

Translating Humour in *The IT Crowd*: An Analysis in Favour of Introducing Humour Studies into Translation and Interpreting Curricula

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Abstract

The paper discusses some of the challenges in translating humour from the British TV series *The IT Crowd* into the Bosnian language. The examples include transcription, translation, as well as analysis. Drawing from the experience of working with translation studies students, the goal is to emphasize the need for introducing humour studies into university curricula. Humour is observed in contrast between English and Bosnian, and analysed within Minutella's (2014) analytical framework involving cultural references, wordplay and language variation for humour detection, and Chiaro's (2004) approach to humour translation which entails substitution, replacement with an idiomatic expression, or replacement with a compensatory verbally expressed humour. The results indicate that some humorous content is easy to detect in the source language, but difficult to translate, and there were also instances of translatable content resulting in the loss of humour in the target language. Humour studies would enable easier understanding and translation for students, while contrastive analysis can serve as the pedagogical means of drawing focus to humorous content in translation studies classes.

Keywords: humour, translation studies, *The IT Crowd*, humour theories, English-Bosnian analysis

1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to discuss some of the challenges in translating humour from the British TV series *The IT Crowd* into the Bosnian language. Translation of humour has been a challenge for many translators and interpreters, but, in this instance, humour translation is observed from the point of view of an instructor at the translation and interpreting programme (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo).

Students who are to become future translators are faced with the challenge of translating humour as part of their Style and Translation course. Humorous content in the source text should be translated so that it is preserved in the target language. The challenge for students is that while they understand the humorous content in English, they are surprised to learn how difficult it is to adequately translate it into the target language.

In practice, translation studies and contrastive analysis, although related, have few methodological encounters (Czulo and Hansen-Schirra 2017, 1). Mona Baker (1993), for example, finds the connection in corpus-based methodology. Translation studies and contrastive analysis also meet within Jacek Fisiak's (1981, 2) observation about the pedagogical potential of contrastive studies: "Drawing on the findings of theoretical contrastive studies they provide a framework for the comparison of languages, selecting whatever information is necessary for a specific purpose, e.g. teaching, bilingual analysis, translation."

This framework is exceptionally important for translation studies classes since the translation process involves not only solving certain linguistic structures and comparing them in the target language, as the focus is on a text in its entirety, i.e., its pragmatic, contextual and semantic features. Hence, for a translation studies' instructor, focusing on specific aspects of a text in class is a necessity.

Humour is a phenomenon overwhelmingly present globally and cross-culturally, and so translators (frequently, also, interpreters) are faced with the challenges of translating it.

That is why humour should be studied as part of translation training programmes at universities, together with the introduction of subjects that treat humour in linguistic and cultural research.

2 Literature overview

Humour in linguistics has been studied for decades, yet we observe a constant struggle with defining the phenomenon. In fact, Attardo (1994, 13) states that “it is impossible to define ‘a priori’ the category of humor”, restoring to a possible view by Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1981; quoted in Attardo 1994, 13) that a text is humorous if its perlocutionary effect is laughter.

Of a number of linguistic theories that appear in humour studies, such as superiority theory and relief/release theory, this paper will consider cases when humour appears as a result of incongruity. In linguistics, this notion concerns an incongruous relationship of linguistic categories that cause confusion among the recipients of humour. Victor Raskin was the first to approach incongruity from a linguistic perspective.

In his seminal work, *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* (1985), Raskin observes incongruity in verbal humour through opposition of semantic scripts, and offers different categories of script opposition (1985, 113–27), with the following key definition of the conditions that render a text humorous:

A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying-text if both of the [following] conditions are satisfied: i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts[;] ii) The two scripts with which some text is compatible [...] are said to overlap fully or in part on this text. (Raskin 1985, 99)

Hence typical opposition, according to Raskin, is culturally dependent and finite, and includes examples such as actual vs. non-actual, normal vs. abnormal, possible vs. impossible, good vs. bad, life vs. death, obscene vs. non-obscene, etc. (1985, 113–14).

Later, Raskin and Attardo developed the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), containing six knowledge resources (KRs), one of which is Raskin’s script opposition. Attardo devotes much of his attention to this theory in his book *Linguistic Theories of Humor* (1994). The topic of the current paper does not leave much space to deliberate on the entirety of GTVH, but one segment in particular is important for the analysis: the notion of verbal humour. All segments of the analysis concern verbally expressed humour, not humour stemming from facial expressions, cartoons, etc., and its translation.

