Visual Restrictions in the Translation of Audiovisual Wordplays. The Case of *Modern Family*.

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ABSTRACT

When not only words, but also images, are involved in the process of translating humour, the degree of complexity increases. This paper delves into the translation of visually restricted wordplays in dubbed audiovisual products by carrying out a descriptive investigation. For this purpose, a corpus of visually restricted wordplays extracted from four seasons of the sitcom *Modern Family* was created. A total number of 84 instances were examined to determine the translation techniques used to deal with this type of wordplay in audiovisual products. The study revealed that literal translation was the most frequent technique and recreation, the least commonly used. Additionally, a general intention to preserve the pragmatic function of the visually restricted wordplays present in the original product in the target version was observed, since most of them were rendered into Spanish, i.e., a strategy other than omission was used.

KEYWORDS: audiovisual translation; dubbing; humour; wordplay; visual restrictions.

1. Introduction

Wordplays are defined as textual phenomena that contrast with linguistic structures which are formally similar or corresponding but have different meanings (e.g., Delabastita 1996: 128; Martínez Tejerina 2016: 91). Therefore wordplays work semantically on two or more levels, some of which are more obvious or easily activated than others (Redfern 1984: 26-27). When used in audiovisual products, the possibility that these meanings are not transmitted exclusively through linguistic means must be considered, since the language of cinema communicates meaning not only through linguistic means; it is also "built around images and sounds" (Chaves 2000: 34, my translation). For this reason, when rendering wordplays in the context of audiovisual translation (AVT), not only verbal aspects must be taken into consideration, but also non-verbal ones.

In addition, wordplays have a humorous nature (Vandaele 2011: 180). Humour is notoriously difficult to translate and presents a high degree of complexity for translators. In fact, in audiovisual products, it is considered one of the most problematic features (Martínez Sierra 2016: 574). Given their nature, wordplays are deemed specifically among the most challenging comedic devices as far as translation is concerned (Schmitz 2002). These can be found in almost every translatable product (Delabastita 1996), but it should be noted that they are particularly prominent in television situation comedies (or sitcoms).

To make matters even more complicated, the audiovisual context of the sitcom appears to be the perfect setting for visually restricted (or constrained) wordplays due to the importance of images, which can "activate a secondary meaning of the accompanying verbal text" (Delabastita 1996: 129). The concept *visually restricted wordplay* refers to wordplays that do not work exclusively on a linguistic level, but rather completely rely on the image to activate at least one of its meanings and potentially elicit laughter. This makes them significantly more difficult to translate into other languages since the image cannot be modified.

Thus, the focus of the present article is the translation of visually restricted wordplays in a sitcom series, where the humoristic purpose of jokes is attained by presenting viewers with the verbal and visual content at the same time. The specific objective of the research project behind this article was to study the range of translation techniques available for translators when dealing with visually restricted wordplays in audiovisual products such as sitcoms, as well as the restrictions and difficulties with which they are faced.

Given the existing ambiguity and confusion regarding the terms *strategy*, *method*, and *technique* within Translation Studies (TS), at this point, it seems necessary to clarify why *technique* is used in this paper. As defined by Molina and Hurtado (2002: 507-508), *strategy* is a procedure to solve translation problems that "open[s] the way to finding a suitable solution for a translation unit", *method* refers to "a global option that affects the whole text", and *technique* alludes to translation decisions "that affect micro-units of the text." What this article aims to examine aligns best with the latter and it is also the term used by other studies focusing on visually restricted wordplays (see, for instance, Martínez Tejerina 2012).

Following this introductory section, a literature review and theoretical framework is presented. In a nutshell, I discuss the importance of word-image semantic cohesion when translating visually restricted wordplays, different types of humorous elements in audiovisual products and some of the most relevant translation techniques for wordplays in audiovisual humour. These constitute the key concepts and rationale used for the selection of examples in the corpus as well as their subsequent analysis.

