact an issue which researchers on humour translation insist cannot be ignored, since his/her understanding of the source-text comedy never constitutes a passive type of reception, while the production of a humorous target text usually calls for a special sensitivity towards comedy as well as a high degree of biculturalism, not to mention a good deal of skill, creativity and imagination (see Martínez Sierra 2008; Mateo 1995a, 2010a; Zabalbeascoa 1996b, 2005). As Zabalbeascoa has put it, "[i]n the real world, each translator has different strengths and weaknesses that play a significant role in the end result [. . .]. The translator is a variable in the process" (2005, 205), and this seems particularly noticeable when humour is at stake.

Verbal humour

It is generally agreed that *verbal* humour – arising from the particular language used to convey it, as opposed to *referential* humour, in which a certain meaning or extralinguistic reality

is the source of comedy – is the harder to translate. Nevertheless, the line that divides these two broad classes of humour is a fine one, underlining the previously mentioned complexity of definition which marks this aspect of human behaviour: “[h]umorous texts well exemplify extreme lingua-cultural specificity”, as Chiaro points out (2010a, 8), rightly concluding that “[w]hile it is evident that heavily language-oriented word play does indeed create peculiar difficulties in translation [. . .], it appears to be a question of type of difficulty rather than degree of difficulty” (1992, 95). Verbal humour (or Verbally Expressed Humour, in Chiaro’s terms 2005) has been present in the studies of researchers focusing on general or other aspects of humour. Let us see a few examples in the Spanish-language context.

Díaz Pérez (2004) discusses the translation of wordplay in various fields, such as literature, advertising and films, while Martínez Tejerina (2008) studies the polysemic nature of language and how it may affect the dubbing process. Rojo López (2009) puts forward an approach to the translation of humorous texts based on Cognitive Linguistics, focusing on the concept of ‘frames’ (from Fillmore’s Frame Semantics) – knowledge structures activated in the text – and on the phenomenon of metonymy as a conceptual and cognitive process pervading our way of thinking (Rojo 2009, 66). Analyzing several types of metonymy (of the part-whole, cause-effect . . . patterns) in various English-language novels, and showing how they are commonly exploited in the creation of humour, Rojo argues that this model provides us with deeper understanding of the production and inference of humour (2009, 63), so it can be a useful guide for translators, “assisting them in adjusting the comprehension mechanisms of both audiences and elaborating a translation that leads to the activation of the relevant frames necessary to achieve a humorous effect” (2009, 79).

Mateo (2010a) illustrates the factors mentioned in the preceding subsection with the verbal distortions used as humour generators and effective means of characterization in an eighteenth-century epistolary English novel, analyzing the difficulties of translating English verbal humour (based on its own phonetics, morphology, spelling system, dialectal and diachronic variants, social connotations attached to certain pronunciations, malapropisms, etc.) into twenty-first century Spanish (with its own linguistic resources and stylistic conventions). The author suggests that the soundest approach is probably “to base our translation decisions on the *mechanism* and the *function* of each humorous item in the whole *text*, rather than on its specific *form*” and to consider each instance of verbal humour “as an integral part of the letters rather than in isolation” (Mateo 2010a, 184, 181). Mateo (2010b) resorts to Oscar Wilde’s comedies to show the pragmatic play verbal humour often relies on, constantly subverting the audience’s discursive, semantic and sociocultural expectations and common logic, by exploiting linguistic contrasts, incongruity, surprise and paradox. After examining some Spanish translations of Wilde’s pieces, the study concludes that most of the comic instances based on the reversal of expectations have been successfully conveyed in the target language; it is only when they also include wordplay or irony that translators seem to have encountered difficulties, either in grasping them in the source text or in transplanting them to the target context. Irony appears problematic, except in cases of dramatic irony or clear sarcasm (Mateo 2010b, 330).