It is important to introduce another scholar who wrote about humour, but in the framework of translation studies, namely, Delia Chiaro.

In her text “Translation and Humour, Humour and Translation”, included in the book *Translation, Humour and Literature* (2010) that she edited, Chiaro emphasizes that translating verbally expressed humour “opens up a gigantic can of worms” (2010, 6). She addresses the common ways in which translators handle VEH, mentioning strategies that include leaving VEH unchanged, replacing the source language VEH with a target language VEH, and, lastly, ignoring VEH altogether (2010, 11–12).

Very close to such categorization is Chiaro’s (2004, 200) methodological approach to the translation of verbally expressed humour: (1) substitution in the target language; (2) replacement with an idiomatic expression in the target language; (3) replacement with an example of compensatory VEH in the target language.

In her book *The Language of Jokes in the Digital Age*, Chiaro (2018, 48) emphasizes that

subtitles for downloads and streaming are often provided by fansubbers, armies of young unprofessional translators whose mission is to translate new products as soon as possible into as many languages as possible for fans around the world. Thus, fast and cost-effective subtitling has rapidly become the most common form of screen translation especially amongst young (mostly highly) educated people who have proficient English language skills.

This important and very accurate remark may serve as encouragement for translation instructors and translation students alike never to give up on having high criteria and striving to achieve the best translation possible, in any register, including humor.

In this paper, we adopt the position that “humor may well remain within the eyes, ears and mood of the beholder” (Chiaro and Piferi 2010, 300). However, the position of the translator in that respect is to make an attempt at producing a humorous text as a result of either translation or subbing, but without being able to influence the outside reality, i.e., whether or not the audience will find a particular sequence humorous. It is important to emphasize here that the success of humour translation “is very much dependent on the translator’s sense of humor; that is the translator’s recognition of a comic instance” (Vandaele 2002, 150).

Clearly, what is being translated is the text from transcribed dialogues, which is why the selected corpus is marked as *verbally expressed humour* (VEH) (Chiaro 2005). In line with the notion of VEH, Vincenza Minutella, in her paper on the translation of humour in *Shrek* (2014, 67–89), offers the following classification: (1) humour based on cultural references and allusions; (2) humour based on wordplay; (3) humour generated by language variation.

The first category, *cultural references*, consists of “words that refer to concepts or objects specific to the Source Culture and that may be unknown in the Target Culture” (Minutella 2014, 69). These carry allusions, implicatures and connotations that concern different notions (people, objects, places, etc.).

The second category, *wordplay*, concerns puns in their most basic sense. Of course, many scholars have defined/written about puns (Koestler 1964; Attardo 1994; Ritchie 2004; Martin 2007; etc.), but perhaps the most useful for our purposes is Delabastita’s explanation of what a pun *does*: “The pun contrasts linguistic structures with different meanings on the basis of their formal similarity” (1996, 128). The category thus concerns synonymy, polysemy, homonymy, etc. Some scholars differentiate between the terms *pun* and *wordplay*, but the position assumed for the purposes of this paper is that the category is interchangeable, since a stricter taxonomy could be applied for a thorough linguistic analysis of humour, not the translation process/results.

The third category entails the notion of *language variation*. The *Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (Chalker and Weiner 1994, 1179) provides the following definition (provided here is an excerpt that is relevant for this section):

The terms variety and VARIATION are particularly used in the analysis of different kinds of English. Thus, we can talk of regional and social varieties (or variation); varieties according to the FIELD OF DISCOURSE; varieties consistent with spoken or written mediums; and ‘stylistic’ varieties, due to different degrees of formality, the attitude of the speaker, and so on.

In the case of humour, this category can also contain stereotypes, *in-jokes*, etc. These three categories may overlap.

3 Study

3.1 Context: Teaching humour in the translation studies programme

Humour has not been taught extensively as part of the courses offered by the English Department at the University of Sarajevo.¹ However, since the establishment of the translation programme in the second study cycle in 2005, it

1 The programme is available in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian at <https://ff.unsa.ba/index.php/bs/2014-12-13-22-32-48>, but the overview of literature will provide the reader with sufficient insight into the main themes treated within individual courses.

had become clear that the subject of humour needed to be addressed. In that respect, we have created a *niche* within the Semantics and Pragmatics course where humour in general is introduced: its definition, major humour theories (with special emphasis on incongruity theories), understanding humour as a global (cross-cultural) and local (culture-specific) phenomenon. Although the subject matter introduced in these instances is very demanding, the time for discussion in class is fairly limited for this topic – at most four contact hours during the entire semester. The course is taught in the second semester at the postgraduate level.

