

Dubbing Verbally Expressed Humor: An Analysis of American Animations in Persian Context

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Abstract

This empirical study was to compare the number of humorous expressions between ten best seller American animations and their Persian dubbed version. Furthermore, it was aimed to investigate the applied strategies in dubbing of humor. Ten American animation transcripts and their Persian dubbed versions were studied for humorous expressions. They were grouped into universal, cultural and linguistic humor, using Raphaelson West (1989) categorization. The number of expressions in each group and the total numbers were compared between the ST and TT. The applied strategies in each group were analyzed using Mateo (1995) strategies for translation of irony in universal group, Leppihalm (1997) strategies for translation of allusion in cultural group and strategies suggested by Delabestita (1996) for translation of pun in linguistic group. The results indicated that the number of humorous expressions increased in the TT. Also the most preferred strategy for translation of universal humor was literal translation, for cultural group omission and for linguistic one translation of pun to pun.

Key words: animation, audio visual translation, dubbing, humor, free translation, literal translation, standard translation

1. Introduction

Language is a means of communication. For a communication to be successful the key factor is understanding the message. Translation that is a kind of interlingual communication is defined by Newmark as “an attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another” (1988a: 7), and he adds that, “rendering, as closely as the associative and syntactical capacities of another language allows, the exact contextual meaning of the original” (1988a: 11). Then translation as a form of communication is concerned with transferring the message as closely as possible. Miremedi (1991) considers the cultural aspect of the language and states that “translation is a two way process from one culture to the other and from other cultures into one’s own culture.” Therefore understanding the message is bound to understanding the culture as well as other nuances of the language.

In the process of communication people may apply different tools of a language to convey their meaning more effectively. One of these tools is humor in which linguistic, cultural and social elements are of great importance. Understanding of this multilateral device in one language is bound to understanding of all these elements. Additionally humor, as an everyday phenomenon, is part of the context of intercultural communication. Then its transferring between different countries with different languages and cultures is also related to understanding of these features.

1.1 Humor

Depending on its purpose, there are different definitions and classifications for the term ‘humor’. Abrams states that “in the normal use, the term ‘humor’ refers to what is purely comic: it evokes as it is sometimes said, sympathetic laughter, or else laughter which is an end in itself” (1993, p.220).

1.1.1 Translation of humor

Following Vandaele (2002, p.150): "humor translation is qualitatively different from 'other types' of translation and, consequently, one cannot write about humor translation in the same way one writes about other types of translation". Then the translator is to maintain the intended effect that is laughter and try to reproduce it with fewer losses. When trying to transfer the humor, cultural elements and language-specific devices make the translator's work difficult, while some elements are ultimately not transferred at all.

Translators often have to translate this seemingly untranslatable element without reducing the expected effect. One area in which humor is greatly applied for practical purposes is mass media, which includes both intercultural and intracultural communication. A wide variety of entertaining programs, films and TV series are produced having humor as the primary or secondary element. Many of which are translated from other languages.

1.2 Audiovisual translation

This kind of translation was the result of the arrival of film industry and the invention of sound films in 1927. That time translation was used to convey the spoken dialogue of source language (SL) film to the target language (TL) of the audience. This new type of translation was called Audio Visual Translation (AVT). AVT is conventionally classified into "subtitling" and "dubbing".

1.3 Dubbing

Dubbing that is the focus of this study is changing the original voice of a film with another in another language. Baker states that:

Dubbing involves the replacement of the original speech by a voice trace which attempts to follow as closely as possible the timing, phrasing and lip movements of the original dialogue. The term 'dubbing' is also sometimes used to refer to revoicing in the same language, for example where the original scene is shot against a noisy background and post-synchronization becomes necessary to record the original dialogue (Baker, 1998, p.74).

2. Methodology

2.1 Corpora

Animations are chosen as the corpora of this study since they are good sources of verbally expressed humor. As they are produced for children, they include humorous expressions to fulfill the entertainment aspect of these young viewer productions.

Ten best seller American animations of the recent years are randomly selected from among the best sellers whose dubbed versions are available in Iran markets. Their transcripts are used for investigation. They are written by Drew Pauts, a transcript writer, or published in Internet Movie Script Database.

The list of these animations is as follows;

1. Finding Nemo

A 2003 American computer-animated epic film dubbed and published by Resanehaye Tasviri Company.

2. Ice Age (1)

A 2002 American computer-animated film dubbed and published by Tasvire Doniaye Honar Company.

3. Ice Age 3

A 2009 computer animated film, dubbed and published by Honarnamaye Parsyan Company.

4. Madagascar (1)

A 2005 computer-animated film dubbed and published by Javaneh Poya Company.

