



## LOST IN TRANSLATION: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN CONVEYING HUMOR

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*Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada hazil tarjimasi - bu hazil, so'z o'yinlari va madaniy kontekstlarni bir til va madaniyatdan boshqasiga o'girish jarayoni bo'lib, u tarjimonlardan nafaqat til bilishni, balki madaniy tafovutlarni ham chuqur tushunishni talab qiladi. Ushbu maqolada hazil tarjimasining asosiy nazariy yondashuvlari, tarjima jarayonidagi qiyinchiliklar va ularni yengib o'tish strategiyalari ko'rib chiqiladi. Shuningdek, so'z o'yinlari, madaniy kontekstlar va multimodal hazil elementlarining tarjimadagi o'rni tahlil qilinadi.*

*Kalit so'zlar: hazil tarjimasi, so'z o'yini, madaniy ma'lumotlar, tarjima strategiyalari, ko'pmodalli yumor (hazil), nomutanosiblik, ssenariy nazariyasi, transkreatsiya, tarjima qiyinchiliklari.*

*Annotation: This article humor translation involves transferring jokes, puns, and cultural references from one language and culture to another, requiring translators to possess not only linguistic proficiency but also deep cultural understanding. This article examines the main theoretical approaches to humor translation, challenges encountered during the process, and strategies to overcome*



them. It also analyzes the role of wordplay, cultural contexts, and multimodal humor elements in translation.

**Keywords:** humor translation, wordplay, cultural references, translation strategies, multimodal humor, incongruity, script theory, cognitive linguistics, transcreation, untranslatability

*Аннотация:* В данной статье рассматриваются аббревиатуры, перевод юмора — это процесс переноса шуток, каламбуров и культурных отсылок с одного языка и культуры на другой, требующий от переводчиков не только языковой компетенции, но и глубокого понимания культурных различий. В данной статье рассматриваются основные теоретические подходы к переводу юмора, возникающие при этом трудности и стратегии их преодоления. Также анализируется роль игры слов, культурных контекстов и мультимодальных элементов юмора в переводе.

Ключевые слова: перевод юмора, игра слов, культурные отсылки, стратегии перевода, мультимодальный юмор, несоответствие, теория сценария, когнитивная лингвистика, транскреация, непереводаемость

Whether you want to admit it or not, most of us love a good pun. Puns can be hilarious. In fact, we even frequently use the word "punny" to describe puns that make us chuckle. While this made-up word may be hilarious to fluent English speakers, it would leave countless people around the globe scratching their heads, even if it was translated into their native tongue. This not-so-funny issue brings us to the translation of humor and its challenges. Humor touches many areas of our lives, from entertainment to advertisements to business relationships. Because movies, products, video games, and educational tools can have a global reach, the translation of humor is often necessary. Humor presents a challenge as it is often tied to very niche cultural and linguistic contexts. Some humor is universal, but some is very culturally dependent. This can leave translators with the task of translating humor that is impossible to translate without risking reducing the intended meaning



of a joke. Humor in translation can also be distorted due to translation errors, caused by irregularities and discrepancies between certain items that translators attempt to translate. This could be due to the ignorance of the translator, as well as the untranslatability of the text as a result of linguistic or cultural differences. In addition, translation errors can be caused by the language incompetence of the translator in the target language, resulting in unintended ambiguity in the message conveyed. Humor relies on a mix of wordplay, cultural references, and linguistic nuances. A joke that is hilarious in one culture may not always be understood in another and can sometimes even be considered offensive. Therefore, professional translation of humor requires a deep understanding of both the source and target cultures. If we want to understand the challenges involved in translating humor, we need to start by considering the different forms of humor that exist. Humour is a vital part of human communication, deeply rooted in language, culture, and social context. However, when humour crosses linguistic boundaries, it poses significant challenges for translators. One of the most complex and nuanced areas in translation studies is the translation of humour, particularly when dealing with puns, wordplay, and culture-specific references.

### **Wordplay as a Translation Challenge**

One of the most notable difficulties in humour translation is wordplay. Wordplay often relies on phonetic similarities or homonyms – words that sound alike or are spelled similarly but have different meanings. Such humour may be highly effective in the source language, yet lose its essence when translated into a different linguistic system.

A clear example of this can be seen in the English pun:

**Q: Why was King Arthur's army too tired to fight?**

**A: It had too many sleepless knights.**

In this pun, the humour comes from the similarity in pronunciation between the words "knights" (soldiers) and "nights" (as in nighttime). The double meaning



creates a clever and humorous twist. However, in many other languages, such phonetic similarity between equivalents of "nights" and "knights" may not exist, rendering the joke ineffective. This illustrates the broader issue of untranslatability in word-based humour.

### **Situational Humour and Cultural Adaptation**

In contrast to wordplay, situational humour is generally more adaptable to translation. This type of humour is based on specific scenarios or dialogues that may be culturally adjusted without entirely losing their comedic value. However, even situational humour can include cultural elements that require thoughtful adaptation to remain humorous in the target language.