The fourth semester includes another subject – Style and Translation – and humour is introduced here as a translation practice. By that point, students have become acquainted with various translation strategies, elements of audio-visual translation,² and so on. Furthermore, by that time they will have been exposed to a plethora of registers in translation, from legal to literary, medical to political, etc. Students engage in translating humour using audio-visual material, as well as jokes and humour in literary texts.

Although translating jokes (especially those that are culture-specific) presents a particular semantic challenge, given the opposition of semantic scripts (Raskin 2011), in this class the focus was on the translation of humour found in the audio-visual material of British TV series, such as: *Blackadder*, *Only Fools and Horses*, *Black Books*, *The IT Crowd*, and *Little Britain*.

A humour translation exercise is introduced by providing the students with selected material – transcribed sections of the scenes for translation. As part of the pre-assignment exercise, students are required to familiarize themselves with the TV series (characters and plot), although experience has shown that the majority of students are already familiar with *The IT Crowd*. They also need to revisit the main theories of humour presented in the Semantics and Pragmatics class.

At the very beginning of the exercise students are reminded that the translation of the provided material is intended for subtitling/subbing.

2 Humour can also be taught within the audio-visual translation class, which is an aspect analysed in this paper. However, since humour does not only appear in audio-visual materials, but also in many other forms of text, cartoons, etc., the need for a separate course is evident.

3.2 *The corpus*

As already mentioned, the corpus will consist of selected sequences from *The IT Crowd* TV series. This series is a challenge for translators because of the seemingly familiar situations and prejudices expressed against an entire profession (the “nerdiness” of software engineers), as well as against corporations, women, and certain races, along with comments about life and habits, and so on. Moreover, the language of *The IT Crowd* contains many more layers than first meets the eye. The series is packed with instances of absurdist humour, witticisms, running jokes, physical humour, dark humour and the like.

The British TV series that aired from 2006 to 2013 focuses on three members of the IT Department at Reynholm Industries: Jen (the head of IT who does not know the first thing about IT), Roy (an Irish IT expert) and Moss (a highly intelligent software engineer critically lacking in social skills). Many other characters appear in the TV series, most notably Douglas Reynholm (the son of the company’s founder, Denholm Reynholm, who inherits his father’s fortune and position following his suicide), and Richmond Avenal (a goth IT associate, who lives in the server room).³

3.3 *Methodology*

In this paper, a selection of eight scenes from *The IT Crowd* TV series will be presented, followed by a discussion of the challenges to the translation of humour in each scene. The transcription and translation of the scenes are provided by the author, since the TV series has not been translated in Bosnia and Herzegovina, nor been aired by any of the country’s broadcasters. Still, experience has shown that students are mostly familiar with the show.

As stated in section 2, the analysis will concern verbally expressed humour, and thus other forms of humorous expression, gestures, motions, and so on will not be considered.

The analysis will entail categories introduced by Minutella (2014), encompassing: (1) cultural references and allusions, (2) wordplay and (3) language variation. These categories have been presented in the Literature Overview section and concern the detection and categorization of a humorous incident. Further in the analysis, Chiaro’s framework regarding translation options will

3 More information on the TV series and characters is available at: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0487831/> and <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-it-crowd>

be applied: (1) substitution in the TL; (2) replacement with an idiomatic expression in the TL; and (3) replacement with an example of compensatory VEH in the target language.

The scenes presented in this paper do not follow the chronological order they appear in the series, but in accordance with the difficulty they posed for the students in class, and may also pose for translation professionals in the Bosnian language. Next to the episode title, the season and the episode number will be cited (e.g. S2 E1).

Although the issue will not be addressed in this paper, it is worth mentioning that the very title of the TV series and the names of the episodes that are presented at the very beginning of the scenes selected for the analysis are another exceptional challenge for translators.

4 Analysis and discussion

(1) Moss and the German (S2 E3)

Moss: I may have misheard you there. Did you just say that you were going to eat me?

Moss: Možda Vas nisam dobro čuo. Da li ste upravo rekli da me namjeravate pojesti?

Johann: Yes.

Johann: Da.

Moss: Right, you did say that. Yeah, no, I'm here for the cookery.

Moss: Da, zaista ste to rekli. Pa, ja sam ovdje zbog kursa kuhanja.

