Book review

Chiaro, D. (ed). (2010). *Translation, Humour and the Media, Volume 2*. **London and New York: Continuum. 259 pp.**

Following Volume 1 (*Translation, Humour and Literature*) which mainly deals with humour translation in ancient and modern literary works (e.g. transferring Greek comedy into the Roman culture, translating James Joyce's wordplay, etc.), Volume 2 concentrates on *Translation, Humour and The Media*. The term *media* here is used as an umbrella term for advertising, cartoons and audiovisual material at large (e.g. TV and cinema productions, video games). Chiaro's (2010) introduction continues her long-lasting work on Verbally Expressed Humour (VEH, cf. for example Chiaro 2004, 2006) by discussing in particular the quality of translated humour, which is also one of the central themes in this book. To this end, she mentions the Italian tendency to revert to "creative dubbing" (cf. La Polla 1994), especially when dealing with culture-specific humour in sitcoms (e.g. in *The Nanny* - USA, CBS, 1993-1999 - where the Jewish Newyorkese main character becomes a girl of southern Italian origins in its dubbed counterpart). Chiaro (pp. 6-7) also lists other techniques (i.e. retaining, [partly] replacing the humorous reference, or omitting it altogether), but she does not mention a valuable although less applied alternative. Dore (2010) demonstrates that translators can opt for replacing the unknown reference in the target culture with another that is still derived from the source culture but is also familiar to the target audience. In general, these are examples of functional translation that seek to compensate for the loss in perfect humour equivalence.

Most papers in this volume are devoted to the analysis of dubbed and/or subtitles material, which are the most widespread modes of Audiovisual Translation (AVT). Yet, some contributors concentrate on the translation of humour in other types of multimodal texts. For instance, Gulas & Weinberger's "That's not funny here: Humorous advertising across boundaries" focus on advertising and debate the many factors (or "boundaries" in their terminology, e.g. ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) influencing humour production and appreciation in both the source and target culture. They show that humour production in advertising is strongly influenced by gender and cultural issues and agents often try to avoid controversial, yet humorous topics (cf. the *Absolut* ad in Gulas & Weinberger pp. 24-28). Hence, Gulas & Weinberger conclude that humour in advertising travels or gets stuck in mental traffic jams because of such factors rather than because of their linguistic specificity. Zanettin's "Humour in translated cartoons and comics" instead provides a thought provoking discussion on the applicability of Attardo's (Attardo & Raskin 1991; Attardo 1994) *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (GTVH) to these types of humorous texts and, most importantly, to their translation (see also Dore 2008 for similar considerations on adapting GTVH to different types of texts). Zanettin argues that humour in cartoons and comics may not travel well because of the lack of the original cultural knowledge in the target culture. Unfortunately, Zanettin's contribution falls short in discussing first hand

examples and prefers providing a full account on the literature dealing with the analysis and translation in comics, books and strips. Zanettin's work certainly opens up to further research regarding these issues.

Antonini's "And the Oscar goes to...: A study of the simultaneous interpretation of humour at the Academy Awards Ceremony" starts the series of works on AVT. She focuses on the appreciation of humour by a sample of Italian respondents who have been asked to rate the work of the media interpreter(s) for three Academy Awards Ceremonies. The experiment demonstrates that the appreciation of the TT was hindered by the presence of US culture-specific references and wordplays that the interpreter could only partly transfer across into the target language. It is interesting to note how this process has led the interpreter to change the butt of the joke (or *target* according to Attardo's Knowledge Resources; see Attardo: 1994) in the TT. It could be interesting to see if and how statistically relevant this finding is within source and target datasets.