2. The Sound-image Interplay of Audiovisual Texts and their Translation

Audiovisual texts are made up not only of words, but also of other types of element, such as images and sounds, and thus make use of several communication channels and codes to convey a message (Chaves 2000: 34). The presence and interaction of each of these elements are the source of some added meanings that complement the linguistic component (Martínez Tejerina 2012: 159). As a matter of fact, as Chaume points out, "despite its preponderant role, the linguistic code is just another code in the creation and subsequent rendering of audiovisual texts" (2004: 26, my translation). As a result, both the visual and auditory channels must be in conformity with each other and interact to transmit information complementarily, not only in the original version, but also in the translated one (Zabalbeascoa 1997: 336). This is relevant here since the object of study –visually restricted wordplays– is essentially a blend of visual and acoustic elements.

In connection with the visual elements, "the translator's leeway is limited by the semantic redundancy […] since the image gives the target spectator additional information about the original text" (Martínez Tejerina 2012: 165). Consequently, since it is impossible for translators to modify the image, some difficulties may have to be faced throughout the process of translation as the TT must necessarily be in agreement with this visual information or, at least, not be in conflict with it (Martínez Tejerina 2012: 159, 165). Since all dialogues are unquestionably, to a greater or lesser extent, connected with the images shown, and since the meaning of the wordplays under examination in this work heavily rely on the visual cues, only "those images that subordinate the text" (Martínez Tejerina 2012: 159) will be regarded as *visual restrictions*.

As a result of all this, in order to achieve a highly unified translation in terms of content, translation techniques which preserve the word-image semantic cohesion of the original must

be used. This is always relevant as it facilitates or even enables comprehension of the target text (TT). Nonetheless, will be seen, in the context of visually restricted wordplays, it is particularly important to respect this cohesion for the joke to make sense and maintain its pragmatic intention.

Furthermore, the object of study is a dubbed product. In this respect, it is interesting to highlight that dubbing is notably constrained by the image as well. The first and most noted restriction caused by the interaction between the visual and the linguistic elements is synchronisation (or lip-sync). When dubbing, "the idea of equivalence between the utterances in the [SL] and those in the [TL] is pursued according to phonetic articulation" (Chaume 2012: 68). This, in most cases, will not be problematic because the meaning of the source text (ST) will be preserved. However, as far as humour is concerned, lip-sync and dubbing in general may seriously limit the range of possible translation solutions (Zabalbeascoa 1996: 245). In fact, according to Mayoral *et al*., dubbed products are the most restricted type of translated audiovisual products (1988: 364).

Whereas in subtitled products, the audience may overlook some meaningful details of the story if they are focused on reading the subtitles without paying attention to the visual information of the programme (Tveit 2009: 90), when consuming dubbed products, full attention is concentrated on the image. This idea is pertinent because the focal point of this paper is wordplays whose semantic content and funniness are reinforced by means of visual elements, hence the image is particularly relevant –or even crucial– when conveying the information and eliciting humour.

3. A Classification of Humorous Elements in Sitcoms

As Zabalbeascoa points out, in audiovisual texts, humour can stem from every element susceptible of carrying meaning (2001: 254). Thus, it can result from verbal elements as well as non-verbal ones, i.e. images, sounds, etc. In addition, culture[1] also plays an essential role in the construction of humour. As a matter of fact, according to Nash (1985: 9-10), all acts of humour –which are the practical realisation of humour– have a cultural background.

[1] In the context of this article, *culture* refers to any or several of the following items: history, institutions, knowledge, experience, personages, attitudes, beliefs, values, hierarchies, religion, stereotypes, geography, gastronomy, literature, art, among others (Nash 1985: 9-10; Samovar and Porter 1997: 12-13; Agost 1999: 99).