Johann: No, no, no, this is the cookery.

Johann: Ne, ne, ne, ovo je kuhanje.

Moss: Look, I've got your advert here. I printed it out. „I want to cook with you.“

Moss: Ali, vidite, imam Vaš oglas. Isprintao sam ga: "Želim da kuham s vama".

Johann: Ah, no, no. My English is not so good.

Johann: A, ne, ne. Moj engleski nije baš najbolji.

Moss: Um... Oh, right! You want to cook with me, using me, you mean.

Moss: Hmm... Aaaa, da! Želite da kuhate sa mnom, tako što ćete mene iskoristiti, to ste mislili.

Johann: Ah, yes! Yes! You see? Yes, yes.

Johann: Da! Vidite? Da, da!

Moss: I see where the confusion was. I thought this was a cookery course.

Moss: Vidim gdje je došlo do zabune. Mislio sam da je ovo kurs kuhanja.

This exchange takes place between Moss and Johann, a German cannibal who obviously has an issue with prepositions in the English language. The German equivalent of the sentence *I want to cook with you* is *Ich möchte mit dir kochen*, while the equivalent of *I want to cook you* is *Ich möchte dich kochen*. Hence, the (mis)use of the preposition gives rise to incongruity, which is resolved the moment Moss realizes what went wrong. Clearly, the English sentence in the advert was a literal translation from the German language, leading Moss to believe that Johann was a cooking instructor.

The translation into Bosnian is not problematic, since there is a clear correspondence between the two sentences: in the Bosnian language as well, the preposition *s* means company, companionship (Halilović, Palić, and Šehović 2010, 1164). Thus, we may say that this section of the exchange belongs to the framework of *language variation*, since we are dealing with a German who uses English as a foreign language.

Still, the mistake he makes is not part of a stereotype one may have about Germans, but certainly there is a sense of humour that arises from the fact that Johann is simply not a native speaker of English. The same sense is presented in the translation, which offers additional humorous value because the Bosnian language has maintained the formal *you*-form for second person singular. The reason why the honorific form increases the humorous value in the translation is because in the conversation the collocutors are highly observant of politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987), as well as of turn-taking (Sacks,

Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), but they are discussing cannibalism so as to clarify a misunderstanding, and in fact one of the collocutors is not going to be a participant in a cooking class, but rather an ingredient. This absurdity is present in both languages, but it is stylistically amplified in the translation.

Another example of cultural (mis)understanding can be seen in the scene where Denholm Reynholm welcomes a delegation of Japanese businesspeople:

(2) Calamity Jen (S1 E2)

Denholm (holding a katana): It is a magnificent symbol of our new merger. I am sorry that my gift...a huge pair of Doc' Martens, is an extremely thick and heavy sort. It's so paltry in comparison. Please rest assured that my cultural advisor will be fired as soon as this meeting is over.

Denholm: Ovo je prekrasan simbol našeg udruživanja. Žao mi je što je moj poklon... Veliki par martinki, tako bijedan u usporedbi. Uvjeravam Vas da će moj savjetnik za kulturu biti otpušten odmah nakon ovog sastanka.

Yamamoto (wearing Doc' Martens, joyfully stomps, speaks in Japanese, translated into English by his interpreter): These are very heavy shoes. He feels like... Godzilla!

Yamamoto (preko prevodioca): Ovo su baš velike cipele. Osjeća se kao... Godzilla!

Denholm: Does he? Godzilla! Go on! Stamp your feet! Clap him man! Good! Oh yeah! The Jap loves it! Go on! Break something! Put your weight into it!

Denholm: A je li? Pa samo nastavi! Skoči svom snagom! Plješći mu! O, da! Godzila! Japancu se sviđa! Ma slomi nešto! Svom težinom!

Jen: You f..... idiot!! You stupid old f... You f.... J.... and your big m.... shoes! Oh you're not! You're nothing! But I f... ..

Jen: J.... idiote!! To glupi stari pr... Ti j.... Jap... i tvoje velike j..... cipele! E, nećeš! Ti si ništa! Ali sam j.....

(Japanese interpreter translates, the delegation leaves, angry)

(Japanski prevodilac prevodi, Japanci odlaze, uzrujanjani)

Jen: I am... so... sorry, Denholm.

Jen: Tako mi je žao, Denholme.

Denholm: That was quite a tarring, Jen.

Douglas: Ovo je baš bilo loše, Jen.

