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Was that funny?

Multi-modal wordplay translation and audience types

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Abstract

In this paper I will set out to show what effect the intended audience of a text has on how one approaches the translation of word play as it appears in comic strips, and how one should analyze those translation. I will do this by analyzing a set of comic strips, all featuring an instance of wordplay which combines the visual and textual elements of the text, which I translated according to metrics proposed by the literature and my own audience types. This paper shows, in the opinion of the author, that audience type can in some instances supersede the visual/textual interplay in translation in certain cases where the humorous instance was directed at a specific audience.

Keywords: Translation Studies, Wordplay, Comic Strips, Audience Type.

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1 Introduction

We have all seen them in the back of newspapers, those short comics meant to brighten our mood before we finish reading the paper. Some of them come from whichever country the newspaper is published in, and is therefore written in the language the target audience speaks, but some do not, meaning they have to be translated, and due to the format, they will present a translator with some special challenges. The presence of these challenges, i.e. non-literal language, restriction due to visual elements, and the very size of the medium, means one can treat wordplay in comic strips as a kind of microcosm for translation studies. This attitude towards short humorous texts is shared by Ritchie (2010, p. 34) who refers to jokes as "laboratory animals" on which ideas about textual humor can be tested". Texts that are humorous in the source language (hence SL) must be translated to a humorous text in the target language (hence TL). This is difficult if what is humorous in the SL relies on some kind of wordplay using a language specific feature in in the SL that is not found in the TL. In addition to this, due to its multimodal nature, one must consider what is seen in the panels, and any TL text needs to make sense with whatever is in the illustrated panels. This is the general consensus among the literature (Zanettin 2010, Kaindl 1999), that translating a comic strip is an exercise in maintaining the relationship between the textual and the visual, but in this paper I will present a third metric, audience type, which categorizes instances of humor based on their likely intended audience. After I have presented my categories for audience type I will then analyze a set of comic strips that I translated in accordance with past writing on the subject, in addition to my proposed audience types. This will not just include literature on the subject of humor translation as I will be relying on Schäffner's (2004) method for deconstructing metaphors, though I have modified it for use on joke-like structures, such as a comic strip. I will also be using Nida (1959) to motivate my audience types. The question this paper will seek to answer will be:

What effect, if any, does my audience type have on how one should translate wordplay in comic strips?

The aim of all this will be to establish my audience categories as a metric for judging the success of a translation and as a "jumping off point" for further studies in the field of humor translation, that one might see if patterns established here hold for larger texts and we will know whether comic strips are indeed a microcosm of humor translation or an outlier. My audience types will also attempt to bring some measure of simplicity into the transfer of cultural items and practices upon which humor sometimes relies.

2 Background

2.1 What's so funny? Studies on humor

Before talking specifically about comic strips, I will outline some research that has been done on the mechanics of humor in general, paying special attention to jokes, i.e. short stories meant to be humorous, for reasons which will be explained in the next section, where I deal with comic strips specifically. Special attention will also be placed on jokes containing wordplay. Comic strips are structured roughly like a jokes, and as such, could be viewed through the lens of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (hence GTVH) where jokes are described as a form of script opposition (Zanettin 2010, p. 36, Ruch 1992, p. 31) where humor arises from incongruities in two scripts that are present in the same text, or as Hofstader (1997, p. 216) put it:

"The sudden unexpected slippage of a mental structure that had seemed perfectly solid and not in the least suspicious until the moment the mental rockslide occurred"

And in order to understand any given instance of humor or comedy, it has been suggested that we need to possess a certain set of "knowledge resources" which, in addition to the previously mentioned "script opposition", includes logical mechanism, which explains the incongruity, the situation in which the humor is found, targets or "derided object" (Aleksandrova 2012) and the narrative strategies and language which serves as the medium by which the joke is told (Zanettin 2010, p. 36). It is my opinion that we could condense all this down to a joke having two discrete parts (set-up and punchline) along with a "subversion" step described briefly below:

Set-up: Presents the premise of the joke and introduces relevant information that will help one understand what follows. Introducing one script overtly while the second script remains ambiguous. Jokes can be further divided into two categories, based on

their set-ups: Syntagmatic, or self-contained, where all the information required to understand the joke can be found in the set-up, and Paradigmatic, where the punchline refers to something outside the set-up. (Ritchie 2010, p. 43)

Subversion: This is where the hidden incongruity reveals itself, Hofstader's (1997, p. 216) "rockslide".

Punchline: Information that resolves the incongruity in the opposing scripts.

For puns, the humor relies on ambiguity of meaning in some word/words in the set-up (Low 2011, p. 59) which is then resolved in the punchline. These types of jokes work because we are lead to understand the set-up as meaning one thing, while the opposing script still remains ambiguous enough that one cannot guess the punch-line, and the subversion and punch-line both resolve the ambiguity and introduces the second element of the text. This means that word play relies on garden-path processing, where one is initially lead down one path in the set up, and then forced to reevaluate one's initial assessments once the punchline has been delivered. With puns relying on some specific feature of the language, phonetic or otherwise, rather than exclusively within the semantic realm, changing puns from one language to another, which might have a wildly different grammar and phonology, is particularly difficult, and I would say even more so when one needs to work within a multimodal text, because any translation not only has to include the transferred pun, but it must also match the text with the images, or as Koponen (2004, p. 81) puts it:

"On the one hand, the images certainly limit the modifications the translator can make, and the target text may not work if the translator has not taken into account the effect of the images."

2.2 Comic strips in particular

In the previous section I focused on humor as it appears in jokes, i.e. short stories with the sole intent of being humorous, and there was a reason for this, as the structure of a comic strip, the focus of this paper, is very similar to the structure of a joke, where the first few panels present characters and any other elements needed to understand the "punch line", usually presented in the last panel of the comic. In addition to narrative structure Zanettin

(2010, p. 38) also talks about three studies where basic script opposition were found in all cartoons and comics used, the same mechanism which allows a joke to function as a joke. Harvey (2009, p. 29) described it in the following manner

"As comprehension dawns - the flash of an instant - the humor is revealed, and the revelation, coming, as it does, suddenly, gives comic impact to the combined 'meaning' of the visual-verbal blend"

The humor in comic strips, when described like that, sounds very similar to Hofstader's (1997, p. 216) metaphorical "rockslide", and in the 3 WD humor appreciation test used by Ruch (1992) comic strips are used alongside more traditional jokes to test peoples appreciation of humor. However, while Zanettin (2010) remarks on the similarity between comic strips and jokes, he points out that GTVH is not able to fully account for the humor of cartoons and comics, as the GTVH was originally meant for, as the name suggests, verbal humor, a mono-modal medium, whereas comic strips function as a multimodal text (2010, p. 39). Zanettin (2010, p. 36) explains this by pointing out that a mere transcription of the speech bubbles will not be sufficient to explain the humor, and if transferred to a mono-modal medium, some kind of verbal description to replace the context of the images, which may result in a different or wholly lost humorous effect. Some have attempted to modify the GTVH to account for the "uniqueness" of comic strips, with El-Arousy (2007) modifying two of the knowledge resources from GVTH to better suit the medium. Firstly, by changing the "Narrative strategy parameter" to a "Semiotic Strategy parameter" and adding "drawings" to the language parameter (El-Arousy 2007, p. 301).