Given the variety of possible sources of humour, authors such as Zabalbeascoa (1993, 2001) and Martínez Sierra (2004) have attempted to classify humour, or more specifically, jokes, as these are the translation units with which translators deal when faced with a humorous text (Zabalbeascoa 1993: 294). According to Martínez Sierra (2016: 575), a joke is generally not a unitary entity[2], but is rather composed of various types of potentially comical elements, which he categorises as follows (2016: 577-579; 2018: 114-117):

1. *Referential Elements* refer to intertextual and cultural features which are specific to a particular group and are unknown to others. This can include celebrities, politicians, organisations, buildings, books, television programmes, brands…
2. *Preferential Elements* allude to the topics which are more popular in a community. Unlike the previous group, this does not necessarily imply cultural specificity, but rather preferences.
3. *Linguistic Elements* are any linguistic features that intend to produce a humorous effect and are transmitted orally.
4. *Paralinguistic Elements* are the non-verbal aspects of an orally expressed message, such as the intonation, rhythm, tone, timbre, resonance, or pauses, which transmit emotions. For instance, foreign accents, a scream, or the imitation of a celebrity's voice would fall into this category.
5. *Visual Elements* comprise any images that are potentially humorous. These can be divided into two different groups: humour emanating solely from what is shown on screen, and a visual support for a linguistic joke. The second type is therefore language dependent.
6. *Graphic Elements* include written on-screen messages (a text, a subtitle, an intertitle…) regarded as funny. These differ from visual elements in that the latter are not text-based.
7. *Acoustic Elements* refer to any sounds or music which, heard alone or in combination with other elements, generates a comical situation.
8. *Non-Marked (Humorous) Elements* embrace all elements which trigger a humorous response yet cannot be incorporated in any of the aforementioned categories.

[2] In contrast, Zabalbeascoa argues that when translating humour, rather than dealing with words, sentences, or paragraphs, translators always deal with a *joke*, which he presents as a unitary and broad concept which can range from a phoneme to a whole text (1993: 294).

All these elements are capable of generating humorous situations, either on their own or in combination with others. Depending on the number of elements of which jokes are made up, they can be classed as *simple* –when only one of the above-stated elements is present– or *compound* – those which include two or more elements (Martínez Sierra 2004: 211). Due to the nature of this paper and the object of analysis –i.e., visually restricted wordplays–, information primarily concerning *Linguistic*, *Visual*, and *Graphic* elements is examined here, although some examples including *Referential* and *Paralinguistic* elements have been detected as well. In the context of this taxonomy, these types of joke are considered compound jokes since they incorporate at least two of these elements.

3.1. Wordplays and visually restricted wordplays

Jokes which rely upon language itself have been labelled *linguistic-formal jokes* (Zabalbeascoa 2001: 260), *linguistic elements* (Martínez Sierra 2016, 2018) or *wordplays*, and they are one of the central concepts of this article. As defined by Martínez Tejerina (2016), wordplays are the contrast of formally corresponding linguistic structures which differ semantically (91).

The most common linguistic mechanisms to construct language-based humour are homonymy, polysemy, homophony, paronymy, homography, rhymes, and *double entendres* (Adamczyk 2014: 13; Zabalbeascoa 2001: 260). Additionally, it could be argued that idioms and mispronunciations may also constitute a resource to generate this type of humour, since as will be shown, to produce language-based humour, *Modern Family* recurrently counts on idiomatic expressions as well as Gloria's characteristic accent and mispronunciations.

Another relevant feature of wordplays is that "there are always two or more levels, manifest and latent, in some kind of coexistence, sequence, alternation, or tension" (Redfern 1984: 26-27). As a result, the various meanings that make up a wordplay are not equally obvious, which implies that only the most recognisable ones will be easily activated. In audiovisual products, "the linguistic code can refer to one of the meanings of the wordplay and the iconographic code, to the other one" (Chaume 2004: 243, my translation), which is what the concept of *visually restricted wordplays* refers to.

4. The Translation of Humour and (Visually Restricted) Wordplays

As already mentioned, translating humour is one of the most challenging activities with which translators may be faced. Firstly, as Chiaro points out, "[i]f we […] begin to consider the exportability of funniness, we will soon find that a traditional vehicle of humour such as the joke does not generally travel well" (1992: 9). The reason is that the means of each language and culture to produce a comical situation are different (Chaves 2000: 147).