Although the differences between the Japanese and the Anglophone/Slavic culture are familiar to the majority of ordinary people these days, it is necessary to again reflect upon Japanese etiquette, including business etiquette and the related hierarchy, in which both hosts and guests have certain rules of behaviour to follow, in addition to the very high importance placed on gifts (Trevor 2001).

In this particular example, humour arises because of the sharp contrast between the Japanese business delegation and the English hosts. Denholm is aware of the importance of hierarchy and is trying to address the situation caused by an inappropriate gift, in which simple footwear is semantically opposed to the Japanese katana, a sword that stands as a cultural symbol.

The second point of humorous contrast occurs when the leading Japanese businessman stomps with all his weight on Jen's feet. In pain, she reacts by swearing.

In that sense, the translation process is not as challenging, since the Bosnian audience is by and large aware of the fine differences between the cultures, as well as the notion of highly developed Japanese etiquette. Moreover, Doc Martens shoes have been present and very popular in Bosnia for generations. To that end, the term commonly used in the Bosnian language is *martinke*, which is present in the translation, making this an example of a substitution in the target language.

However, the section where Jen is swearing is challenging, to a certain extent, for the translator. The reason for this is because the swearing is "concealed" by interpunction in the source text, while the scene in the audio-visual presentation shows Jen screaming at the shocked Japanese in anguish, swearing, but most of the words are concealed by a beep. Although it is clear that swearing is in progress, which may lead some translators to leave the beginnings of the swear words as provided in the source text, the preferred option in this case was adjustment in the target language. It is, in a way, a *path generator* (Wang

et al. 2020), a semantic process where the text recipient will use the schemata in their own language to recreate the concealed content. The reason for such a solution is that the source text conceals some implicatures that should also be present in the translation. That primarily concerns the section where she says *You f... J... and your big m... shoes! Ti j... Jap... i tvoje velike j... cipele!* The implicature which may be read here is that Jen is aware of the Japanese man's strengths (economic, cultural, etc.) and that, in a moment of despair, she is uttering something very racist. That makes the situation even more difficult, but this is also humorous content, as transferred in the Bosnian language, especially if the entire swearing section is translated. That translation result would fall within the category of replacement with an idiomatic expression in the target language, since the swear words in Bosnian and English do have a similar, but not substitutive correspondence. On a final note here, it is worth mentioning that Reynholm himself, thrilled to see Mr. Yamamoto's satisfaction with the gift, utters *The Jap loves it!* This stands in opposition to the formal title of Yamamoto-san, but the Bosnian translation does not contain an expression that could be considered an equivalent to the English *Jap*.

Although not as important for the humorous content, it is interesting that the noun Denholm uses, *tarring*, does not have an adequate equivalent in the Bosnian language, since the intended meaning is that of damaging someone's reputation. Stylistically, word-to-word correspondence was not achieved and here we can say that replacement with another expression occurred.

The following is an example of humour mainly generated by *language variation* in the source text, as well as in translation:

(3) Are We Not Men? (S3 E2)

Moss: Awright, ,arry? See that ludicrous display last night?

Moss: Š'ima, Eri? Jes' vidio onaj kretenski nastup sinoć?

Harry: What was Wenger thinking, sending Walcott on that early?

Harry: Š'a je Wenger mislio kad je uveo Walcotta onako rano?

Moss: Fing about Arsenal is, they always try an' walk it in.

Moss: Caka s Arsenalom je što uvijek pokušavaju da ušetaju s loptom u gol.

Harry: True. See you later, Moss.

Harry: Vala baš. Vidimo se, Moss.

Moss: Mind ,ow you go.

Moss: Čuvaj se, jarane.

The main reason this scene is considered humorous in both English and Bosnian is the shift in Moss's speech. Moss, a geeky, highly intelligent character is known to *The IT Crowd's* audience as someone who is not able to function well in everyday social interactions, especially when it comes to football. His normal manner of expression is marked by an IT-related register and his own daily routine, where his interactions are limited to very few people. In that sense, chatting about football while using a Cockney accent is what stands in opposition to the audience's expectations regarding this character. Not only do we notice a change in language variation, but he also uses expressions that are part of the football register.

To an extent, one could consider that Moss shifts to what is known as *mockney* speech, where the speakers of standard English, frequently middle and upper-middle class, adopt Cockney pronunciation but not its other grammatical forms (Rogaliński 2011).