As clearly stated on the title, O'Hagan's "Japanese TV entertainment: Framing humour with open caption telop" deals with the peculiarities of intralingual subtitling (telop) used particularly, but not exclusively, in Japanese TV game shows. This AVT mode aims to cater for both hearing and hearing impaired viewers. As O'Hagan explains, this open caption tepol (OTC) methodology seems to be used to enhance the potential humour of the verbal and visual texts, as much as canned laughter tries to do in US TV comedy shows. Although acknowledging their informative and useful function, O'Hagan points out the OTC's tendency to deprive the audience of their personal interpretation. This neglected yet interesting AVT mode surely deserves further research from scholars in those Asian countries where it is used.

Mangiron's "The Importance of *Not* Being Earnest: Translating humour in video games" shows how dubbing and subtitling have been used in translating the Japanese best-selling role-play game series *Final Fantasy*. The functional scope of the humour embedded in the original STs (i.e. entertaining the player, supporting a character's idiosyncrasies, etc.) was retained and sometimes enhanced in the TTs. The level of creativity displayed and asked of translators for localisation purposes surely set video game translation apart from other AVT material that are often called for (perfect) equivalence. As Mangiron nicely puts it: "Game localisation is not about a sacred ST and unavoidable loss. Game localisation is all about a maleable [sic.] and dynamic ST and a meaningful gain" (p. 104).

Wai-Ping's "Translating audiovisual humour: A Hong Kong case study" starts by questioning the common assumption that dubbing leads to the domestication of the TT (and therefore to ideological control) whereas subtitling lends itself to its foreignisation. By means of a wealth of examples, Wai-Ping shows how humour translation in both subtitling and dubbing can enhance cultural identity and power relations in the target audience (in this case, the Hong Kong population) by subverting set rules about the use of language (i.e. Standard Chinese as a high variety for highbrow topics versus Cantonese as a low variety for ludicrous subjects). This thought-provoking and enjoyable reading displays an original way of questioning outdated concepts regarding the actual status of standard languages and dialects in society.

Rossato & Chiaro's "Audiences and translated humour: An experimental study" concentrates on AVT humour appreciation and seeks to understand how translation effects audience perception. By means of *ad hoc* questionnaires, they tested humour appreciation in a sample of German and Italian informants who watched respectively the German original and the Italian dubbed version of *Goodbye Lenin!* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003), a German film set during the period of the Fall of the Wall and the German reunification. Interestingly, the German sample

was made up of both young and older respondents. While the former could not remember the division between West and East Germany, the latter could, as they lived in what once was the GDR. As a consequence of this, the East Germans carried a cultural and emotive load that the Western seemed to lack. Most importantly, Rossano & Chiaro found that the Eastern Germans' response was more similar to the Italians' than to West Germans', especially when humour brought about nostalgic references to the past. This empirical study certainly sheds some light on our understanding of the relevance of adequate translation choices that help to fill (where possible) the cultural gap between source and target audience and the intergenerational gap in the same culture.

Zabalbeascoa's "Woody Allen's themes through his films, and his film through their translations" focuses on the problems that regular themes in Allen's movies such as religion, psychoanalysis, sex and politics pose in translation due to the use of puns and culture-specific references. Zabalbeascoa's comparison of the Spanish dubbed and subtitled versions shows that, under the Franco's regime, the dubbed humour in Allen's productions was allowed, but was somehow censored or downplayed. Consequently, this has led to a misperception not only of the humour of the original script but, most importantly, of some of the characters' peculiarities. Conversely, the more recent subtitled versions of the same movies in Spain tend to retain potentially humorous references even when the target audience is unlikely to be familiar with them. A similar investigation could be carried out for other languages to verify whether, for instance, the Italian and French dubbed and subtitled versions of Allen's films display similar characteristics (cf. Pisek 1997 for a discussion on the German dubbing of Allen's movies). For the sake of clarity, some of Zabalbeascoa's examples would benefit from reporting the character who utters each line (e.g. examples 4-6, 14) as this is not always clear to the reader. Also, non Spanish speakers may appreciate a more extensive explanation of the rationale behind some dubbing or subtitling choices (e.g. examples 2, 17, 19).