2.3 Translating the untranslatable

Like the last two sections, when discussing the translation of humor in comic strips, first we will outline the works that have been done on humor and non-literal translation in general and then focus on comic strips specifically. The "untranslatability" of jokes is hardly a new claim, with one quote from 1711 going so far as to claim that the untranslatability of a "Piece of Wit" is what defines it as a pun (Steele, Addison & Ross 1982). More recent studies into the translatability of wordplay seems to answer the questions with a resounding "Yes! But…" (Koochaki 2016, Low 2011), with Chiaro (2010, p. 10) stating that "it would be absurd to think that a translator can create a carbon copy of the ST (source text) in such a way that the

two texts can perfectly mirror each other" (Italics added by me). Nevertheless, she outlines four tactics for translating "verbally expressed humor" (VEH).

- 1. Leave the VEH unchanged
- 2. Replace the source VEH with a different instance of VEH in the TL
- 3. Replace the source VEH with an idiomatic expression in the TL
- 4. Ignore the VEH altogether (Chiaro 2010, pp. 11-12)

For this paper, the fourth tactic, ignoring the VEH altogether, will be considered unacceptable, due to the focus on short comedic texts, whose sole function is to be amusing, meaning that a complete removal of what makes it funny in the SL renders the whole text pointless. This will be achieved by focusing on "ad sensum" translations, resulting in the largest possible overlap with regards to the texts invariance (more on invariance later). In addition to Chiaro's somewhat measured disputation of a joke's untranslatability, others go further, with Low (2011, p. 59) going so far as to claim:

"In my view, claims that jokes are untranslatable have two main sources: either translators' incompetence (jokes are indeed lost but no serious effort has been made to find equally humorous substitutes) or a narrow notion of translation, combined with an unrealistic standard of success".

He then goes on to say that TL translation of the joke need merely deliver the same joke, broadly speaking, and though what is considered "funny" may vary across cultures (more on that later) what we can and should do is translate a joke into something that recognizably attempts to be funny and has a chance of amusing the audience (Low 2011, p. 60). With Low's (2011) methods, initially when starting the work of translating the joke one asks four questions, which are:

- (1) What is the work's genre/context/tone/situation/purpose?
- (2) Is the humor obscure/clumsy/complex/hilarious/offensive?
- (3) Is the humor language-specific or not?
- (4) Is the humor culture-specific or not? (Low 2011, p. 60)

This is similar to the considerations inherent in my own model and my categorization of "audience types" (discussed in greater detail later) in that one needs to understand the purpose of the joke, and who it is for in order to attempt a successful translation and failure to do so can result in a jarring shift of tone in the TL text, especially in multimodal texts where the visual "tone" needs to match the rest of the text. Then Low (2011) presents his models which are conceptualized as shapes that a translator follows in steps in order to reach a translation that is suitable for the text (see fig. 1). The simplest translations are represented as a square, where the punning word in the SL is also a relevant punning word in the TL, e.g.:

My accountant told me to invest in the food industry, so I put my money in stocks Min revisor sa åt mig att investera i livsmedelsindustrin, så jag satte mina pengar i fonder (my example)

Here the word "fond" means both stock (foodstuff) and "fund" like an "investment fund", similar to the two homonymic, i.e. pronounced and spelled the same, meanings of the English word "stock". Of course, one cannot always be so lucky to have the punning word be a homonymic with all the things that are relevant for the pun, so often one will have to resort to a bit of semantic side-stepping. Low (2011) presents us with one method for finding suitable generalizations by conceptualizing the process of translating the pun in steps along various shapes, the simplest of which is represented as a square (fig. 1), which he demonstrates using the French translation of the pun "If he writes in verse, take the inverse meaning" (Low 2011, p. 63)

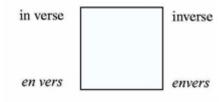


Fig. 1, Low's (2011) conceptualization of a direct translation of a pun

In examples of non-direct translation of a puns (fig. 2), we are presented with the translations of the puns "Life depends on the liver" (reference to the organ) and slightly vulgar "Bugger off for bugger all" and he describes the process of translating the second pun like so:

"Could one put that into French? Well, one half can be translated directly as Foutez le camp! and the other half as pour presque rien there is no pun there yet. But it takes only one small semantic leap from the idea of 'next to nothing' to the phrase Les prix sont fous (the prices are crazy), which puns perfectly with the singular of foutez." (Low 2011, p. 63)

Similar steps were taken when translating the pun "Life depends on the liver"

Life->Foie (Liver)->Foi (faith, related to life and vitality) (Low 2011, pp. 63-64)

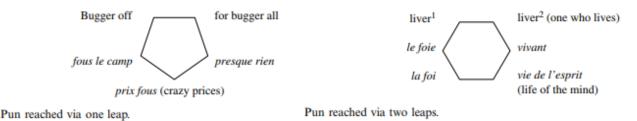


Fig. 2, Low's (2011) model for reaching suitable linguistic jokes in TL. Translations requiring more than these steps are represented as a circle. (ibid, p 65).

Before one can place an instance of humor in to the above model, one must first understand the elements of what makes the joke "work", and to do this, I look outside of the study of translating humor and to the work of Schäffner (2004) who wrote about the translation of metaphors, having this to say on their structure, using the expression "I gave vent to my anger"

"In cognitive linguistics, the term 'metaphor' is used to refer to this conceptual mapping (e.g., ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER),1 and the term 'metaphorical expression' is used to refer to an individual linguistic expression that is based on a conceptualization and thus sanctioned by a mapping (e.g., 'I gave vent to my anger'). Establishing the conceptualization on which a particular metaphorical expression is based is relevant to translation, too." Schäffner, 2004, p. 1248.

So in the same way Schäffner (2004) makes the function of the metaphor concrete, so too will I do with instances of humor (more on this in the methodology section). Of course, one will not always be able to substitute all parts of a pun, if that pun is part of a larger text. For example, maybe some elements of the pun reoccur later in a so-called "call-back", which

means specific elements of the joke must be maintained. It is possible in monomodal literary text that one will be able to change the call-back so that it matches the TL pun, but in cases of multimodal texts, where image goes along with the written text, this can be more problematic. An example is given in Zanettin's 2010 article "Humor in translated cartoons and comics" with the American comic "Peanuts". In the source text, there is a running gag where one of the characters holds an American Football for another of the characters to kick, only to pull it away in the last second, causing the kicking character to fall over. As American Football is not a part of the target audience for most translated text, in the German version, the image had been re-touched to feature a round ball. However, as the rules of football do not allow player to hold the ball in this manner, nor would anyone ever need to as a spherical ball does not need to be held up in order be kicked properly, the gag is rendered less effective (Zanettin 2010, p. 47). One of the more concrete investigations in to pun translatability comes from Delabastita (1996) who outlines nine ways a translator can deal with instances of wordplay

- **1.** Pun -> Pun
- 2. Pun -> Non-pun, both senses (all elements from wordplay preserved)
- **3.** Pun -> Non-pun, one sense (one element from wordplay preserved)
- **4.** Pun -> related rhetorical device. Replace pun with non-pun wordplay, e.g. rhyme
- 5. Pun (ST) -> Pun (TT), new pun in target text
- **6.** Pun -> Zero, i.e. Omission
- 7. Non-pun -> Pun, new puns elsewhere in text, compensating for another lost pun
- **8.** Zero -> Pun, totally new text added, mostly compensatory technique
- **9.** Editorial techniques, i.e. translator notes and the like.