The translation process is interesting because it is possible to achieve a language variation equivalent in the Bosnian language. The preferred option in this case is a non-standard form of the Sarajevo speech, the argot highly present in everyday communication, frequently among educated people who consciously change their register (Halilović, Tanović, and Šehović 2009).⁴ The typical examples found in this translation are *š'ima*, *kretenski nastup*, *caka*, *čuvaj se*, and especially the expression *jarane*, a noun meaning a good friend. In that sense, these expressions can be considered to reflect a full correspondence in the translation.

Moreover, the name *Harry* is rendered as *Eri* in this translation, notwithstanding the fact that the name can also be pronounced in full in the Bosnian language, since pronunciation sequences in the Sarajevo argot are frequently

4 I find it highly important to mention here the work by academician Senahid Halilović, professors Ilijas Tanović and Amela Šehović entitled *Govor grada Sarajeva i razgovorni bosanski jezik* [Speech of the City of Sarajevo and the Spoken Bosnian Language].

characterized by elision (Halilović, Tanović, and Šehović 2009, 115). Generally speaking, the entire section represents replacement by an argot of the target language.

The phrase *to walk in* in football register is somewhat challenging to translate. The meaning is achieved by the extended expression *da ušetaju s loptom u go*, but it is clear that this translation contains additional information, since the Bosnian language does not have a phrase denoting this specific situation. An inadequate use of the instrumental case in Bosnian *s loptom* should also be emphasized, since it would literally mean that the ball was a conscious object, walking together with the players. That, to an extent, also contributes to the intensity of Moss's use of argot.

Whereas the previous three examples did carry certain challenges in the translation process, examples (4) and (5) are semantically marked to an extent that it is almost impossible to find an adequate correspondence:

(4) The Speech (S3 E4)

Douglas: Oh, poppet... to think when we met, you were so worried that you came from Iran.

Douglas: Lutkice moja... Kad se samo sjetim kad smo se upoznali koliko si bila zabrinuta što si mješanac.

April: ...what?

April: Šta?

Douglas: When we met, as if I'd be worried about something like that! I don't care where you're from; Iran, France, doesn't bother me. I'm very modern.

Douglas: Kad smo se upoznali, kao da bi me bilo briga za takvo što! Baš me briga ko si; crnac, bjelac, nije mi bitno. Vrlo sam moderan.

April: I'm not from Iran!

April: Nisam mješanac!

Douglas: Well, you said something along those lines.

Douglas: Pa, rekla si nešto u tom smislu.

April: No, not Iran, a man! I said I used to be a man!

April: Ne, ne mješanac! Rekla sam da sam nekad bila muškarac!

Douglas: You used to be a man...?

Douglas: Bila si muškarac?

April: Yes!

April: Da!

Douglas (holds her tightly): Oh, God!

Douglas (čvrsto je zagrli): O, Bože!

In the episode, Douglas expresses joy over having met April, a woman he grows to truly love. The audience knows that Douglas's character and intellectual abilities are subpar in many respects. In this example, humour arises because he failed to properly hear (and, maybe even comprehend) that April told him she used to be a man. This is thus an example of homonymy, where the similar sounding words *Iran* and *man* give rise to incongruity that is resolved when April (again) clarifies what she had said.

The translation into Bosnian uses replacement by the compensatory VEh. Since Bosnian is a gender-sensitive language, finding suitable replacements in countries/cities/villages that would (a) sound similar to the noun *muškarac* (man) and that would (b) resist the feminine declension proved highly demanding. That is why the choice was complete substitution, aiming for racial characteristics, which adds to the humorous content in translation because the expressions used are considered derogatory, especially *mješanac*, which means a person of mixed race. In that sense, in the Bosnian language, humorous content arises from the opposition of Douglas's "modernity" and ability to accept being in a relationship with a person of mixed race, but not with a woman who used to be a man, just as the case in English is that he is able to accept the possibility of being with someone from Iran, but not with a woman who used to be a man. The translation procedure entails the second of the three categories, *word play*, and the pair in opposition *mješanac/muškarac* can be considered homophonic.

A similar situation is seen in example (6), where again the second category, *wordplay*, appears as the source of humorous content.

(5) The Dinner Party (S2 E4)

Roy: Oh, Peter, I got that link for the Firefox extension you were asking about. What's your email address?

Roy: Ej, Petre, nabavio sam ti link za onu ekstenziju za Firefox što si tražio. Koja ti je mail adresa?

Peter: Do you have a pen and paper?

Peter: Imaš li olovku i papir?

Roy: No, I'm recording.