The translation of irony

The study of humour-related textual constituents, such as irony, must no doubt form part of a list of issues interesting researchers on humour translation. In an early study, Mateo (1995b) presented a taxonomy of translation strategies for irony, and in an article published in 1998 this author focused on non-verbal components frequently used in the communication of irony, which are therefore crucial to its translation. More recently, Hirsch (2011) examines the

differences in explicitation strategies between translating irony and humour, illustrating them with several literary works originally written in Spanish (including South American ones, such as two novels by Vargas Llosa) and their English and Hebrew translations. The analysis shows that the translations of irony show more explicitations while strategies for humour yield more non-explicitation shifts. This may indicate, according to the author, that, “while the explicitation of humour can override its function altogether, the explicitation of irony does not necessarily do so, since the implied criticism is not cancelled” (2011, 201). These findings, however, seem to clash with discussions on the translation of audiovisual irony, like Zabalbeascoa (2000a, 2010b), which, from the analysis of the films *Annie Hall* and *Trainspotting*, maintain that translation choices enhancing subtleness are precisely the ones that work better in the case of irony.

The issue of culture in humour translation

However difficult verbally expressed humour often proves to be, “the translation of humour is only very partially an interlingual problem, it really is above all an intercultural one” (Chiaro 2010a, 21). To make one another laugh, the members of a speech community rely heavily on implicit knowledge, which may involve important differences between groups regarding “what or whom can be targeted in social play” (Vandaele 2010, 150). Indeed, the cultural nature of humour and its impact on translation has been extensively researched, both within and outside Spain.

In her early article on the subject, Del Corral (1988) already highlighted the vital role of culture-specificity and perception, rightly reminding us that “[o]ur sense of humor is not innate. It is acquired imperceptibly” and that a culture’s perception of humour reflects the group’s special frames of reference, relating to its history, literature, religion, or politics (1988, 25). As Zabalbeascoa puts it (1993, 234–6), we share our humour with those who have shared our history and understand our way of interpreting experience. (A good example of this is intertextuality, often present in humorous texts, which calls for the reader’s identification of the literary/historical/artistic/audiovisual source). Along these lines, Gillies (1997) suggests that language is the mirror of culture, and claims that, in literary translation and simultaneous interpreting, proverbs and humour constitute the main problems, as they rely on shared knowledge between sender and receiver (in Martínez Sierra 2008, 122). This common ground often includes the particular group’s prejudices against other cultures or groups, or feelings about certain registers, dialects, sociolects or idiolects – language varieties with strong social ties to the speech community, all of them often constituting a rich source of humour.

This raises the issue of ‘culture bumps’, “culture-specific items of interpersonal communication and social dynamics” (Zabalbeascoa 2005, 190) imposing restrictions on the translator, who must gauge the relative importance of humour in the different contexts; for, as this researcher observes, “what do we do if humor is detrimental to the author’s goals in the new environment of the translated version?” (2005, 188). In this sense, Martínez Sierra (2008) – examining humour in AVT – believes that the possible loss of a cultural reference in the dubbed version of an audiovisual text may be deemed a lesser evil, since replacing a source-culture reference with one specific to the target culture may provoke stronger disapproval from audiences than their not noticing or understanding a source reference which has been transferred in the dubbing process (2008, 238). In any case, preserving certain source-culture allusions will require greater pragmatic effort from the target audience, which will not necessarily entail a greater reward (in the form of *cognitive effects*) (Martínez Sierra 2008, 241). This study highlights the cultural side of both humour and translation, underlining the translator’s role

as an intercultural mediator. Rojo López (2002) also acknowledges humour as a complex cultural phenomenon. Humorists like David Lodge – whom this researcher resorts to in order to illustrate her points – often distort their readers’ cognitive frames, create new ones or make a character activate an erroneous one with humorous purposes. Rojo López therefore argues that an approach which presents the relationship between language, mind and culture will provide a “unified, coherent and structured explanation of the translation problems which appear when two different languages and cultures come into contact” (Rojo López 2002, 68).