5. Madagascar (2)

A 2008 animated film dubbed and published by Sooreh Company.

6. Monsters vs. Aliens

A 2009 American computer-animated science fiction film dubbed and published by Javaneh Poya Company.

7. Planet51

A 2009 Spanish/British animated science fiction/family film dubbed and published by Sooreh Company.

8. Princesses and the Frog

A 2009 American animated musical family film dubbed and published by Pars Video Company.

9. Shrek (1)

A 2001 American animated comedy dubbed and published by Silver Screen Company.

10. Shrek (2)

A 2004 American computer-animated comedy film dubbed and published by Silver Screen.

2.2 Instruments

One of the present study aims is to investigate the strategies applied in translation of verbally expressed humor. These strategies are investigated regarding Raphaelson-West (1989) categorization of humor into three groups, including linguistic humor, cultural humor and universal humor along with three comparative theoretical models.

2.2.1 Word play translation strategies

The first model is based on the strategies suggested for translation of word play or pun by Delabastita (1996). Considering the point that linguistic humor is mostly related to sounds and spellings of the words on the one hand and that pun is also a result of identical or different sounds and spellings on the other hand, the strategies suggested for translation of pun are investigated in linguistic group. As an example in the animation *The princess and the frog*, when Louis the alligator is accused of deceiving the frogs and showing them the wrong way (00:38:19), he says "I was confused by the topography and the geography and choreography". In this example three different words end in the same suffix, that is -graphy. Based on Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary (2000) the meanings of the two first words are related but the last one is different; topography is the features of a place, geography is the arrangement of the features of a place, while choreography is the steps and movements in dancing, it is used probably because in that situation Louis is playing music. Using these three rather similar words with different meanings create a humor that is classified as linguistic. Suggested strategies for translation of pun by Delabastita (1996) are as follows;

- 1) Pun to pun (pun rendered as pun): the ST pun is translated by a TL pun;
- 2) Pun to non pun (pun rendered as non-pun): a non-punning phrase which may retain all the initial senses (non-selective non-pun), or a non-punning phrase which renders only one of the pertinent senses (selective non-pun), or diffuse paraphrase or a combination of the above;
- 3) Pun to related rhetorical device [pun rendered with another rhetorical device, or punoid (repetition, alliteration, rhyme, referential vagueness, irony, paradox etc), which aims to recapture the effect of the ST pun];
- 4) Pun to zero (pun rendered with zero pun): the pun is simply omitted;
- 5) Pun ST = pun TT (ST pun copied as TT pun, without being translated);
- 6) Non pun à pun (a new pun introduced): a compensatory pun is inserted, where there was none in the ST, possibly making up for ST puns lost elsewhere (strategy 4 where no other solution was found), or for any other reason;
- 7) Zero to pun (addition of a new pun): totally new textual material is added, containing wordplay as a compensatory device;
- 8) Editorial techniques: explanatory footnotes or endnotes, comments in translator's forewords, 'anthological' presentation of different, complementary solutions etc. (Delabastita, 1996, p.134).

Since the concern of this study is dubbing the spoken mode of translation, the editorial techniques are not considered.

2.2.2 Allusion translation strategies

The second model is based on the strategies suggested for translation of allusion by Leppihalm (1997). Allusion is an indirect reference to a work of art or a person or an event. Cultural humor is also bound to cultural elements such as reference to some customs or the name of some special places, works or people and application of proverbs, idioms or catchphrases. As an example in the animation *Madagascar 2* when the monkeys aren't present at work for amending the air plain (00:60:41), the head of penguins says "darn you Darwin". Here there's a reference to the theory of Darwin that considers monkeys as the primitive humans. Then the strategies of allusion translation are investigated in cultural humor category. They are as follows;

A) Proper name allusion translation strategies:

- 1) Retention of name (either unchanged or in its conventional TL form; with three subcategories:
 1. a) use the name as such

1. b) use the name, adding some guidance
1. c) use the name, adding detailed explanation for example a footnote
- 2) Replacement of name by another (beyond the changes required by convention); with two subcategories:
 2. a) replace the name by another SL name
 2. b) replace the name by a TL name
- 3) Omission of name; with two subcategories:
 3. a) omit the name but transfer the sense by other means for example by a common noun
 3. b) omit the name and allusion together
- B) Key phrase translation strategies:
 - 1) Use of standard translation;
 - 2) Minimum change that is a literal translation without regard to connotative or contextual meaning- there is thus no change that would aim specifically at the transfer of connotation;
 - 3) extra-allusive guidance added in the text, where the translator follows his or her assessment of the needs of readers by adding information which the author with his or her source language view point did not think necessary; including the use of typographical means to signal that the material is performed;
 - 4) The use of footnotes, endnotes, translator's prefaces and other explicit explanations not slipped in the text but overtly given as additional information;
 - 5) Simulated familiarity or internal making, that is, the additional of intra-allusive allusive –signallin features (marked wording or syntax) the depart from the style of the context, thus signaling the presence of borrowed words;
 - 6) Replacement by a performed TL item;
 - 7) Reduction of allusion to sense by rephrasal in other words, making its meaning overt and dispending with the allusive key phrase itself;
 - 8) Recreation, using a fusion of techniques: creative construction of a passage which hints at the connotations of allusion or other special effects created by it;
 - 9) Omission of the allusion