Roy: Ma ne, snimam.

Peter: It's aaa... filepeter@hotmail.com

Peter: Pa... filkopero@hotmail.com

Roy: Filepeter? Why filepeter?

Roy: Filkopero? Što filkopero?

Peter: Well, File is my second name.

Peter: Pa, Filko mi je prezime.

Roy: Oh, right. I see. Peter File.

Roy: Aaaa, shvatam. Pero Filko.

Moss: Who's a paedophile?

Moss: Ko je to pedofilko?

In this scene, the translator is faced with two options: one is to change the second element of incongruity, *paedophile*, or the first, i.e. the name of the character. The second option is *simpler* in the sense that changing/adjusting the name of the character does not entail changing the other element in the incongruous opposition, but adjusting to it. The noun *paedophile* is pronounced very similarly in many languages, hence the Bosnian audiences' exposure to the English pronunciation will sound familiar, meaning that they will look for the

complete correspondence of the noun in translation. Still, the noun itself was not translated into Bosnian in its standard nominative form, but the preferred equivalent was *pedofilko*, a diminutive form that stands in sharp contrast to the meaning of the word *pedofil*. Since this is a very extreme example, it should be emphasized that this scene is an instance of *dark humour*, which “relies on the deviation from values and the transgression of social norms and moral systems and as such relates closely to both sick and aggressive/hostile humor” (Aillaud and Piolat 2012, 212).

Clearly, the true challenge was to find a name that would resonate similarly to the focal noun. This proved a challenge in the Bosnian language, since the option of preserving the original name in English was a possibility, but would require phonetic transliteration, and we hold that translating in the target language should always be encouraged, when possible. In that sense, the last name Filko was used, present in Bosnia and Croatia, as well as the typical nickname for Peter in Bosnian – Pero. The resulting homophonic combination proved satisfactory in the target language, especially when contrasted to the diminutive form, and the process can be categorized as substitution in the TL (*pedofilko*) and compensatory VEH replacement (*Pero Filko*).

The following three examples will be jointly introduced, since they were the most challenging parts of the humour translation process. These are instances where the translation was a) partly omitted (example 6), b) conducted but most likely inaccurate (example 7), and c) not performed at all (example 8):

(6) Men Without Women (S2 E6)

Douglas: I like you, Jen. You don't ask questions. A lot of people would be confused as to why I invited them up here then asked them to leave, not you. A person's got to have a lot of backbone to allow herself to be ordered around like that. You've got spunk and balls, and I like that in a woman.

Douglas: Sviđaš mi se, Jen. Ne postavljaš pitanja. Mnogi bi bili zbunjeni kad bi ih pozvao ovdje i onda im rekao da odu, ali ne ti. Takva osoba mora da ima dosta kičme da joj se naređuje tek tako. Ti imaš muda, a to mi se sviđa kod žene.

The key opposition of scripts (Raskin, 1984; Attardo, 1994) in this example is in the sexual vs. non-sexual parameter, which entails biological traits of men that are in this case applied to a woman. As far as the categorization in

translation is concerned, this is another example of category 2: *wordplay*. The focal points are the nouns *spunk* and *balls*.

The noun phrase *balls* is used in both English and Bosnian to denote a courageous, determined person, hence it can be said that the translation was the result of substitution in the TL. Although characteristic of predominantly male persons, sometimes it can also be jokingly attributed to women. In that sense, it can be said that humorous equivalence was fully achieved in the Bosnian language.

However, the polysemic nature of the English noun *spunk* which is used informally to denote a) determination and courage and b) sperm makes it possible for the humour to be even more prominent. That is not the case with the translation, where the noun was omitted. Tomaszewicz (1993) writes about omission in translation and subtitling of films, emphasizing that some culture-specific terms are omitted. However, we are of the opinion that omission in this instance occurs at the semantic level, because of the polysemy that exists in the English but not in Bosnian. Still, the humorous effect was achieved in the translation because of the correspondence with the usage of one of the words Douglas uses in this scene.

In example (7), we are dealing with the register characteristic of the IT *community*. As is the case with the legal, medical and other professional registers, they can be fully understood by people who are professionals in the field. Here, however, that content is presented to a wide audience (in the case of this scene, to an unknown interlocutor Moss is talking to over the phone):

(7) Yesterday's Jam (S1 E1)

Moss (speaks on the phone): See, the driver hooks the function by patching the system call table, so it's not safe to unload it unless another thread's about to jump in and do its stuff, and you don't want to end up in the middle of invalid memory. Hello?