Fuentes Luque's "On the (mis/over/under)translation of the Marx Brothers' humour" also compares dubbed and subtitled Spanish texts but deals with the Marx Bothers' filmic production. By looking at the way their films were transferred under the Franco's regime, Fuentes Luque considers the many historical but also contingent factors that may have influenced the translator's decision-making process (e.g. censorship, cultural references). Interestingly, he explains how puns leading to sexual innuendos, wordplays poking fun at the American society, etc., were literally translated rather than censored. Fuentes Luque's empirical testing shows that Spaniards conceive the Marx Bothers' puns and jokes as types of nonsensical, absurd and surreal humour rather than witty and sophisticated as perceived by most English speakers. Nonetheless, he also demonstrates that dubbing has managed to render a better service to Marx Bothers' humour than subtitling.

Dirk Delabastita's "Language, comedy and translation in the BBC sitcom *'Allo 'Allo!*" focuses on the many linguistic, geolocal and cultural challenges posed by the transfer of this sitcom that is set in France during the World War II and involves French, English, German and Italian characters. Delabastita looks at the way the original text manages to convey an absurd fictional reality for humorous purposes by adopting code-mixing and code-switching strategies (e.g. French, German and Italian characters are heard speaking English even when they are supposed to be speaking their native languages; English characters speak English while are supposed to be speaking French, etc.). He also investigates the way Dutch subtitlers and French dubbers have dealt with inter- and intralingual puns, quips, blunders and so on. While the former have used standard Dutch to translate most accents and linguistic idiosyncrasies, the French

dubbers applied Standard French with respectively Italian, German and English accents. Moreover, they have rendered the French interference over English as the opposite. As Delabastita rightly points out, the question remains about whether the French dubbed version might have lost part of the original humour that has made the English audience laugh at the French peculiarities.

Chiara Bucaria's "Laughing to death: Dubbed and subtitled humour in *Six Feet Under*" examines how black humour dealing with death and illness, potentially disturbing topics (e.g. swearing, homosexuality) and VEH were dealt with by Italian dubbers and subtitlers. Interestingly, she shows that the subtitled version tends to retain a higher number of swear words and potentially disturbing references but it fails to re-create the original VEH. In contrast, the dubbed version tones down many instances of swear words and references to death and homosexuality, but it manages to retain the intended humorous effect of the ST via the recreation of puns in the TT. As Bucaria suggests, the reasons for such discrepancies may be time pressure and subtitlers' lack of expertise, censoring interventions by the broadcasting network over the dubbing scriptwriter's work, etc.

Last but not least, Valdeón's "Dynamic versus static discourse: *Will & Grace* and its Spanish dubbed version" analyses how humour in the ST is used to create a positive attitude towards the two main characters of the series, Will and Jack, in mainstream television. In contrast, Valdeón shows how the Spanish dubbed version tends to rely on a stereotyped and somehow more negative representation of homosexuality by translating neutral and/or positive terms such as *gay*, *homo* (for *homosexual*) by means of negative terms such as *maricón* and its derivates. Hence, whereas the original text seeks to build a positive attitude towards homosexuals by means of humorous and ironic remarks that are uttered by both homo- and heterosexual characters, to some extent its Spanish counterpart makes use of stereotyped schemata that negatively connote the gay characters of the series.

In conclusion, this collection of papers is a very interesting reading for scholars and students who are interested in the ever-changing landscape of AVT. As advocated by many of its contributors, it is hoped that research continues in this fascinating field, focusing in particular on the reception of translated humour so as to improve its practice. Scholars and practitioners will benefit from understanding what the audience wants and this will help them better cater for their needs. Some of the comparative investigations in this book demonstrate how humour dubbing and subtitling have made impressive progress in terms of quality, despite contingent limitations imposed to the practice by cultural and/or other factors (e.g. censorship on potentially offensive and disturbing topics such as death and sickness). This book displays a high number of contributions looking at the Spanish situation and it is hoped that future research may consider the wider scenario of AVT in Europe and elsewhere.

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