Reception

The issue of culture is inextricably linked to that of reception, which has gradually attracted research attention in humour translation. The social aspect of humour is unquestionable, which implies, on the one hand, that the group or individuals involved must be ready to play. Taking this to a translation context, it means that “jokes are translatable if and only if the respective cultures are interested and available” (Raphaleson-West 1989, 140) (see the ‘good mood’ variable in Mateo 2010a, mentioned previously). On the other hand, as has already been stated, humour relies heavily on the receiver’s identification of the implicit knowledge the joke/comedy is based on; and it is precisely the success in the inference that produces the pleasure. As Gillies rightly observes, “el chiste no tolera explicaciones” (1997, 356, in Martínez Sierra 2008, 160; meaning a joke should not have to be footnoted or explained), and, in Rojo López’s words (2009, 68), “a joke or humorous comment is always funnier if, instead of being directly communicated, receptors manage to decipher it themselves”.

A researcher in the Spanish-language context who has devoted his attention to the reception of translated humour is Fuentes Luque, focusing on audiovisual texts both in his previously mentioned doctoral dissertation (2000) and in Fuentes (2001), where he presents an empirical study of the issue. A very interesting question regarding reception is described by Martínez Sierra (2008, 240), who explains that, while *The Simpsons*’ audience in the US is mostly composed of adult viewers, in Spain it seems to be made up largely of twelve-year-olds, the reason probably lying in the translation strategies taken for the dubbing: since the series contains highly specific cultural referents, the dubbed version has changed its humorous potential to more mundane allusions and to visual, paralinguistic or purely sonorous play, thus getting closer to a pattern which is more appealing to children, in line with Zabalbeascoa’s (2000b) observation regarding Disney translations. This may be related to the conclusions reached by Del Corral in that earlier study on (literary) humour translation (1988). After comparing the effect produced by the parodies written by the Mexican writer Jorge Ibargüengoitia (1928–1983) about the Mexican revolution and the succeeding upheaval on the Mexican reader and on the receiver of the English translations, this researcher makes two interesting observations regarding the perception of this culture-specific type of humour: “While the native understands the book’s national humor, the foreigner perceives its literary humor”, so “both may take pleasure in the same detail for entirely different reasons” (1988, 26). A second conclusion, which Del Corral herself describes as surprising, but no doubt tenable, is that

[t]he different perspective and perceptions of the two readers have absolutely no effect on the translation process itself. Universal and literary humour present no special problem. As for national humour, [. . .] it is available to those who are prepared to understand it, imperceptible to those who are not”.

(Del Corral 1988, 26)

Ideological issues in humour translation

In connection with culture and reception, the question of ideology is present in various studies on humour translation. Thus, Vandaele (2002) focuses on (self-)censorship and humour in Franco's Spain, making two interesting observations: in relation to the key theoretical translation question whether meaning, as the *effect* of language, can really be predicted, Vandaele suggests that it must certainly be predictable "with greater or lesser accuracy. Otherwise, indeed, the type of self-censorship exerted by Francoist translators [. . .] would be difficult to imagine" (2002, 164). In relation to the issue of ethics, this researcher considers that the Francoist censorship of humour was certainly not a good thing, either for the humour or its message (Vandaele 2002, 166). Regarding the critical side of humour (notably present in parodies and particularly in satire), Zabalbeascoa (2005) suggests that the translator will have to decide whether humour is the most effective way of producing the same type of criticism in the target context and what is more important in the text in question, the humour or the criticism, since the funniness of the text may actually be "more important than any criticism it might hold" (Zabalbeascoa 2005, 198). For his part, Valdeón (2010a, 2010b) examines how the discourse of the two gay characters in the American sitcom *Will and Grace* has experienced some changes in the Spanish-dubbed version, their portrayal thus becoming less politically correct than in the original, something which should probably be considered in relation to the respective standards of political correctness in each culture.

