

## Book review

**Dore, Margherita (2020). *Humour in Audiovisual Translation: Theories and Applications*. New York: Routledge.**

Dore's book brings together two micro areas of linguistics which rose to prominence in recent years, Translation Studies and Humour Studies. As she points out in the introduction (pp. 1-2), quite a few scholars of Translation Studies "made the jump" as it were, to research humour in its many aspects. Especially in latest years, the diversification of so many streaming platforms has exposed audiences all over the world to an unprecedented quantity of international contents. Consequently, the transmission of humour in Audiovisual Translation (thereafter AVT) has been the subject of a steadily rising number of publications. However, Dore points out that the mode in which AVT works is not always fully grasped by scholars, who tend to minimise one or more of its aspects (pp. 2-3) This is one of the reasons which drove her to complete this book. The other reason, as appears in the introduction (pp. 3-4), is a relevant one, especially for people who work in translation from English into Italian: the world of entertainment in Italy is still highly dependent on anglophone productions, coming mostly from the United States, therefore a text exploring the mechanics of AVT and its relation to humour is much needed, not only for the scholars, but also for the practitioners of the industry, often forced to work at tight rhythms and with next-to-impossible deadlines (believe me, I have been there). Therefore, the book, while being mostly descriptive in scope, lends itself to prescriptive purposes quite well (especially in the second part).

As its subtitle states, the book is divided into two parts: theories (Chapters 1-2) and applications (Chapters 3-6). The theoretical part is necessary to provide a more focused analysis for the last four chapters; however, all chapters (each with its own bibliography) can be appreciated and studied in isolation.

Chapter 1 enters the core question right from the start, and in the most difficult way: it tries to define humour. Sections worthy of mention (and of great praise) are section 1.2, where Dore distinguishes between humour and laughter based on previous literature, and sections 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 where the major theories relevant to the study are presented, as a general literature review, and which also tell the reader where to look for humour theories. Respectively, in sections 1.3, Dore explains the "sacred triad" of humour theory, "superiority-incongruity-relief" (pp. 17-21), before expounding Script-based theories in 1.4, and conversational humour in 1.5. The humour in comedy, explained in 1.6, lays down the foundation for the further discussion. Before launching into more advanced critical discussion, Dore rightly considers the relationship between humour and translation in 1.7: since humour is hard to define, it is also particularly hard (some say impossible) to translate, but nonetheless humorous texts produced in a source language do indeed get translated all the time.

Chapter 2, apart from discussing thoroughly AVT in all its configurations, past and present, expounds its relationship with humour. Dore makes two smart choices: the first one is that she avoids discussing the age-old problem of whether or not subtitling is better than dubbing; the second one is that she avoids a history of both practices, which would probably deserve their own monograph. However, she rightfully insists on the question that, historically,

Italian cinema and television have relied on contents coming from abroad, especially from the anglophone world, and therefore the question of how different media are adapted for the Italian market is particularly relevant. Dore never loses the focus of her research question, by putting into relation AVT and humour, and the various techniques that she observed in the translation of different kinds of humour. Particularly useful for translators is her concept of *functional manipulation* (p. 89), which refers to the way contents are modified (when not downright replaced) to provoke laughter in the target language. The table of jokes in dubbing (pp. 89-90) that the author quotes from Zabalbeascoa's (1996) analysis, can serve as a starting point to discuss how comical interaction works in translation. However, Dore notices that this table is limited to isolated jokes and therefore needs expanding if we want to consider a longer exchange between two or more characters, as happens in TV shows.

Chapter 3 is where the book takes its research question "out in the field" so to speak. In paragraph (3.2) Dore explores the different definitions of (humorous) puns, building on script oppositions, as well as on the characteristics of *homonymy*, *homophony*, *homography*, and *paronymy* (that she lifts from Delabastita's 1996 taxonomy), which are combined with vertical and horizontal structures. In a nutshell, the former is when only one of the two opposing scripts is present in a text, whereas the latter presents both opposing structures in the same text ("The cock has a big cock"). Dore's main dissatisfaction with the pre-existing theory seems to be that it covers only static puns, whereas she is interested in dynamic and interactional ones. However, one might argue that, at least in TV shows, what appears is a mere illusion of interaction and dynamicity, since usually the puns (like the rest of the dialogues) are scripted (and only few actors, such as Bill Cosby, would ad-lib lines for a TV Show). In 3.2.1, Dore introduces the concepts of puns based on *fixed expressions* and *idioms* (*FEI-puns*), and different degrees to which these idioms can be twisted, while 3.2.2 is based on the combination between verbal and non-verbal content (the elements which add contour to a dialogue). Dore then formulates her taxonomy of six strategies for coping with humour in AVT (pp. 118-119) - these are: *transference* (direct translation of a pun), *equivalence* (replacement with an equivalent pun), *substitution* (replacement with another related rhetorical device), *neutralisation* (omission of the pun with preservation of the meaning), *omission* (cancellation of the pun with manipulation of the passage), *compensation* (adding of a feature in the TT where the ST did not feature one). Based on this, Dore analyses the translation of humour in the American sitcom *Modern Family* (2009-2020), dividing how different kinds of puns (General, FEI, Verbal + Non-verbal) are dealt with in dubbing and captioning; interestingly, she includes in the analysis also the fan-generated versions (fandubbed and fansubbed) alongside the official versions, in order to suggest that more than one strategy is applicable when translating the same pun.