Consider the following English dialogue that exemplifies absurd humour:

#### **Original (English):**

"Hey, you wanna have dinner with me Saturday night?"

Oh, I can't. I'm going to Orlando for a week on Friday. Some guy's attempting to make the world's biggest pancake."

"Guess who's covering it?"

"That's gonna take a week?"

"Yeah, he's gonna eat it, too."

"It's another record."

This exchange is humorous due to its absurdity—attending a week-long event where someone is making and eating the world's largest pancake. The exaggeration and surprise elements create a comedic effect. However, such humour may not directly resonate with audiences from other cultures. To overcome this, translators often resort to cultural substitution. The Russian adaptation of the same scene replaces the pancake event with something more familiar to Russian audiences—references to popular TV programs like KVN and Что? Где? Когда? held in correctional facilities:

#### **Adapted Translation (Russian):**



"Может, сходим куда-нибудь в субботу?"

"В субботу не могу: у меня командировка в Ярославскую исправительную колонию, там проходит КВН, угадай, кто будет вести репортаж?"

"Ты? Хорошо, тогда до воскресенья?"

"В воскресенье тоже не получится. В другой колонии проходит 'Что? Где? Когда?' У меня такой тур выходного дня по колониям."

This version maintains the absurd tone while integrating familiar cultural references, making the humour more accessible to the target audience. It shows that effective humour translation is not merely about linguistic accuracy but also about cultural sensitivity and creativity.

**Dark humor and sarcasm:** These forms of humor are deeply rooted in each culture and can be difficult to translate without losing their tone and impact. Professional translators use various techniques to translate humorous scenes, each with its pros and cons:

**Cultural transposition:** This technique involves adapting a joke by using cultural references from the target language. For example, a joke about a celebrity in one country can be adapted by using a celebrity in the target country to create an equivalent effect.

**Functional equivalence:** This method tries to find a joke in the target language that has a similar impact on the reader or viewer. While the joke may not be identical, it aims to elicit the same emotional response.

**Localization:** This is an advanced form of cultural transposition, where the entire context of the joke is adapted to fit the cultural norms and expectations of the target language.

For translators tasked with translating humorous text, there are certain steps they can take to ensure the final version still evokes laughter. When dealing with jokes that involve a cultural divide, translators may need to invent entirely new jokes



that resonate with the target culture. This approach can often be more effective than directly translating the original joke. Similarly, in cases of wordplay-based humor, translators may need to creatively rewrite the pun or expression so that it makes sense in the target language. Capturing the essence and impact of the original joke is often more important than providing a literal translation. Translating humor is neither a quick nor simple task. It often requires multiple drafts and extensive editing to capture the intended tone and comedic effect. Nevertheless, it is the translator's role to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. With the right skills and dedication, translators can achieve this and bring laughter to new audiences. Many translation errors stem from untranslatability—that is, situations where certain words, expressions, or cultural elements do not have equivalents in the target language. This is often linked to challenges in domestication and foreignization strategies. For example, the Chinese idiomatic expression 多多少少 ([ 'duo duo fao fao ']) means “to some extent” in English. However, a literal translation would yield “many many few few”, which completely distorts its original meaning and sounds absurd.

Another notable case of untranslatability occurred when Coca-Cola entered the Chinese market in 1928. Early attempts to phonetically transliterate □Coca-Cola□ used Chinese characters that, when combined, produced nonsensical or awkward meanings such as □female horse fastened with wax□ or □bite the wax tadpole.□ This branding blunder was later corrected by selecting characters (可口 可乐) that preserved the pronunciation and conveyed a positive meaning: “allow the mouth to rejoice.”

Ambiguity in language can also be a source of humor. Words that are homonyms, paronyms, alliterative, rhyming, or include metalinguistic features often lend themselves to comedic use. Wordplay—including puns, one-liners, limericks, and witticisms—is another major tool for creating humor. However, such forms are



particularly hard for machine translators, which can produce humorous but unintended mistranslations.

**In the office of a doctor in Rome: Specialist in women and other diseases.**

**In a Japanese hotel: You are invited to take advantage of the chambermaid.**

**In a Norwegian cocktail lounge: Ladies are requested not to have children in the bar.** Translating humor is a sophisticated and multifaceted task that extends far beyond mere linguistic competence. It involves a deep understanding of both source and target cultures, sensitivity to context, and creative problem-solving. The challenges of humor translation—such as untranslatability, wordplay, and cultural specificity—often require strategies like transcreation, adaptation, or cultural substitution. Translators must decide whether to prioritize fidelity to the original or resonance with the target audience. The goal is not always to replicate the joke exactly, but to reproduce the humorous effect and intent. As global communication continues to increase, the role of humor translation becomes even more essential in media, marketing, literature, and daily cross-cultural interactions. With the right training and sensitivity, translators can succeed in delivering humor across languages—making people laugh, think, and connect beyond borders.

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