Humour in audiovisual texts

AV texts can be said to have taken centre stage in the study of humour translation from the end of the twentieth century onwards. As may have already been noticed, they are frequently present in pieces of research on various aspects of comedy, but more and more studies have focused specifically on AVHT. Three of the Spanish contributors to Chiaro's special monograph on the translation of humour (2010b), for instance, focus on cinema and television (Fuentes Luque, Valdeón and Zabalbeascoa). The editor of this compendium remarks on the Anglo-centricity noticeable in most of its studies, which is however quite understandable since "the sheer amount of translated products from the USA on TV provide researchers of languages other than English with plenty of material to study", as Chiaro herself observes (2010a, 25). A study which has paid attention to audiovisual texts produced outside the Anglophone world is Mogorrón Huerta (2010), examining how the humour of three French films has been conveyed in the Spanish dubbing.

Apart from those given previously, we can mention other representative studies. Díaz-Cintas (1998) analysed the subtitling and dubbing of a specific piece, Woody Allen's comic thriller *Manhattan Murder Mystery*, while the monograph on subtitling he coedited (Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2007) devoted a whole section to humour. Lorenzo and Pereira (2003) examine *The Simpsons*, a series which would later be the research topic for Martínez Sierra (2008), which will be described in the following. Mendiluce and Hernández (2004, 2005) deal with the issues of function and quality in AVHT (mostly focusing on animated films); while digital animated films, such as *Antz* and *Shrek*, have been the object of study in González Vera (2010). Venuti's dichotomy between foreignization and domestication provides the basis for the studies by Botella Tejera (2006) and Martínez Sierra (2006). Díaz Pérez has devoted at least two studies (2008, 2014) to analyzing the translation of wordplay in English film titles, a particularly thorny issue, considering, in the first one, the fondness for punning in English-language literatures and cultures, frequently observed in literary works, advertisements and films – as the

author rightly points out – and, in the second, the twofold function served by puns in titles, since they are an effective appealing device for viewers and can encapsulate at least two meanings relevant for the film (Díaz Pérez 2008, 55). In order to examine their translations into Spanish, the author adopts a non-evaluative description-oriented approach in (2008) and a Relevance Theory standpoint in (2014).

Martínez Sierra's volume (2008) also applies Pragmatics' Relevance theory to the study of translated humour, focusing on the *The Simpsons*, the American animated TV series which has been shown in about seventy countries, among them Spain. The author presents a taxonomy of elements which generate humour, illustrating them with a selection of comic instances from the series; with the analysis of the translation strategies adopted for them in the Spanish version, he tries to systematize some translational tendencies for TV dubbings of a type of humour which is strongly culturally marked. An interesting distinction made by this researcher is between translatability on a macrotextual and a microtextual level, concluding that it is only on the latter that some jokes can be deemed as untranslatable, while the series as such works well in its target version, preserving its potential for humour; i.e., it fulfils its main function, which is essentially to provoke laughter³ (Martínez Sierra 2008, 233–5). This leads the author to conclude that the approach taken by the Spanish translators of the *The Simpsons* is a functional one, and mostly foreignizing regarding cultural references, despite the high number of source-culture references which are thus transplanted to the target context (2008, 235). In connection with this issue, a keen observation made by Martínez Sierra is that the visual components of the TV series, far from constraining the translation, often help to facilitate the understanding of the target text, which should prompt us to question the concept of image as a constraining factor in AVHT (2008, 239).

Research on AVHT is incorporating new modalities in AVT, such as audio description, which is the object of another study by Martínez Sierra (2009).

The translation of specific humorous genres/texts/authors

Humour interacts with the specific conventions of the genre that the translated text belongs to. "Different *genres* generate different schemes of normality to be transgressed", and these differences may be rather subtle (Vandaele 2002, 168–9), so translators will have to bear in mind the schemes operating for each genre – a comedy, a joke, etc. – in each of the two contexts involved in the intercultural and interlinguistic process of translation. Mateo (1995a), for instance, studied the specificity of theatre humour, in which all the semiotic codes can be exploited for the creation of comedy as well as to solve translation difficulties – i.e. a verbal problem may be overcome by resorting to the non-verbal signs in the performance (1995a, 283). The performability of the text, the immediacy that characterizes a play's reception in a theatre, and the need to recreate the humorous effect in the target text often imply that the exact semantic content of a source comedy will somehow be sacrificed.