(Leppihalm, 1997, p.84)

The fourth strategy that is the use of footnotes, endnotes, translator's prefaces and other explicit explanations, is not used in dubbing.

3. Irony translation strategies

The last model considers the strategies suggested for translation of verbal irony. Irony in general means to say something and to mean something else, that is the real meaning is different from the surface one. In universal humor also the expression is not related to linguistic features or cultural elements, but it is humorous by itself; for example in the animation Ice age when Manny the mammoth, Diego the tiger and Sid the sloth are speaking about retuning the human baby to his parents (00:13:10), Diego says: "if we save him, he'll be a hunter, and who do you think he'll hunt?" Sid says: "may be because we save him, he won't hunt us" Diego says: "yeah, and maybe he'll grow fur and a long skinny neck and call you Mama." In this situation Diego doesn't really mean the human baby may change so, but he means that there's no exception, humans are not animal's friends and the baby will kill them when he grows up. Then we can regard it as an irony. The strategies of verbal irony translation suggested by Mateo (1995) are investigated in the universal humor group. They are as follows;

- 1) ST irony becomes TT irony with literal translation
- 2) ST irony becomes TT irony with 'equivalent effect' translation
- 3) ST irony becomes TT irony by means of different effects from those used in ST (including the replacement of paralinguistic elements by other ironic cues)
- 4) ST irony is enhanced in TT with some word / expression
- 5) ST ironic innuendo becomes more restricted and explicit in TT
- 6) ST irony becomes TT sarcasm (i.e. more overt criticism)
- 7) The hidden meaning of ST irony comes to the surface in TT (no irony in TT)
- 8) ST ironic ambiguity has only one of the two meanings translated in TT (there is no double-entendre or ambiguity in TT therefore)
- 9) ST irony is replaced by a 'synonym' in TT with no two possible interpretations
- 10) ST irony is explained in footnote in TT

- 11) ST irony has literal translation with no irony in TT
 - 12) Ironic ST is completely deleted in TT
 - 13) No irony in ST becomes irony in TT
- (Mateo, 1995, p.175)

Strategy 10 that is using footnote is not applied in dubbing.

The other aim of this study is to investigate the difference between the number of humorous expressions in the source text (movie transcripts) and the target text (dubbed movie). Tables are used to show this difference.

Procedures

The following steps were taken into consideration in order to provide the necessary data;

- 1) The English transcripts of animations were carefully studied and the humorous expressions were investigated at two different times by the researcher;
- 2) The humorous expressions were classified into universal, cultural and linguistic humor; for example in the animation plane t 51 when it's raining rocks (00:8:12) the man says: "it's raining rocks and dogs" it refers to the idiom "it's raining cats and dogs" then this is categorized as a cultural humor expression. In another situation when captain Baker, the astronaut from the earth, is introducing himself (00:26:38) ,he says: "I'm captain Charles T Baker.- astronaut, -as-tro-naut -Ass,-tronaut" .Based on Oxford advanced learner's dictionary (2000); "ass" refers to an animal or a stupid person, then the expression is categorized as a linguistic humor. In another situation when Lem and his friends are taking Cptain Baker to the TV station (00:45:41), Lem's friend says: "you're the biggest story in history the whole planet will watch" then Captain says: "the whole planet? Interesting I left my hair products on the ship. But I could improvise, you know, astronauts have to deal with any kind of emergency." in this example Captain regards the problem of his hair as an emergency to deal with, then it is regarded as a universal humor expression that is humorous by itself;
- 3) The translation of English humorous expressions are also investigated and categorized in Persian text (dubbed version); here there's an extraction of the Finding Nemo animation transcript (00:48:12) , in which the Persian expressions are categorized ;

CRUSH

Oh, saw the whole thing, dude. First you were like, 'whoa!' And then we were all like, 'Whoa!' And then you were like, 'whoa'.

The Persian equivalence is considered as a universal humor expression because of being humorous by itself

MARLIN

What're you talking about?

CRUSH

You, mini-man! Takin' on the jellies, you got serious thrill issues, dude.