These different tactics will become relevant in the methodology section because it allows us to categorize translations into discrete groups, allowing us to judge how successful the transfer from SL to TL has been, with tactic 1 being the most successful. Tactics listed by other authors (Kaindl 2004, Low 2010) are versions of this, featuring many of the same elements (replication, replacement etc.) and as such will not be listed in detail in this paper. Some of the tactics listed here I have deemed unacceptable for reasons I will outline in the next section. Though translating puns can be a fraught process, in the words of Delabastita (1997):

"We may not be able to control the potential ambiguities of language, but by studying all these factors and the interplay between them we might go a long way towards hypothesizing sensible generalizations about various possible textual strategies — individual ones or more collective ones — that exist by virtue of this openness or fluidity of meaning." Delabastita 1997, p. 8.

2.4 Maintaining an image

In translating word-play as it occurs in comic strips, one is further limited in the tactics one might employ, with Mayoral et al. (1988) discussed the translation of cartoons and comics within the framework of "constrained translation", and we can see this if we apply comic strips to Delabastita's (1996) tactics. I would argue that about half of the list becomes useless for word play in comic strips, as we cannot use tactic 6 (Pun->Zero, i.e. omission), because if the pun is the only instance of humor, and it is removed, one has effectively rendered the whole text pointless. You also cannot use tactic 7 (non-pun->pun), which is compensation for lost wordplay in other parts of the text, because there is no other text in which to place it. And even if one did find a way to place a pun in the second out of four panels, for example, that would render the last two panels of the comic somewhat redundant. Tactic 8, where a pun is added where there was none before, while not entirely unacceptable, runs in to not just issues of having to maintain text that matches the images, but depending on how much text you add, you might obscure something in the images once all the necessary text has been added. So translating comic strips is not only constrained by the length of the narrative structure, but also the actual size of the published medium itself. Tactic 9, editorial techniques and notes should be avoided because it changes the text from a performance of humor to an explanation of humor (Zanettin 2010, p. 42). While this may be acceptable for certain types of political cartoons (Zanettin 2010, p 42.) where the point of the text is to make a certain political point and/or statement, but for more strictly "joke texts" this takes away a lot of the humor, or as Low (2011, p. 59) put it: "If a joke is not translated as a joke, the translation is bad". Tactic five, where one comes up with a new pun in the TL, is possible, but difficult, as one would have to make up a new pun that still works with the images. Of course, one could re-touch the images, but as we discussed with the example of "Peanuts" earlier (Zanettin 2010, p. 47), this presents us with a whole different set of problems, ones which people trained in translating written texts might not be fully able to tackle. The importance of the images in translating comic strips is further asserted by Zanettin (2010, p. 40) where he states that the translation of cartoons and comics is maximally effective when the opposition between verbal and visual scripts is maintained across translations. In the same paper Zanettin (2010, p. 46) posits that when the humor is based on the mixing of the visual and the verbal, there can be three outcomes:

- 1. **Preservation:** The translation may be humorous by preserving the incongruity between visual and verbal, either maintaining or changing the images or the texts.
- 2. **Alteration:** Preserve the humor but change it from incongruity-resolution to non-sense humor (aka. non sequitur) or vice versa
- 3. **Omission.** (Zanttin 2010, p. 46)

For reasons already discussed, the third alternative is not possible for comic strips, and the other two are arranged hierarchically, with "preservation" being the ideal solution due to its maintaining the incongruity between written and visual texts, which as discussed earlier, is the maximally effective way to translate humor in comics and cartoons.

2.5 Who was that joke for?

Translating humor is not just an issue of exactly transferring the text from the SL to the TL, one must also remember that what people consider humorous varies across cultures. This is exemplified by an experiment performed in 1994 by Köhler and Ruch (Zanettin 2010, p. 39) where they submitted 8 "Far Side" cartoons (Short, usually one-panel, comics with (usually) text under the image) to 79 Germans who were then asked to rate the comics. The answers given lead to the conclusion that "Far Side" was a type of nonsense humor. This claim has been refuted by Paolillo (1998), stating that cultural components required to understand the joke may have been lost in translation, meaning that comic strips that would be perfectly understandable to an American audience is judged as being nonsensical by a German. When translating something humorous Gulas and Weinberger (2010) identifies three roles which exist in the delivery, or process, of humor.

Agent: Source of humor, i.e. the teller. Can be individual or group.

Object: "Victim", the entity at whose expense the humor is derived.

Audience: The people at whom the humor is directed. (Gulas and Weinberger 2010,

p. 17)

Whatever occupies each of these roles matters greatly in the reception of the humor. Take for example Robert Downey Jr.'s portrayal of an Australian actor wearing black-face (a type of theatrical make-up meant to mimic people of African descent, generally considered very offensive) in the motion picture "Tropic Thunder", and compare it to the minstrel shows from which the make-up originated. One earned Downey Jr. an academy award nomination while the other is held up as an example of a deeply problematic past regarding racial relations. This is because of who occupied the different roles. While both instances can be argued to have the same Agent, a person wearing black face, the object and the audience differs greatly. In the movie it is the wearer of the make-up which is meant to be ridiculed as an example of the vanity and cluelessness of a certain kind of movie star, and the portrayal is meant to be enjoyed by an audience who will agree with that view, while in the minstrel shows the object is a marginalized group, portrayed in broad stereotypical and racist strokes, meant to be enjoyed by an audience who hold those generalizations as true. This means that when translating instances of humor, one must be cognizant of these roles in the source text to avoid a change in perception of the humorous instance. Aleksandrova (2012, p. 147) refers to the "subject" of the joke as the "derided object" and then goes on to say that a more successful translation is one that attempts to maintain the elements of a pun from SL to TL, even if the pun has been altered somewhat.

2.5.1 What's Grice got to do with it?

Relevant to this is also Grice's Maxims (1975) which outlines four cases (or maxims) of "conversational implicatures", two of which I shall describe here, as well as briefly explain how I think they fit in to the act of telling jokes, specifically as it relates to a jokes intended audience, and in some cases, how they do not. The two maxims that are left out are "The Maxim of quality" (Grice 1975, p. 46), as it does not apply to the telling of inherently untrue stories, and the "Maxim of manner" (Grice 1975, p. 46), as flouting this maxim is a common technique for creating humor and tension while telling jokes. The two maxims we will be looking closer at here are:

Maxim of quantity:

- Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.

- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (Grice 1975, p. 45)

This maxim, especially the second sub-maxim, applies to how one should structure the set-up of a joke. In order to make sure that a punchline is unexpected or hard to predict, one must choose what details to include and omit. The set-up must include enough information for the punchline to make sense and leave enough out that it is still surprising. Consider the following exaggerated example:

Set-up: Why didn't the skeleton go to the party with nobody?

Punchline: Because they had no body to go with!

In using the punning word from the punchline in the set-up, one has essentially provided the audience with a so-called spoiler as to what the punchline is going to be, which would be considered flouting of this principle, the implications of which I will be discussing later.

Maxim of relation:

This is rather simply stated as "Be relevant" (Grice 1975, p. 46) and is also connected to how one delivers a joke. There is an expectation that when one is listening to a joke, details that one is informed about in the set-up will somehow be relevant in understanding the punchline, which means that one shouldn't include details that are irrelevant. Of course, there are jokes that are outliers, where the rambling nature of the story is part of the joke, but even for these exceptional cases the winding story is relevant to that specific type of joke.

How this all relates to translating humor is that all the things that I discussed above, providing only relevant information while maintaining the surprise of the punchline, if it is done skillfully in the ST, it also has to be done skillfully in the TT.

3 Method

3.1 Selecting funny

For this paper I will be working with comic strips which I have chosen on the basis that they contain word-play, according to the definitions set out above (script opposition relying on some kind of linguistic ambiguity), and the word-play should in some way rely on a visual verbal blend. Then I will be analyzing translations that I make of those comics. I will be translating from English to Swedish, two languages that I speak natively, with additional examples in Spanish and Norwegian, for which I will receive help from native speakers, meaning that I will hopefully arrive at functional translations, though it is my hope that a more qualified translator will eventually test the results in this paper. Selected comics vary in style, from vulgar to more benign, so that every audience type (see below) is represented, as audience type is of particular importance for this paper.

3.2 Breaking down "funny"

Selected comic strips will be analyzed according to several parameters. They will be placed into an audience type according to my own classification, placed in Delabastita's (1996) categories with a discussion on the choice, broken down according to Schäffner's (2003) methodology for metaphors, with some of my own modifications. These modifications include separating the humor into its constituent parts outlined above, i.e. set-up, subversion and punchline. The punchline will also have added brackets around the elements of the text which create the pun, in other words, the key components of the script opposition which creates the humor. There will be some discussion of each translation using Low's (2011) model with some motivation for certain tactics, with some discussion motivating choices made in the translation. With the selected comic strips representing the different audience types. Then we will see what, if any pattern can be found in the methods used to successfully translate the wordplay in the comic strips. When translating wordplay, firstly one should attempt to make a pun keeping every element from the SL. This is even more true for wordplay in comic strips, as an ideally transferred pun will not generate a mismatch between the words and the images. If one cannot do that, one can generalize the pun, and try again.

However, generalization should never come at the expense of the interplay between the visual and the textual, or one risks changing the nature of the comic strip, just like in the experiment with the "Far Side" comic strips (Zanettin 2010, p. 39). If it becomes clear that an ideal transfer is not possible one should move from a micro-analytic approach, keeping the source text as intact as possible and maintaining all elements from the ST, to a macro-analytic approach, maintaining an "effect" in the target audience at the expense of some of the ST being lost in the transfer (Adamczyk 2014, p. 327). In scenarios like the ones described earlier in this section, where one is not be able to freely generalize as the wordplay is reliant on something in the panels of the comic, which remains in both ST and TT, I will use the term "variance limitation" to classify these elements which must be transferred. The term "variance limitation" is a term I've adapted from Popovič (1976) who labeled a translations lowest common denominator (my term) as its "invariable core" which also features in Dorothea Hygrell's (1997) dissertation "Att översätta komik" (Translating Comedy). To find out what a comic strips variance limitation is we will first break down the structure of the humorous instance, which I will do with my version of Schäffner's (2003) methodology for breaking down metaphors, that I have modified for use joke-like texts. Using a conventional setup/punchline type joke, I will demonstrate the method with the following example:

What do you call a fake noodle? An impasta!

This joke breaks down thusly:

name of fake noodle? -SUBVERSION- [impostor+pasta]

If we compare this breakdown to the one used by Schäffner (2004) we can see how a joke differs in structure to a metaphor. In making the meaning of a metaphor concrete Schäffner (2004) simply makes a sentence in which the elements of the metaphors are spelled out obviously in a single sentence, whereas my adapted version needs to take into account the various constituent parts of a joke. On the left side of the subversion are all the constituents of the set-up, every part of what is needed for the punchline to work, i.e. it must be a question about the name of a fake noodle, and on the left are the elements of the punchline. The plus sign indicates what two or more elements are combined in wordplay, which may include visual elements from the panel. The goal is to always achieve "preservation" according to Zanettin's (2010, p. 46) three options, while providing the translator with a useful way to

abstract the elements of the humor and generalize within the variance limitation of the text. Any elements which feature in the punchline but are not part of the punning elements of the text will be written outside of the brackets.

3.3 Know your audience

Every joke has an intended audience, be it an inside joke between two friends or a joke told by a comedian to a literal audience of thousands, or a short comic with a funny punchline, and the type of joke one tells depends on who the joke-teller thinks the audience is and what they will find amusing. The following categorizations have been formulated by me in an attempt to make more concrete the somewhat vague references to target audience in some of the literature, e.g. Nida's "receptors" (1959) or Gulas and Weinberger's (2010, p. 17) "Audience". In my categories I make a distinction between general and specific audience, similar to the difference between a syntagmatic (everything needed to understand joke is in the set-up) and paradigmatic pun (requires some outside knowledge to understand punchline) (Ritchie 2010, p. 43). This is not arranged hierarchically, and translations of jokes should be in the same audience type in the SL as in the TL.

(1) General audience, always appropriate (**GA.AA**): Uncontroversial jokes that are likely to be understood by anyone who encounters it.

Example: What did one ocean say to the other? Nothing, it waved.

(2) General audience, sometimes inappropriate (**GA.SI**): Jokes that are likely to be understood by a general audience but contain some elements which make them inappropriate in some cases, due to featuring vulgar or controversial topics.

Example: What is the height of trust? Two cannibals 69'ing each other.

(3) Specific audience, always appropriate (**SA.AA**): Jokes that would, without additional explanation, likely not be understood by a general audience, due to the inclusion of some specialized element. This includes inside jokes among friends and peer-groups.

Example: What airline do electron shells fly with? KLM!

(4) Specific audience, sometimes inappropriate (**SA.SI**): Same kind of specialized joke as **SA.AA** but dealing with potentially taboo themes in addition to the specific ones required to understand the joke.

Example: How do you know a professor of linguistic typology is walking a dog? He/She/It hits the dog.