Non-verbal elements – in this case, image – and text are also closely linked in comics, as Muñoz-Calvo and Buesa-Gómez have studied, focusing on the translation of *Astérix* (2010). Comics have their own conventions – e.g. concise and precise language, recurring visual metaphors and onomatopoeia, etc. – and each particular text is characterized by a particular linguistic and iconic discourse which will constrain translation decisions. For instance, in their thorough analysis of *Astérix*, Muñoz-Calvo and Buesa-Gómez (2010) discuss the constant wordplay and cultural references that create much of the humour in the French canonical text, and they address the thorny issue of how to translate multilingualism when the alien language in the source text happens to be the target language in a translation process: English syntax

and word order are often parodied in the original *Astérix*, a difficulty the translators into this language have solved by making the Breton characters speak English with Scottish or Welsh dialect forms. These researchers include an exhaustive and useful list of studies published in Spain which are centred on the translation of comics (2010, 429): e.g. the specific problems the translation of this genre entails, the translation of the texts' typical onomatopoeia and word-play, and the (Spanish) translation of *Astérix* or of other popular comics – either originally Spanish or from other literary systems, such as *Mortadelo y Filemón*, *Mafalda* and *Tin-Tin*.

The humour of specific authors belonging to different genres has been examined in various studies: to mention but a few examples centred on Spanish creators and the translation of their work into other languages, Spanish playwrights from the Golden Age have attracted the attention of scholars both in Spain and abroad, as will be seen next; and Pedro Almodóvar's films have been the object of study in Rox Barasoain's PhD dissertation (2008), which focuses on their translation and reception in the US, and in an end-of-degree project examining their subtitling in Greek (Roussou 2003, mentioned in Martínez Sierra 2008, 268).

Translating the classics

An important study in the Spanish-language context is Braga (2009a and 2009b, with an English and a Spanish version published in the same year), devoted to the transplantation of Spanish Golden Age comedies to England and their influence on British playwrights. The author first analyzes situation comedy, observing that English translators showed great interest in this type of humour, in some aspects keeping very close to the Spanish originals – as in the humorous use of stage space, characters' movements, night scenes or the figure of the fool –, at other times slightly adapting the situational elements of the ST, like gestures, paralinguistic features or hairstyle and costumes. English translators also exploited certain resources practically inexistent in the Spanish written versions of the plays, such as songs and music, and they introduced some other ridiculous figures that would be familiar to the intended TT public (Braga 2009a, 273–4). The translators showed more freedom in verbal humour, such as that created through wordplay, comic neologisms, repartees, parodies of Latin expressions, double entendres and asides, either by omitting many of these ST elements or opting for creativity; they introduced elements of the same type in order to exploit their comic potential in English (Braga 2009a, 295).

Apart from its thorough analysis of these Spanish comedies and their various English translations, which are placed in their respective cultural, historic and theatrical contexts, an interesting contribution of this study is the exhaustive bibliography provided, which shows the strong attraction this period of Spanish drama has held for playwrights and researchers elsewhere. The list includes studies about the translation and adaptation of Calderón's plays into English, French, Italian and Polish; about this playwright's influence on English writers such as Dryden; his reception in Germany, and throughout Europe in various periods; comparative studies between Calderón in Madrid and in London, or between Renaissance English and Spanish drama; about the translation into English of other writers, such as Lope the Vega or Hurtado de Mendoza; or about Spanish comedy in France, Holland, Italy, Poland and English-speaking countries, or in seventeenth-century Europe; and bibliographies of English translations of Spanish comedies (see Braga 2009a, 324–32).

Translating into languages other than Castilian Spanish

Researchers in Spain have also studied the translation of humour into official languages other than Spanish. Thus, Espasa Borrás (1995) deals with Joe Orton's humour in Catalan

and Valencian versions; the same researcher devotes part of her 2001 book to the analysis of comedy in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *As You Like it*, examining, for instance, how the humour created by some characters' accents in those Shakespearean comedies has fared in the translations into Catalan. Díaz Pérez (1999) analyzes the translation of wordplay in Lewis Carroll's work into Galician (and Spanish).