Moss (u slušalicu): Vidite, upravljački program povezuje funkcije tako što poziva funkcije u kernel, te ga nije sigurno ukloniti osim ako neka druga poveznica nije spremna uskočiti i obaviti posao, a ne želite završiti usred neispravne memorije. Halo?

Classification of the translation process in this instance would fall into category 3, *language variation*. Moss's mode of expression is incredibly technical and stands in sharp contrast to example (3), where he spoke Cockney. The translation process can entail looking for assistance online. Explanations can be found for all the phrases that occur in Moss's speech, but since there is a possibility that the translator does not truly understand the register, the fallacy of the translated text may occur. This is one of the reasons why it is important to insist that the translator is as acquainted with the register appearing in the text as possible. This is also a sign that CAT (computer-assisted translation) tools can be used in a support role only, not as a means to replace human translators.

Still, the humorous effect has been achieved in the translation as well, since the inability to understand what Moss is saying is actually what gives rise to the humour in this scene. The translation process would ideally contain substitution in TL (since the register is highly technical, so the presupposition is that correspondence in the TL would be high), but, in this case, it is difficult for the translator to categorize it as such. The most logical conclusion in this instance would be that it is a case of compensatory VEH replacement.

Finally, the last scene in the analysis is also the most difficult to translate and this example concerns the first category, *cultural references*:

(8) The Red Door (S1 E4)

Roy (singing): We don't need no education.

Roy (pjevajući): We don't need no education.

Moss: Yes, you do. You've just used a double negative.

Moss: Treba ti. Upravo si upotrijebio dvostruku negaciju.

The position presented to students is that everything can be translated, including the song *Another Brick in the Wall* by Pink Floyd (1979), but in this case the preferred option was not to translate. One of the main reasons for this decision is that the song is culturally marked, in the sense that it is highly popular even today, and so replacing the lyrics would prove to be misguided. Moreover, translation would have to entail adjustments that would move the resulting text away from the English lyrics. The reason for this is that the

translator would have to find some item in the grammar of the Bosnian language that is frequently misunderstood/misused, and that would prove adequate in the translated lyrics. Such a process would mean translation using compensatory VEH replacement.

Moss's response (which is the humorous place, since he notices the grammar mistake in the English language and assigns it to Roy) has been translated, but the humorous effect in the Bosnian translation has not been achieved.

5 Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to present some challenges in the translation of humorous content from the British TV series *The IT Crowd* into Bosnian. The two main issues emphasized in relation to the process of translating humour were that students of translation studies should be familiar with the basic trends in humour research in linguistic and cultural studies, and that the translation of humorous content can be highly challenging even for more experienced translators, despite the seemingly superficial and familiar plot of the audio-visual material (this is one of the reasons why *The IT Crowd* was chosen as the corpus).

Regarding the first issue, experience has shown that although the majority of students at the Sarajevo English Department possess an adequate command of the English language and are acquainted with basic translation practices and different registers, they face considerable obstacles when translating humour. However, from the moment they are introduced to the basic humour theories in linguistics, their approach to the humorous text improves in the sense that they are able to detect not only the basic (and often, also, most difficult characteristic of humour translation) script opposition, but also other hidden humorous layers in the text that stem from implicatures, emotional exclamations, self-praise and mockery, etc.

Second, the analysis conducted for the purposes of this paper showed that the amount of effort necessary to recognize and translate the nuances that appear in the humorous content is truly challenging even for more experienced translators. Of course, a good translation is always highly appreciated but rarely overtly emphasized, and thus translators often live and work in the shadows of their own creation. Still, there is always a sense of satisfaction when the audience reacts to the text, in this case the humour that appears in the subtitles, in the same manner as the English-speaking audience.

In conclusion, it is important to again reflect on the link between translation studies and contrastive analysis. Although a solid translation analysis encompasses elements that go beyond the comparison of structures, from morphological to syntactic, contrastive analysis can be used for exploring certain aspects of translation. In that sense, this paper concerned the analysis of humour translatability, focusing primarily on the preservation of humorous content from the source language. Still, the analysis could have also included other aspects, such as adjusting the length of the sentence, translating onomatopoeic expressions, determining which elements could be omitted in the translation because of the subtitling constraints, etc. The same principles apply to translation studies programmes: contrastive analysis is a highly useful pedagogical tool if the instructor devotes attention to one or otherwise a very limited set of topics to be covered in class.

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