Chapter 4 continues with *Modern Family* as its main object of research, this time exploring the sitcom under the lens of *culture-specific references* (CSR). What emerges even more clearly in the comparison between the solutions adopted by dubbers and those adopted by subtitlers, is that in dubbing the dialogues, there is much more freedom to manipulate the source material. The many examples that Dore provides, from both the dubbed and subtitled versions of the show, demonstrate time and again that subtitles have to adhere more to the original dialogues (partly because the original version is heard at the same time as when the subtitles are read), whereas the dubbed texts leave more space for creativity and functional manipulation, in order to amuse the Italian viewer. The author also briefly explores the importance of using CSRs in section 4.4, where she argues that their humorous effect is achieved by producing incongruity between what they might evoke (example: singer Boy George) and their appearance in a new context, where they are given a new meaning (example: an object renamed Boa George). The process of translating these elements can be extremely straightforward, because sometimes the original text itself explains a given reference, but if that does not happen, translators have to

resort to different strategies. Dore argues that all strategies can be summarised into *transference*, *explicitation*, *lexical recreation*, *substitution* and *omission* (pp. 190-191), with substitution being the most widely used and having its own subcategories (substitution with a foreign element known to the target audience, or with a foreign element shared with the target culture, or with a domestic element, and so on). Moreover, it is worth noticing that the CRSs in *Modern Family* (at least in the first two seasons) can be categorised into *material*, *ecological*, *high culture*, *popular culture*, and *religious*. The findings in comparing original and translated versions show that script oppositions are voluble and malleable, but the humour in the translated text does not suffer from incoherent choices.

Chapter 5 covers the interplay between different languages in the source material, especially revolving around one character, Gloria, whose mixture of Colombian Spanish and English, as well as her struggle with idioms and mispronunciation of words make for interesting comedy. As explained by previous literature (mainly Zabalbeascoa & Voellmer 2014), multilingual humour has usually been elaborated in translation through one of the following solutions:

- *neutralisation*: when the multilingualism is rendered invisible;
- *transfer unchanged*: when it is transcribed verbatim;
- *adaptation*: when it is conveyed by using another language.

Dore argues that usually bizarre solutions in comedy are ‘given a pass’ by viewers, who are willing to suspend their disbelief even more than usual, to enjoy the humour (p. 233). Therefore, it is not uncommon to have situations where characters speak in more than one language. As for Italian dubbing, usually multilingual humour is flattened out, and compensated for elsewhere. For example, different languages are rendered as different accents, even though this may end up somehow stigmatising a certain regional reality. As for *Modern Family*, it appears that Gloria’s hispanophone tendencies are highlighted even more in the Italian version as opposed to the original one. Dore justifies this strategy in the following passage:

It could be argued that the choice of retaining the original L3 (Spanish) is certainly facilitated by the fact that Italian and Spanish are related languages. However, the translation of multilingual humour is often challenged by the presence of language-based pun, verbal and non-verbal play and so on due to Gloria’s non-native command of her L2 (English). In addition, some instances of humour derive from some of the other main characters’ improper use of Spanish or misunderstanding during conversations. It goes without saying that these instances of multilingual humour are perceived as unintentional at the character/character level, but intentional at the scriptwriter-audience level (p. 235).

While dubbers resort to creative solutions and functional manipulation of the content whenever multilingual exchange happens (and Dore even points out a whole episode where “[a]ll the scenes featuring her [i.e. Gloria] become challenging from a translational point of view because they revolve around the mistakes she makes while speaking English”; p. 237), subtitlers (both in the official and in the fansubbed version) preferred to retain the Spanish words in the Italian subtitles, without attempting any adventurous rewriting, that would probably put even more tension between what the spectator hears and what s/he reads (she quotes Pedersen’s 2007 notion of *credibility gap*; p. 246).

Chapter 6 deals with the relationship between Audio Description and humour, and before introducing her own data analysis, the author points out studies carried out on Audio Description of other movies, namely on *Borat* and on the Spanish versions of *The Hangover I* and *The Hangover II*. What is important to her discussion is that although the aim of Audio Description

is to reproduce the same or similar effects to those that a ‘normal’ audience would have, usually the translated versions of such Descriptions practice self-censorship and go for much less “coloured” expressions than their original counterparts. The final data analysis is based on the movie *The Big Sick*, and it shows that with so much difference between the English and Italian versions, the English-speaking blind and visually impaired audience can enjoy the descriptive humour in more than one occasion (especially in the multilingual interplay between Urdu and English), whereas much is left out for the Italian audience. I believe we have to be especially grateful to Dore for delving into the analysis of Audio Descriptions, in spite of the extremely difficult conditions that render almost impossible any retrieval of both source and target materials.

It is hoped that this book will encourage a response among humour studies, particularly with people concerned with audiovisual material and translation; the instances of functional manipulation that Dore highlighted demonstrated that we are way past asking ourselves whether or not humour can be translated. Moreover, although the adage “there are more ways of translating a joke” still applies, Dore’s systematic analysis showed us that there are preferred ways in which it gets done.

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