Methods

Research methods within HTS need not be different on the whole from other aspects of translation, especially the ones included under translation problems, according to Holmes's 1988 "map", along with other problems like metaphors, allusions and politeness. Indeed, part of the challenge in studying translated humour is how to separate or combine overlapping textual features like humorous metaphor, or humour in the context of politeness, etc. Due to space constraints we outline very briefly here fruitful research methodology, already carried by authors mentioned previously but also still demanding of further work, particularly in Spain.

- Linguistics, semiotics, communication studies. The tools of linguistic science are not to be disdained at all, but they should be put at the service of the particular goal of humour translation, to further develop the area of verbally expressed humour, while acknowledging the importance of non-verbal and audiovisual humour. One very interesting area is that of comparing professionally scripted humour (the one that is typically scripted and published) to humour produced by all other people.
- Pragmatics and reception studies. This methodology involves studying texts with the tools of pragmatics to focus on reactions pursued and achieved by the presence of humour. This is probably why AVT is so prominent in this field, because of the presence of telling pragmatic markers such as the laugh track and fictional characters' laughter. Scholarly work of this kind includes Díaz Pérez (2014) and Mateo (2010b).
- Descriptive reception and social studies. Like the important work carried out by Fuentes Luque, humour translation can be studied by looking at audience responses, which can be done through questionnaires or direct observation of reactions (typically, but not exclusively, laughter). Eye-tracking research is gaining importance in this respect, combined with studies of heartrate or other indicators of responses to specific stimuli, such as humour (e.g. eye-tracking studies as carried out, outside Spain, by Kruger, Szarkowska, and Krejtz 2015).
- Corpus studies. One area that has not grown as much for humour translation studies as in other areas is the collection of texts and/or instances of (translated) jokes and humorous elements. It is very useful, not to say essential, to have a large body (database) of samples of instances and examples of types of humour.
- Theoretical studies are needed to complement all of the above, because theory is where explanations and typologies are proposed. Insights and hypotheses help to guide descriptive studies, provide structure for corpora and databases, and advance pragmatic and hermeneutic studies of texts. For example, there have been many publications that have used Zabalbeascoa's (1996a, 2005) theory of types of translation-oriented humour for their research, coupled with Zabalbeascoa's model of priorities and restrictions (1996b), showing how one of the variables of humour (in translation) is its importance in the context of every other textual feature. Another much-cited case, both within Spain and beyond, is Delabastita's (1996) theoretical account of how wordplay is and can be translated.

Future directions

There are still plenty of topics to study and research lines to open. To start with, more collaboration between Humour Studies and Translation Studies is needed since, as Vandaele clearly puts it, “la traduction [...] se présente clairement comme un test culturel et linguistique ultime des ‘frontières communautaires’ dans les présuppositions qu’exploite l’humour” (“translation [...] has clearly proved to be a definitive cultural and linguistic test of ‘national borders’ within the presuppositions which humour plays with”; our translation), and the absence and presence of the latter can be interpreted as an unmistakable signal of those borders (Vandaele 2001, 40, 29). Chiaro (2005, 143) calls for more empirical studies to establish the link between funniness and ST-TT similarity, following Zabalbeascoa’s previously mentioned claim that they may have little to do with each other (2005, 185). Spanish researchers could contribute to confirming this.

The area of reception also deserves fuller investigation, focusing on translated humorous texts of different genres and/or conveyed through various translation modes. It would be useful to find out, for instance, “whether culture-specific senses of humor actually do exist” and “how far language transfer influences the triadic behavioural, physiological and emotional response in individuals from different cultural backgrounds” (Chiaro 2005, 139–40). This should be particularly relevant for AVHT, in which another interesting topic could be the examination of global marketing strategies in the production of screen series and how they affect, or are affected by, translation (Chiaro 2005, 139).

