



## REVIEW

**Margherita Dore:**  
***Humour in Audiovisual Translation:  
Theories and Applications***

(New York and London: Routledge, 2020. 289 pages)\*

**Xiangchi Men**

Northeastern University  
China  
1095280304@qq.com

**Yang Li**

Northeastern University  
China  
lynkabm2000@163.com

**Agnieszka Solska**

University of Silesia  
Poland  
agnieszka.solska@us.edu.pl

ONOMÁZEIN 57 (September 2022): 263-267  
DOI: 10.7764/onomazein.57.12  
ISSN: 0718-5758



The intersections of humour studies and audiovisual translation (AVT) are generally not as frequent as desired either from theoretical nor applied perspective, but they are gaining in-crescent scholarly attention. Margherita Dore draws on part I a considerably valuable and crucial account of the key theoretical underpinnings in humour studies and translation studies, especially in AVT, followed by the application to case analysis from television and film in part II. Regarded as a pioneering contribution, *Humour in Audiovisual Translation: Theories and Applications* illustrates a multitude of linguistic manifestations and functions of humour. One of the strengths is to address the difficulty and complexity encountered in transferring various dimensions of humour in audiovisual contexts, particularly as the changes of technology matter in audio description (AD). Primarily, it is also aimed to conduct a descriptive investigation on “humour transfer via four different translation modes: dubbing, subtitling, fansubbing and audio description in two comedies” (p. 281). To that end, this book purposefully falls into six chapters featuring theories and applications. It well serves as key reading for beginners in humor studies and AVT and an insightful complement for seasoned researchers.

The author starts with a general introduction to the existing background, main purposes, scope and outline. Readers will be enlightened in humour studies and AVT with topics such as condensation in subtitling that AVT involves, foreignisation and domestication in the transfer of humors from strong culture (i.e., American series and movies) to weak culture (i.e., Italian AVT) in the polysystem as depicted by Even-Zohar (2012). Apart from the extensive concerns like how humour is conceived, conveyed and appreciated, the central concern of this study is how humour is created, approached and transferred across languages and cultures in bilingual and multilingual audiovisual contents. Most notably, it presents a more exhaustive picture of linguistic, textual, contextual, pragmatic and non-verbal factors at play during the AVT of humour.

Chapter 1 firstly demonstrates the difficulty of reaching a unified definition of humour and later moves on to grasp the concept through revealing how humour is applied and exerts effects in daily life. It is furthered by an overview of the most prevalent theories related to humour studies, like “Superiority (or Hostility) Theories” and “Relief (or Release) Theories” (p. 18). They emphasize the cognitive, social-behavioural, psychological aspects of humour. Similar to frame or schema in cognitive linguistics, the scripted-based theories are highlighted. For instance, the “General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH)” (p. 24) is devoted to the differentiation between verbal and referential humour, the analysis of similar jokes and the application of knowledge resources to humorous texts, in conversation and comedy. Subsequently, the issue of humour translation is involved in a thorough discussion on the humour (un)translatability. Due to the “language- and culture-specificity” and “the fact that translators are

---

\* This work was supported by the Youth Project of China’s Philosophy and Social Science Fund under Grant No. 17CYY052.

sometimes afraid of manipulating the target text” (p. 39), it is claimed that humour cannot be translated from a theoretical perspective. However, the daily occurrence of successfully translated versions of humorous texts proves the translatability of humour. Ultimately, Nilsen’s definition of humour is quoted to conclude the previous theories and prepare for the spreading of part II.

Chapter 2 reviews briefly how AVT, a currently fully fledged discipline, develops from originally a “virgin area of research” (p. 53) to later a “scholarly area of research” (p. 53). After presenting the reasons and rationale of AVT and certain theoretical considerations regarding AVT in general as premises, this chapter moves on to offer an overview of diverse modes of AVT in two categories, highlighting their constraints and merits. Resorting to Chaume’s statement, the author proposes that, inherently speaking, many elements contribute to certain degree of manipulation, such as technical and ideological manipulation, involved in AVT. Further, the two “macro modes” (p. 65) of AVT, namely revoicing and captioning, are thoroughly considered in terms of their merits and deficiencies. The academic research should keep up with the inevitable social turn in AVT. Since the majority of the explained examples come from Italy, where dubbing is historically honored and recently experiencing changes, the following sections contribute to the review of previous and current circumstance of Italian AVT. Ultimately, the chapter tackles the crucial issue of the (un)translatability of humour in AVT, taking into account “priorities and strategies in the AVT of humour” (p. 88). This chapter not only provides a framework of diverse strategies in real cases, but also ensures that the investigation of humour translation in both revoicing and captioning is made on a solid theoretical foundation.

While the first two chapters focus on theories, the remaining chapters turn to their applications.

Chapter 3 tackles the problem of humour created by a variety of puns. It starts with providing a definition of humorous puns or “wordplay” (p. 106) at structural and textual level in a narrow sense. The linguistic units of puns range from fixed expressions and idioms to combined verbal and visual humour. Furthermore, it moves on to critically review related literature on the translation of puns. What follows is a taxonomy of six translation strategies for puns in AVT, including “transference”, “equivalence”, “substitution”, “neutralization”, “omission” and “compensation” (pp. 118-119). Then, taking the TV comedy program *Modern Family* as a case in point, this chapter explores into “the process of humour creation in audiovisual settings and, more importantly, its translation” (p. 123). The fine-grained quantitative analysis unfolds the translation strategies of tackling obstacles in the source texts (STs), while transferring punning in dubbing and captioning in three target texts (TTs). It is stressed that the strategies employed are highly dependent on contextual and pragmatic factors. Given the priority to preserving the original mechanism, the AVT mode actually exerts influence on translator’s decision-making. Also, a combination of diverse approaches is proposed to address varied language- and culture-specific elements when transferring puns in the AVT.