These categories are an attempt to classify texts based on who their intended audience is, something which the literature clearly thinks matters, from the early days of translation theory with Nida's (1959) "receptors", to the more recent "Roles" proposed by Gulas & Weinberger (2010, p. 17), to three out of the four questions Low (2011, p. 60) states a translator should ask themselves relating to the what kind of humor it is and who the intended audience is. While audience has been written about, my categories group the audience types not just by the likelihood that a given group will be able to understand the humor, but also by what their likely attitude will be, based on the content of the humorous instance. This lets us view the TT according to the same measure and will give us some insight in to how we arrived at the most functional translation. My types are also useful in that it makes it possible to answer three polar question (yes/no questions) that can be asked about any instance of humor:

Was that funny? Was that Appropriate? Did the audience "get it"?

While it would be difficult task, one well beyond this paper, to create an objective system to say whether something is funny, my audience types handily answer two of the above questions, which is how they are such a useful tool in analyzing the success of the translations. The role of the content of jokes is mentioned very briefly by Zanttin (2010, p. 49) in a footnote at the end of the text where he mentions "sexual humor" as category of humor which cuts across "incongruity resolution" type humor and "nonsense" type humor and he seems to disregard this as a category for the very reason I hold it as important, the fact that it is strictly related to content rather than humor, which this paper will attempt to demonstrate matters greatly to effective translation. The importance of content is more than just the simple fact of "content" being the actual text that is translated, but it also has a role to play in determining the roles set out by Gulas and Weinberger (2010), which one must consider in translating humor, and as I will show in the next section, affects how one is to approach the translation and what tactics one can employ.

4 Results

In the following section I will present my translations and their analysis according to what I outlined above. I will begin with an example of what Low (2011) called a direct translation and then will follow comic strips from each of the above audience categories.

4.1 Direct translation

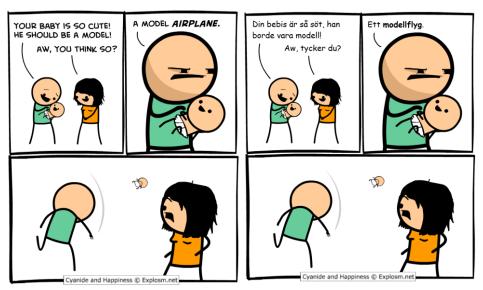


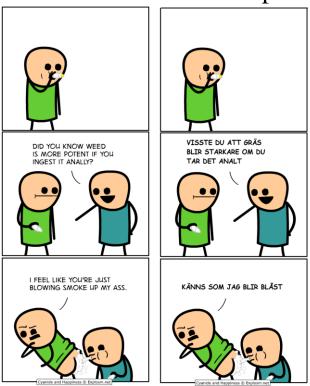
Fig. 3, example of a direct translation. McElfatrick, D. (2019)

baby is cute, should be model -SUBVERSION- [model airplane+model] throw baby

Here we have what Low (2011) considered the simplest form of translation, which is represented as a square where the punning element from the ST also functions as a punning element in the target text. Here we see clearly the value of "Preservation" (Zanettin 2010, p. 46) of visual and literal incongruity resolution discussed by Zanettin (2010). If one were to have translated the comic in such a way that the "airplane", or more generally "flying", element from the second panel was lost, only maintaining some wordplay on "model", the last panel would serve no purpose other than a nonsensical addition to a partially resolved pun, changing the ST from a traditional play on words in to a TT which could at best be called a "non-sequitur". In Delabastita's (1996) list of tactics this would be a simple and straightforward Pun->Pun. In my audience type categorization this would be a GA.SI type

joke, where anyone could reasonably be expected to understand what is meant to be funny, but some may not appreciate it all the same.

4.2 GA.SI with multi step transfer



weed stronger anally
-SUBVERSION[blowing+fooled in some way+ass]

Fig. 4 GA.SI with multi step transfer. DenBleyker (2019)

In this example, we see more clearly the importance of working a translation around the visual, as any translation which does not, in some way, reference the situation in the last panel, will render the last panel incomprehensible. This means that we can safely say the variance limitation on the translation is set by visual/textual interplay. In the source text the final panel combines three elements for the word play. Firstly, the expression "to blow smoke up someone's ass" means to trick or deceive them in some way, in this instance the "deception" lies in the effectiveness of taking weed anally. Secondly, the literal meaning of the metaphoric expression is being acted out in the last panel, meaning that the literal meaning of the expression is at the same time demonstrating its metaphoric meaning, which all works with the third element of the wordplay, the visual. In the translation, the expression has been generalized somewhat, losing the "ass" element from the ST, giving us a two-step translation where "blowing smoke up one's ass" = deception in the ST, which in the TT is represented

with the expression "blåst", from the verb "att blåsa någon", lit. "to blow someone" which is used as an expression for deceiving someone. Though we lose one element from the ST pun, I would argue that it was the least important textual part, as the "ass" part is clearly evident from the image, while the "blowing smoke" is the thing that needs to be contextualized with the rest of the text. Interestingly, in this translation, it seems we have added a pun element which was not in the ST. In the Swedish version, the verb "att blåsa" is used, a verb which implies some willful deception for the gain of another, in this case, the character in the blue shirt, who now gets to smoke the weed belonging to the character in a green shirt, with the pretense of helping to receive a more potent dose. So in a way, according to Delabastita's (1996) tactics, this translation could be analyzed as belonging to tactic 1, Pun -> Pun, or tactic 5, Pun (ST)->Pun (TT). The joke is, like the other one, GA.SI, and possibly a little more taboo for a Swedish audience, considering the different attitudes to recreational cannabis consumption across cultures.

4.2.1 GA.SI English -> Swedish and Norwegian

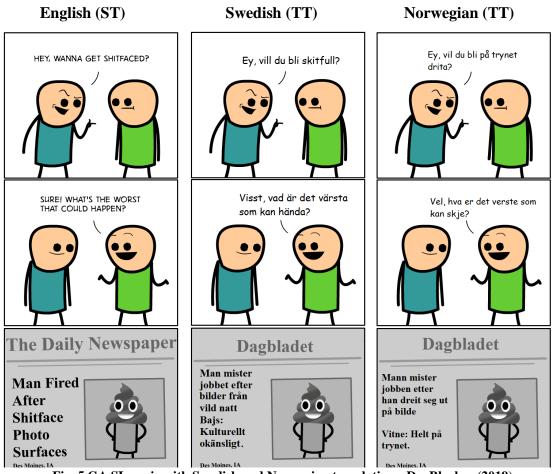
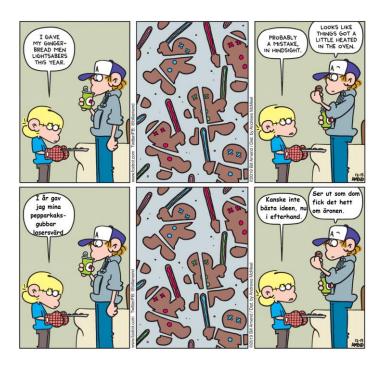