In the target text there are two related words used based on the meaning of 'jellies' in Persian, then it is categorized as a linguistic humor expression;

- 4) The expressions categorized in each group are counted in the source text; for example in the animation Monsters vs. aliens, forty four universal expressions, eight cultural expressions and seven linguistic expressions are investigated;
- 5) The expressions categorized in each group are counted in the target text; for instance in Persian dubbed version of the animation Monsters vs. aliens, forty two universal expressions , forty five cultural expressions and twenty five linguistic expressions are investigated;
- 6) The frequency of expressions in each category is compared between the source and the target text; for example the following table shows the comparison for the previously mentioned animation in which the mark '+' indicates increase and '-' indicates decrease;

Table1: Frequency of Humorous Expressions in the Animation Monsters vs. Aliens

group	ST	TT	Change number
Universal	44	42	-2
Cultural	8	45	+37
linguistic	7	25	+18
Total	59	112	+53

7) Total frequency of each group in all of the animations is compared between the source and target text. The numbers along with their percentages are presented in the following table

Table 2: Frequency of Humorous Expressions in the Animations

Group	ST	ST %	TT	TT %
Universal	391	69	273	40.56
Cultural	103	18.32	274	40.71
Linguistic	68	12.09	95	14.11
Total	562		673	

8) The strategies used in each category are investigated and analyzed by the researcher at two different times. As mentioned before the strategies for translation of puns suggested by Delabastita (1996) are considered for linguistic jokes, the strategies suggested for allusion translation by Leppihalme (1997) for cultural ones and those suggested for verbal irony by Mateo (1995) for the universal ones. One example of each group is presented here;

Animation: Shrek 1

Speaker: The donkey

Time: 00:23:00

English statement: What's the point of being able to talk if you gotta keep secrets?

Group: Universal

Strategy used: Literal translation

Explanation: In this example the exact meaning of the English sentence is presented then the strategy used is the first suggested strategy for translation of verbal irony that is literal translation.

Animation: Madagascar 1

Speaker: Alex

Time: 00:7:25

English statement: When the moment is right, we will ignite the Beacon of the Liberty

Group: Cultural

Strategy used: Reduction of allusion to sense

Explanation: In this example there's an indirect reference to the liberty statue, the name is changed to the Beacon of the Liberty, while in its translation the implied word is used, then the allusion is reduced to sense.

Animation: Ice age 3

Speaker: Sid

Time: 00:13:13

English statement: I'd like to present Egber, Shelly and Yoko

Group: Linguistic

Strategy used: Pun to pun

Explanation: In this example Egber, Shelly and Yoko are the chosen names for three dinosaur eggs. They come from respectively egg, shell and yoke. In translation the names are also considered as pun because of their only difference in one sound.

9) Conclusions are made based on the Frequencies in steps 4, 5, 6 and seven, and also the strategies in the last.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study is to find the answer for three research questions; the results are discussed and the conclusions are drawn separately for each question;

Question 1: Is there any significant difference between the number of humorous expressions in American animations and their Persian dubbed versions?

Though it is believed that humor suffers from some losses in the process of translation, the results of this study shows that the quantity of humorous expressions increases in dubbing of animations. In 90% of the investigated animations the number of the humorous expressions increased. Then it can be concluded that the number of humorous expressions in Persian dubbed version of American animations is more than the number in the original text.

Question 2: What kind of humor (cultural, universal or linguistic) is statistically affected in the process of dubbing?

As it is shown in table 2, the number of universal expressions decreased from 69% to 40.56%, the number of cultural expressions increased from 18.32% to 40.71% and the number of linguistic expressions increased from 12.09% to 14.11%. In spite of the belief that since universal humor is not bound to specific features of a language or a culture, it is not greatly influenced in translation; the results indicate that it is numerically affected in the process of dubbing. Also it is believed that cultural and linguistic elements are specific to one language then they are victims of translation, these figures indicate that they are numerically increased in dubbing.

Although the quantity of cultural and linguistic humorous expressions increased in target text, the quality change is vice versa. While in the source text there are a lot of implicit references to proper names, events, proverbs or other allusive sources, the TT is ample in repeated catchphrases. Considering the linguistic humor the ST includes elaborated puns, while the target text involves nonsense repetition or change in a word letters. Then cultural and linguistic humors are qualitatively affected but universal humor is quantitatively affected.

Question 3: Which specific strategies are mostly used for transfer of humorous expressions in cultural, universal and linguistic groups?

In universal group literal translation is the most preferred strategy and free translation is the next applied. As for cultural group, in proper name allusions, retention of name (either unchanged or in its conventional TL form); and in key phrase allusions omission of the allusion are mostly used. Finally in linguistic group translation of pun to non pun is the most applied strategy and translation of pun to pun is the second.

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