But even if a linguistically perfect translation of the joke could be provided, it may fail to be funny because of the target audience's lack of background knowledge (Chiaro 1992: 83). This might be the case when dealing with non-verbal elements, such as sounds or images, because as universal as they may appear, the audience will interpret their meaning on the basis of their own cultural background or knowledge (Zabalbeascoa 2001: 260). In the case of *paralinguistic jokes* –which are based upon the conjunction of both verbal and non-verbal elements, just like visually restricted wordplays–, there are visual representations of a word, idiom, or expression (Zabalbeascoa 2001: 260-261). Consequently, it seems logical to presume that the audience will only understand this type of joke provided that the exact word or expression for the visual element comes to mind. Otherwise, they will be unable to find a connection between what they hear and what they see.

For these two reasons, according to Attardo (2002), it would appear that "a literal translation would be completely beside the point" when dealing with comical utterances (174). Nonetheless, it seems worth pointing out that while this may be a common scenario, literal translations in the context of humour are not necessarily *always* a questionable choice, as will be demonstrated.

Despite this, it should be considered that the SL and TL audiences need to be given a similar humorous effect (Yus 2012: 6) and this indeed cannot always be achieved through literal translation. Whenever that is the case, a translator's overriding concern should be "reproducing humorous effects" instead of "coded content" (ibid.). In other words, when it comes to the translation of humour, "pragmatics wins over semantics" (Attardo 2002: 185) and "the translator should do the utmost to preserve [the pragmatic] scenario, even if that involves radically changing the semantic scenario and also, perhaps, the cultural one" (Yus

2012: 8). In the case of visually restricted wordplays, as will be seen, this can be done by means of techniques such as *substitution* or *recreation*.

Even so, reception studies seem to indicate that verbal humour is generally not particularly successful when translated. By way of example, in his study about the reception of translated verbal humour in English-Spanish, Fuentes-Luque (2001) concludes that participants who were exposed to the original version of the humorous product laughed and smiled more often than those who watched the translated versions, who instead showed a greater tendency to reactions of puzzlement or, simply, no reaction at all. A similar study in the combination English-Italian by Chiaro (2007) appears to yield similar results, as British participants gave higher scores to verbally expressed humour (VEH) than Italian respondents. The reason could be that, as Chiaro (2004) suggests, when humour depends on a linguistic element, the translation can significantly influence its recognition. Indeed, in this study, she found that respondents who watched the translated version "scored very low on recognition of VEH", that is, they generally did not seem either to spot the humour in the TT or to understand it (49). Antonini (2005) obtained similar results in her study on the perception of subtitled humour in English-Italian.

Indeed, with reference to the translation and translatability of wordplays, Schmitz (2002) thinks of linguistic or word-based humour as the most difficult to translate, even more than universal or reality-based humour and culture-based humour. The primary reason is the unavailability of "one-to-one equivalence" between tongues (Delabastita 1996: n.p.). To put it differently, the fact that each language relates forms and meanings differently complicates the reproduction of wordplays in other languages because when trying to replicate the joke in a different language, translators may find that the traits of the TL do not allow it to be reproduced. However, as the likeness between the SL and TL increases, translatability will increase as well (ibid.).

Despite this, the translation of wordplays between fairly distinct languages –such as English and Spanish– is not impossible: they will still be translatable, but the translator will have to "replace language based [sic] humour strategies with alternative ones in the [TL] in an attempt to preserve the initial humorous intention" (Yus 2012: 8). When wordplays are visually restricted, this search for alternatives becomes a more demanding task, as the number

of options is considerably reduced by the presence of unalterable onscreen information. In fact, the limitations are of such magnitude that the translator, who normally prioritizes the reproduction of semantic content or pragmatic effects, would settle for avoiding contradictions with the image in this case (Chaume 2004: 27). Additionally, it should be borne in mind that the translation of wordplays, given their nature, tends to result in a dramatic decrease of the comic effect (Marco 2010: 276).