Chapter 4 carries out a data-driven analysis on humorous effects produced by culture-specific references (CSRs) in the first two seasons of *Modern Family*. By defining CSRs in general and more specific terms, the author notes that CSRs cannot always find their exact counterparts in a different language, due to the existing culture differences. Thus, it is essential to arouse translators' awareness of the types and sources of CSRs, say "allusion proper" and "eponymous adjectives" (p. 178), to name but a few. Based on the functions of humorous CSRs, myriad translation strategies and techniques in the AVT, like "retention", "substitution" and "transference" (p. 188), can be subsumed under a fidelity scale. As its previous counterpart, this chapter proceeds with data analysis on the translated CSRs in dubbing and captioning. Ultimately, the chapter concludes that a comparative textual analysis, which involves both theories in translation studies and humour studies, can be considered as the most appropriate method of elaborating the AVT of CSRs with humorous effects.

Chapter 5 investigates the translation of multilingual humour in audiovisual context. As in the previous two chapters, the author examines three AVT modes, namely, dubbing, subtitling and fansubbing. First, the scholarly research on multilingualism and translation is reviewed to clarify the concept of multilingual films. Then it sheds lights on how multilingual humour functions in audiovisual context and what challenges it renders to translators to preserve its functions. That said, multilingual humor is treated differently in dubbing and captioning. But the examples of *Modern Family* prove the validity of "functional manipulation" (p. 234). It is worth noticing that language variation in *Modern Family* is more frequently used in dubbing than its captioning counterparts. In captioning, the TTs preserve both the Spanish expressions and "Mock Spanish" (p. 245) in STs. The TTs are, therefore, functionally manipulated to preserve the humorous effects, when humorous puns occur in the STs.

Chapter 6 serves to link up humour with audio description (AD), "an integral component of Audiovisual Translation" (p. 259). There is a great necessity of drawing worldwide scholarly attention to AD, since the globe is aging with more visually impaired senior citizens. However, the AD of humour has seldom or even virtually never been systematically under scrutiny. Similarly, this chapter undoubtedly proves valuable for reviewing the defining features of AD and its production process as well as constrains. The scant literature of humour in AD, however, centers on appreciable humour of AD by relevance theory and the AD of such taboo topics as sex and religion. As an important attempt, "a comparative analysis of the English and Italian AD of the same audiovisual content" (p. 267) is conducted to unveil similarities and differences in the way different countries handle humour of AD at non-verbal textual level. Despite the limited examples, voicing the subtitles and audio subtitling represent the most interesting characteristic of the English AD.

As a whole, this neatly-organized monograph is characterized by theoretical elaboration on issues in the emerging research field of humour in AVT and by a fine-grained descriptive analysis from a comprehensive and comparative perspective. It strives to bridge the gap between

theoretical humour studies and practical humour transference via translational strategies in real audiovisual cases. On the one hand, it regards humour as “a complex phenomenon which is part of human nature” (Rojo Lopez, 2002: 34), including linguistic, paraverbal and non-verbal factors, substantiating the (im)possibility of translating humour and mobilizing culture in the practical audiovisual context. On the other hand, the descriptive translation studies help to observe the norms of manipulated interference, deliberately adopted as a strategy, for the purpose of discriminative treatment in an attempt to enrich the target culture/language (Toury, 2012). The systematic selected dataset provides readers with a fuller picture of humour taxonomy. Then, the corresponding translation strategies of transferring humour are exemplified on a continuum ranging from source culture-oriented to target culture-oriented. All the examples of humour gain intensified interest with sufficient conclusive evidence in various modes of AVT, representative of both revoicing and captioning. It should be reiterated that the book under review has broken ground in AD, where studies on translating humour are almost non-existent. Essentially as for both modes, humour needs a common ground on which translators endeavor to minimize the discrepancy between senders in the STs and recipients in the TTs by the reference to shared knowledge and interpreted experience (Rojo Lopez, 2002).

To sum up, this book is highly instructive in either humour studies or translation studies as a great starting point for students and a useful complement for seasoned scholars and practitioners. No doubt in our comments on the originality we have definite confidence that readers will gain a view of translation that is applicable to humor in AVT, especially “when comic effect is a high priority” (Zabalbeascoa, 2016). More importantly, this point of view not only reinforced steps on a virgin field of research on humour AD, but also opens avenues for further research. At present, the overdue attempt reconciles the complex phenomenon of translating humour with interlingual, cultural preferences and humorous effect. Humour devices of AVT, to most extent, are well established in the repertoire of target community. In this regard, this book will hopefully better its translational practice in the context of AVT and promote continuous exchange among different cultures to learn humour from each other.

## References

EVEN-ZOHAR, Itamar, 2012: “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem” in L. VENUTI (ed.): *The Translation Studies Reader*, London: Routledge, 162-167.

TOURY, Gideon, 2012: *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond (Revised Edition)*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

ZABALBEASCOA, Patrick, 2016: “Censoring Lolita’s Sense of Humor: When Translation Affects the Audience’s Perception”, *Perspectives* 24 (1), 93-114.

ROJO LOPEZ, Ana Maria, 2002: “Frame Semantics and the Translation of Humour”, *Babel* 48 (1), 34-77.