Fig. 5 GA.SI comic with Swedish and Norwegian translations. DenBleyker (2019)

Here we see that when dealing with instances of non-literal language such as metaphor and idiomatic expressions, one must also work within the constraints of the TL inventory of such expressions. In the ST the joke relies on the expression "shitfaced" meaning "very drunk" and puns that with the term "blackface", which I described earlier in the paper as a racially insensitive type of stage make-up. The variance limitation on this comic is set by the last panel, where the persons face has been replaced by what appears to be a pile of excrement, and this has to, for some reason, be noteworthy enough to end up on the front page of a newspaper. In the Swedish translation we see an example of tactic 1, pun->pun, in that "shitfaced" has been translated in to "skitfull" (lit. "shit drunk"). However, where the ST puns on both the "shitface/blackface" connection as well as with the image in the newspaper with the "shit element", in the Swedish translation the blackface pun has been removed, and that element of the of the pun is instead made explicit using surreal elements in the newspaper headlines, which is not out of place next to an image of a man with a literal shit face. So this means that in addition to the pun->pun in the Swedish texts we also have an example of tactic 3, which is "pun->non-pun, one sense". The sense that has been transferred is the supposedly offensive nature of the picture seen in the newspaper, but where this is used to make a pun in the ST, in the TT it is made explicit. One of the reasons that we had to change the punning elements in the TT is that there is no commonly used expression for "drunk" in Swedish which uses the word "face", or some synonym, in some way. This is not a problem in Norwegian, where the expression "på trynet drita" (lit. "on the face shitted", with "shitted" referring to a state of strong drunkenness). In this case, we use two meaning for both parts of "på trynet drita". "Drita" can also be used in the expression "Drita seg ut" (lit. "to shit oneself out") which refers to someone making a fool of themselves in some way. And the expression "Helt på trynet" (lit. "Completely on the face") can refer to a situation which has in some way gone wrong. So, in this, we have created a two-step pun, just like in the ST, where both "shit" and "face" are elements of the texts which are used to create puns, but the translation does not reference blackface in some way, which is contrasted against the Swedish version, where the "Blackface" element has in some way been preserved while the "face" aspect of the TT pun has been lost. This is not to say that they both are not perfectly serviceable translations, they just worked within a different non-literal space, the implications of which will be discussed further in the discussion section.

4.3 GA.AA



Lightsaber wielding
gingerbread men destroyed
-SUBVERSION[heat+fighting]

Fig. 6 GA.AA. Amend (2019).

In the SL, this is a GA.AA joke, and because of the prevalence of American cinema in Sweden, meaning one can reasonably assume a person will have at least heard of a lightsaber and its Swedish translation ("Lasersvärd" lit. laser sword), we can say that the Swedish translation belongs in the same group. Of course, translators will have to make judgements on what cultural references will and will not be understood by a target audience. If "lightsaber" is not a widely understood reference one can simply replace it with a more generalized weapon. This would work particularly well in this comic, as the pun that serves as a punchline does not actually reference the lightsabers directly, but rather relies on the heat produced by an oven as a metaphoric vehicle for violence, in a very similar way to the example given from Schäffner's (2004, p. 1248) article. Of course, there will be some loss in the visual and textual interplay as the weapons the gingerbread men are seen holding are all colored like lightsabers, but if one were to simply translate it into "brightly colored batons" or something similar, the visual and textual interplay remains intact, if a bit different from the ST. The translation above is a Pun -> Pun in Delabastitas (1996) classification, which is possible due to both the SL and the TL having metaphors about violence relating to heat. If a TL does not have metaphors for violence using the same vehicle, then one will have to use whichever metaphor one can

reasonably apply to destroyed, weapons wielding gingerbread men, making that translation Pun (ST) -> Pun (TT). This the variance limitation of this translation, like the last one, is created by the images, as any translation would in some way have to involve the destroyed gingerbread men seen in the second panel.

4.3.1 GA.AA English->Spanish

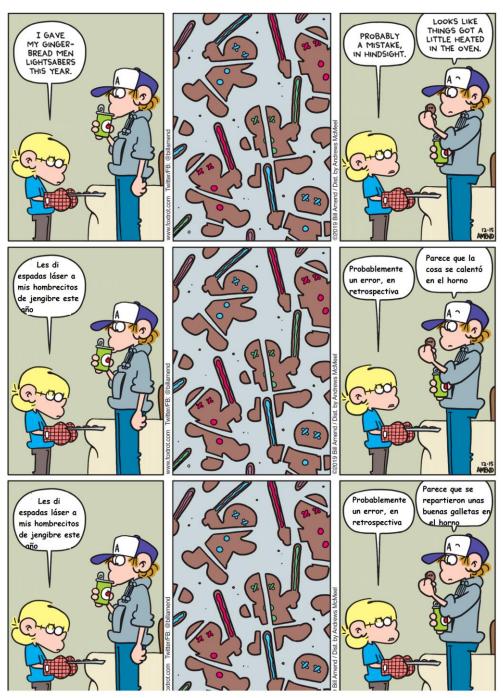


Fig. 7 GA.AA from English to Spanish, two versions. Amend (2019)

Punchline 1

parec-e que la cosa se calent-ó en el horno seem-3s.PRES that DEF.FEM thing 3P.REFL heat-3s.PST in DEF.MASC oven It seems that thing got heated in the oven

Punchline 2

parec-e que se repart-ieron un-as buen-as galleta-s
seem-3s.PRES that 3P.REFL give-3p.PST some-FEM.PL good-FEM.PL cookie-PL
en el horno
in DEF.MASC oven

It seems they gave each other some cookies in the oven

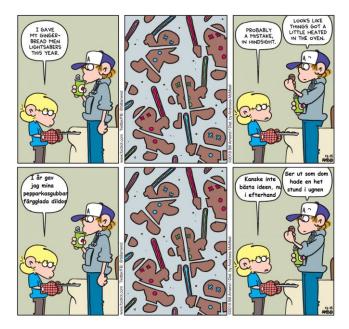
Punchline 1: Same breakdown as English translation in previous section

Punchline 2: Lightsaber wielding gingerbread men destroyed -SUBVERSION-

[Giving cookies+hitting eachother]

On first glance the second one does not seem to make a whole lot of sense, until you learn of the Spanish expression "Te voy a dar una galleta" (lit. "I am going to give you a cookie") which is a colloquial way to threaten to hit someone so in this way we see what I discussed in the section above, about how one will have to use alternative expressions if one cannot find a direct equivalence in the TL. In this case, however, there is a direct transfer as "things got heated" is an expression in Spanish as well so it might seem like this would be the obvious choice for a translation. However, the two native speakers who helped me with the translation both said that the second one, which featured the cookie wordplay, was the better pun, and if the goal is to make the funniest translation that still operates within the variance limitation of the ST, the second translation is a viable option. Though the texts, without the images, would seem very different if one wrote them out as pure textual jokes, in their context they are made similar.