Other subjects of relevance in today’s world are: the translation challenges presented by new technological media – audio(-visual), electronic and digital – in relation to humour; translating humour in different textual/translation modalities: e.g. video games, advertising, musical texts (e.g. in songs, opera or musicals), and even live interpreting; or fansubs and fandubs as leisure translating activities. More concrete topics are how to tackle humorous multilingualism in texts to be translated, or the issue of accessibility in relation to AVHT.

As regards methodological issues, descriptive studies, which may yield tendencies and norms of translation strategies for humorous texts – either foreign (audiovisual/written) texts translated in Spain or Spanish texts received abroad –, will no doubt be enlightening for the field too.

It is important not to mix up or confuse research methods and interests, as outlined earlier, with theoretical frameworks, although they might be said to be part of the researcher’s toolbox. Thus, there are linguistic theories such as functional linguistics or pragmatic-linguistic theories such as Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) or Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principle. Then there are translation-studies specific theories, such as norm theory (Toury 1980) or Skopos theory (Reiss and Vermeer 1984), and then, of course, there are theories that come out of humour studies, that may then be applied to translation (e.g. Attardo 2002; Raskin 1985; Nash 1985). The interesting case of humour as a challenge for AVT has been amply dealt with here, and basically implies that any theory for AVT will have to be tested and validated against the case of humour, regardless of whether humour turns out to be a sense or a function or a device or a mood or an elusive quality.

A final word must be said in favour of integrating humour translation studies (HTS) in with a better general understanding of translational phenomena. We must strive for increased visibility of humour in Spanish Translation Studies, both in general theoretical studies and in works focusing on AVT. Work for the future includes convincing scholars that a greater awareness of humour must be included in mainstream translation studies to provide fruitful dialogue between TS and HTS. The belittling of humoristic and comic issues in TS will surely change in

the near future. We hope that just as AVT was belittled for too long but came out into the light, so too will humour translation come out of the shadows of special cases and into the limelight of core translation studies given its ubiquity and universality in every order: textually, socially, linguistically, culturally, semiotically, cognitively, and politically. We hope we can eventually witness the dawn of a full-fledged HTS picking up and joining the strands of work carried out internationally, like Chiaro's (2010b) and Delabastita's (1996), and largely in Spain, too, or by Spanish scholars, with humour becoming more and more visible in the titles, such as those of Mateo (1995a), Díaz-Pérez (2004), Fuentes (2000), Martínez Sierra (2008) and Martínez-Tejerina (2016).

Recommended reading

- Attardo, Salvatore, ed. 2017. *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor*. London: Routledge.
A fundamental introduction to Humour Studies and verbally expressed humour, whose author is a major reference in the field.
- Martínez Sierra, Juan José, and Patrick Zabalbeascoa, eds. 2017. "The Translation of Humour/La traducción del humor." *MonTI* 9.
It includes state of the art research in the field of HTS, and although its scope and contributions are clearly international there is an important number of studies by Spanish scholars about Spanish-language case studies, and some of them are written in Spanish.
- Zabalbeascoa, Patrick. 2005. "Humor and Translation – an Interdiscipline." *Humor* 18 (2): 185–207.
A much-cited article that makes a clear case in favour of Humour Studies and Translation Studies working for each other, both to exchange insights and to help gain visibility and prestige in academia.

Notes

- 1 An important development in the mid-nineties that helps to understand historical milestones in HTS is the sudden growth in the number of Spanish universities offering degrees in translator training. The effect this had on research was to create an alternative centre of gravity and to influence the research agenda, changing the sole presence of Spain's traditional philological departments by adding the newly created departments of translation.
- 2 The dissertation presents a theoretical model for accounting for translations based on distributing translational factors according to whether they can best be seen as priorities or restrictions. Arrangements of priorities and restrictions are variable and context sensitive, potentially unique for some translations, while accepting that certain arrangements might be recurrent for a large number of cases.
- 3 Martínez Sierra entertains serious doubts about the social satire in *The Simpsons*, since the series seems to reproduce the same system, American society, which it appears to criticise, thus showing a two-faced attitude that this researcher relates to commercial reasons – the purpose being to attract as large an audience as possible not just in the US but abroad (2008, 126, 191).

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