4.3.2 Flouting Audience Types: GA.AA in to GA.SI



Joke about lightsabers and ovens
into
Joke about dildos and ovens

Fig. 8 Example of bad translation. Amend (2019)

In section 4.3 I briefly mentioned a situation where "lightsabers" were not a commonly understood reference and one would have to substitute it with something more commonly known in the target culture. In this section we see a somewhat exaggerated example of this process done poorly, with regards to the audience type. In this example the ST is a relatively innocent joke about lightsaber wielding gingerbread men, whereas in the translation, the brightly colored sticks are no longer lightsabers, but dildos. In doing this change, we have changed who the intended audience is from "people who enjoy corny puns about ovens and lightsabers" to "people who enjoy child characters making corny puns about dildos and ovens". While the text and images still work together this change in themes have made the TT a significantly different text. If we view this change through the view of the Gricean maxim's (1975) we could say this type of mistranslation would fall under the maxims of Quantity and Relation. The maxim of quantity is divided in to two submaxims:

- 1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
- 2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (Grice 1975, p. 45)

While it is relatively simple to connect the first of these submaxims to the set-up of a joke, for our purposes we will be looking at the second of these submaxims, as I would say that the flouting of audience type is related to this principle. Flouting audience type in the manner shown above is tantamount to adding something unnecessarily in order to make

something vulgar that was not, meaning one has needlessly strayed from the ST. As far as The Maxim of Relation (Grice 1975, p. 46) is concerned, it is not hard to see how this translation flouts this. There was nothing sexual about the ST, meaning that any sexual additions would be irrelevant to the text, and only serve to make the translators job easier at the expense of the quality of translation.

4.4 **SA.SI**

put on condom before sex+commutative? -SUBVERSION-

[commutative processes can happen in any order+matematician+impregnation]

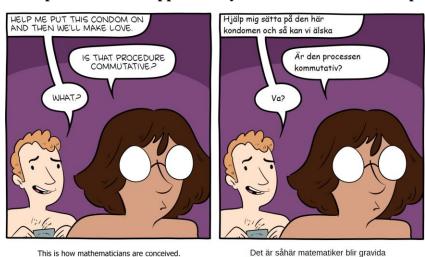


Fig. 9 Example of SA.SI type comic strip. Wienersmith (2019).

Here we see an example of highly specialized sexual wordplay, which places this comic in the SA.SI category. Due to the specialized vocabulary used, which is shared across languages, this is once again a one step process, or as Low (2011) would visualize it, a square. This is also aided by the fact that the wordplay relies on the meaning of the word being generalized, rather than some aspect of its pronunciation or spelling. According to Delabastita this is a Pun -> Pun. The visual is, of course, still relevant, and limits the translation to being about two undressed people, one of whom is holding what is quite clearly a condom wrapper, meaning that any translation would have to reference the sexual situation in order to be complete. However, the sex is not actually the punning element, it is merely used as a vulgar vehicle for the mathematical pun, meaning that any translator must use the sexual situation as a set-up, and the mathematical pun as the punch-line, as it is in the ST. This means that in a situation

where such a direct transfer is not possible, the variance limitation is set by the sexual nature, which places it in the "Sometimes inappropriate" category, which is then even further restrained by the math joke, which is what places it in the "Specific Audience" category, meaning that the audience type has taken precedence over strictly maintaining the ST as it is transferred in to a TL.

4.5 SA.AA

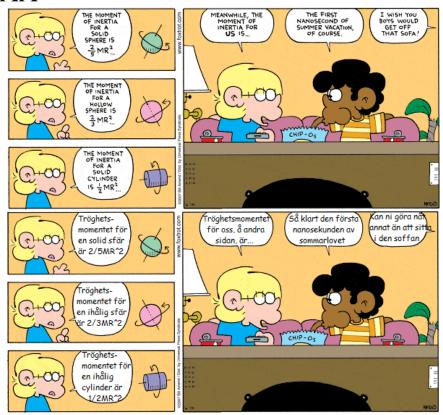


Fig. 10 SA.AA. Amend (2007).

amount of energy required to set object in motion -SUBVERSION-

[moment summer starts+moment of inertia+inertia]

This joke, for a specific audience featuring no offensive or vulgar elements, has been transferred as a Pun->Pun using the meaning of inertia, both as it functions in the physical concept of "moment of inertia" and its lay-meaning "a tendency to do nothing or remain unchanged". The variance limitation here is set by the visual representation of bodies in

motion that can be seen in the first three panels, meaning that any translation would need to feature the concept of "bodies in motion" in some way. Like in the last example, the specificity of the reference means that the concept in the TL is realized in much the same way, though with slightly different words. "Moment of inertia" in Swedish is "Tröghetsmoment" (lit. moment of slowness/sluggishness), so while the individual words that make up the pun, "inertia" and "tröghet", are not exactly the same, they refer broadly to the same concept. So while one could say that this translation is in more than one steps, according to Low (2011), if one only focuses on the actual words that make up the pun, I would say that the pun, as a reference to a concept (moment of inertia+the moment one starts to act slow and/or sluggish) it is transferred in one step. This means that the concepts which the wordplay deals with, the concepts which make it an SA.AA type joke superseded the textual in how the transfer from ST to TT should be analyzed. But it is not always the case that a concept can be so easily transferred from SL to TL, even if it does refer to a specific concept, which is something we will explore in my next example

4.6 SA.AA with multi-step transfer

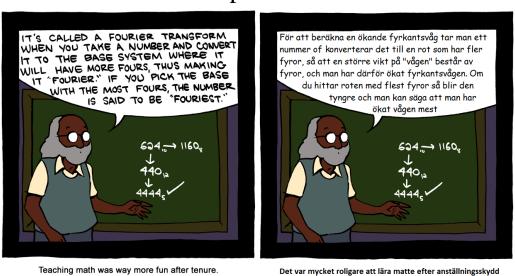


Fig. 11 SA.AA with multi step transfer. Wienersmith (2013).

math professor teaching about fourier transform -SUBVERSION-

[fourier+more fours] teaching math incorrectly because of tenure

This example, like the last one, is highly niched, and should be translated as such. However, unlike the previous example, punning elements cannot be directly transferred as it relies on a more traditional form of word play, namely the way in which "fourier" sounds like an adjective for something containing fours in the comparative form (aka. The "second" level of adjective comparisons such as "larger" in the set large, larger, largest). This, combined with the fact that the blackboard seen in the panel shows a set of numbers containing increasingly more fours, and the text under the panel, means that the variance limitation is set as a joke about math being taught incorrectly featuring the number four heavily. For my translation I wanted the mathematical concept used to make the pun to be as closely related to fourier transform as possible, thereby sticking as close to the ST as possible. In this case however, the very thing that let us transfer the previous two examples so easily, the tendency for highly specialized vocabulary be very similar across languages, is what makes this translation more difficult. Fourier transform in Swedish is "Fouriertransform" but four is "fyra" and the comparative suffix for Swedish adjectives is different (törstig, törstig-are, törstig-ast, lit. "thirsty, thirstier, thirstiest"), which makes the direct transfer of the pun impossible. This forced me to generalize the mathematical concepts in the following manner:

Fouriertransform->Fourierserie->Fyrkantsvåg

A fourier series is a concept to which fourier transform is related in a hyponymic way, and square wave (fyrkantsvåg in Swedish) is similarly subset to fourier series. I then used the homonymic meaning of the Swedish word våg (wave and scale (weight measuring device)) to conceptualize the increase in the amount of fours as a weight on set of scales that increased. Because of the punning word changing from "four" to "våg" (scale) this translation would be a Pun (ST)->Pun (TT) according to Delabastita's (1996) tactics. This type semantic sidestepping is what Low (2011) conceptualizes in his shapes, and for this translation I would put it in to the following circle:

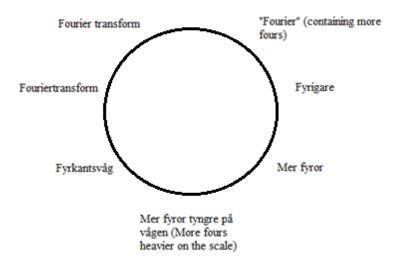


Fig. 12 Translation of comic visualized according to Low's (2011) model.

If we follow the steps taken down each side, we see the side-stepping mentioned above. On one side is the part of the pun that relies on the mathematical concept of "Fourier transform" and on the other side is the part that relies on "Fourier" being used as an adjective. We see each side generalized until we reach two concepts that contains elements that can be used to make a pun, but one more step is needed to "blend" those concepts in to a pun that is actually functional, hence the bottom step where both sides merge. I would argue that this is a functional translation because while the ST may refer to "Fourier transform", the visual and textual interplay does not actually require this specific concept to make a pun, based on the variance limitation created by the image and the specific audience. One of the incongruities creating the script opposition in the text is the fact that the numbers seen on the blackboard have nothing to do with fourier transform and the whole point of the joke is that the professor is not taking his job seriously and would rather make a stupid pun than teach actual mathematics, and you as an audience is expected to know that, as it is never explicitly stated that there is anything wrong with the math, or that the number on the blackboard do not in fact have anything to do with fourier transform, This means that, while one should stick to the ST as closely as possible, a math pun where the humor is derived from the amount of fours increasing is acceptable, even if it has nothing to do with fourier transform. Though one should not generalize the math so much that the incorrect math becomes apparent to almost anyone, as this is a SA.AA type of joke, meaning that the people who derive the most humor out of the original comic are the ones that can correctly identify the disconnect between what

the professor says and the math on the blackboard. Furthermore, since the incorrectness of the math is one of the things that create the script opposition, which is essential to the text as a humorous one, the transfer of that incongruity means that a translation which maintains this will be more successful than one which does not. This means that once again the audience type plays an integral role in judging the effectiveness of the translation, even when punning elements cannot be transferred as directly as in examples 3 and 4.

4.7 Summary

As we see in the above examples, when one works with such heavily constrained texts as comic strips the process of translation is oftentimes not straight forward, and one must employ some kind of work-arounds to arrive at a successful translation, and while the visual and verbal blend plays an important part in what is considered "successful", audience types can play just as big a part in judging success, which means that a translation which has technically maintained a visual verbal blend can still be considered "bad" if audience type is not maintained.

5 Discussion

The Variance limitations placed in translating wordplay in comic strips is usually dictated by the visual, as demonstrated in examples one and two, but it becomes less important the more niche the audience type becomes. To paraphrase Low (2011), if a dirty joke for engineers is not translated as a dirty joke for engineers, it is a bad translation. This is aided by the fact that many specialized fields share vocabulary across languages, meaning that finding new words in the TL that one can create a relevant pun for in many cases becomes a moot point, though it is not a fact you can rely on as a translator, as demonstrated by the fourier transform comic, and it is almost certain that one will come across a situation where a niche joke does not use easily transferable vocabulary. While the audience types are not organized hierarchically (their appropriateness for the TT is completely determined by the ST) they do appear to affect variance limitation in the following way, with the "more constraining" types being more likely to take a greater importance in the effectiveness of the translation compared to the visual/textual interplay.

Less constraining

General audience

Always appropriate

More constraining

Specific audience

Sometimes inappropriate

It is important to note here that "more constraining" does not necessarily mean that the translation will be more difficult or take more semantic sidestepping to arrive at, merely that the range of acceptable translations have narrowed due to the specificity of the references featured in the ST. In the example with the Spanish and Norwegian translations we see how two dissimilar texts are made similar by their interplay with visual. It seems obvious that translation problems created by the use of non-literal language in the ST should be solved using non-literal language in TT, but the different inventories of non-literal language across linguistic boundaries means that the same "problem text" will potentially be solved very differently depending on the TL. This shows us that measuring the success of a translation by the strict transference of linguistic material is a woefully inadequate method to measure the success of translated wordplay in comic strip, and other metrics should be used, with my audience types, I would argue, being one of them. This is claim is also strengthened in section 4.3.2 where I show that a translation which moves across the audience types is a kind of translation equivalent of flouting conversational implicatures (Grice 1975). Though I would say that this effect is more noticeable when you go from GA and AA to SA or SI types, as it only takes one vulgar instance for a whole text to be considered vulgar, whereas already vulgar texts will always feature some non-vulgar elements. This means that while in a way the SA and SI types are more constrained, AA is uniquely constrained in that one cannot use vulgarity in its translation, whereas sometimes, non-vulgarity can be a suitable (or only possible) translation for a mildly vulgar text.

6 Conclusions

In this paper I set out to investigate the role audience type plays in the translating wordplay in comic-strips and while it is true that the interplay between visual and textual does put limitations on the possible translations of comic strips, the content and the intended audience sometimes supersedes this. This means that when judging the success of translated wordplay in comic strips, in addition to the functional interplay between visual and textual, translators should include audience types as a metric for success. The next step would be to test this

model of categorizing audience types on word play and humor generally, in the context of larger texts. This could be relevant because though I have shown that audience type constrains translation in some way, it may be the case that in texts where translation is less constrained it becomes less important, as tactics to work around the problem, such as omission and replacement become possible that were not in the case of comic strips. It would also be relevant to apply it to other instances of non-literal translation, such as metaphors and localized/specialized vulgarity.

6.1 Further research

The next step would be to test this model of categorizing audience types on word play and humor generally, in the context of larger texts. This could be relevant because though I have shown that audience type constrains translation in some way, it may be the case that in texts where translation is less constrained it becomes less important, as tactics to work around the problem, such as omission and replacement become possible that were not in the case of comic strips. It would also be relevant to apply it to other instances of non-literal translation, such as metaphors and localized/specialized vulgarity. And if I may think well ahead of myself, if we ever hope to use machine translation effectively on non-literal language then we much find a way to quantify non-linguistic elements in the texts, and using variance limitations and audience types seems like viable candidates.

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