Furthermore, as pointed out earlier, idioms or idiomatic expressions can also be used to create wordplays, which is the case in numerous instances of this corpus. Idioms are defined as "a stable word combination with a fully or partially transferred meaning" (Veisbergs 1997: 156), hence their comical effect stems from the unpredictability caused by the alteration of their habitual meaning and, sometimes, their structure as well (Veisbergs 1997: 157). Since idioms are generally regarded as structurally immutable entities, the translation of idiom-based wordplays appears to be particularly challenging due to the need for a specific wording to achieve the intended effect (Veisbergs 1997: 162). In the case of audiovisual products, it can be stated that the image represents an additional translational difficulty, as it may limit even more the already small range of possible solutions.

In line with this analysis, it seems that the translation of visually restricted humour is particularly problematic. In fact, following Yus's (2012) classification of jokes, this would be included in what he named *challenging jokes* (10), as their comical impact is based upon a linguistic reference to an item which cannot be adapted to the TL or omitted, i.e., images. Indeed, "audiovisual texts for translation can only be manipulated or 'translated' in their verbal components" (Zabalbeascoa 1997: 341). For this reason, Chiaro (2005) points out that humour on screen, especially when it involves wordplays, is normally more successful in its country of origin than abroad because of the high translational difficulty of this type of joke (138). In other words, when wordplays are not accompanied by an image, they are easier to translate because of the lack of reinforced, unalterable meanings. Therefore, the more constraints, the fewer potential solutions. In Chiaro's (2008: 590) words,

> In a comedy which may well rely on many of these features [(verbal, non-verbal, acoustic and visual signs)] simultaneously in order to create the desired effect, the verbal code is the only area which can be manipulated to aid the target culture in capturing the humour. Thus, most translational problems which regard VEH on screen are similar to those which regard written texts but multiplied several times owing to the restrictions which the visual code impose upon the translation.

Still, none of this implies that humour is untranslatable, but its translation entails a certain loss of humorous effect (Fuentes-Luque 2001: 67), especially when the SL and TL share fewer structures and the product to be translated embodies some of the elements referred to in the previous section. Having said that, since "it would seem that […] translating humour would come down to achieving the 'same humorous effect'" (Vandaele 2002: 151), it is worth bearing in mind that the range of possible solutions will considerably widen so long as the top priority is translating the purpose instead of the style or content (Martínez Sierra 2003: 749). Indeed, as Chiaro (2008: 593) points out, "[t]he Italian translations of Marx Brothers' films are a never-ending source of inspired solutions to puns on screen."

4.1. Translation techniques for wordplays

Martínez Tejerina (2016) offers an overview of translation techniques available for wordplays. Firstly, she argues that, as long as the effect is maintained and the structure of both languages allows for it, the first resource to transfer wordplays into another tongue should be as close to *literal translation* as possible. When that is not the case, translators should shift away from literalness as they try, to the greatest possible extent, to preserve the humour (136-137). For this purpose, she considers *substitution* and *recreation* to be appropriate techniques since they contribute to the preservation of the original comical effect (2012: 167; 2016: 140-143).

Substitution consists in moving away from literalness to render both the humorous intention and resource used in the source text (ST) (2016: 140-141), while *recreation* replaces the wordplay with a different humorous resource (2016: 143). The most important difference between both techniques is that substitution aims at maintaining the semantic aspects of the joke, whereas recreation does not. However, while it is true that "retaining the humour should be a priority, even if this means changing the meaning of a pun or nonsense word" (Maher 2011: 6), substitution appears to be more effective when translating visually restricted wordplays because semantics is taken into consideration, and therefore coherence with the image is ensured (Martínez Tejerina 2016: 141).

In addition, Martínez Tejerina (2016) comments on techniques which do not preserve the intended humorous effect of the wordplay, such as neutralisation and omission. When humorous effect cannot be preserved, *neutralisation* tries to disguise this loss to spare the

target audience the feeling of strangeness (141-142). In this case, as long as there are no visual or verbal elements that reinforce one of the meanings of the wordplay, the target audience should not be aware of this loss (2016: 72). For this reason, occasionally it appears to be a suitable solution which ideally should be compensated, when possible, by adding a joke somewhere else in the text (ibid.). Nonetheless, in the case of visually restricted wordplays, neutralisation could sometimes create a slight feeling of strangeness in the viewers, as in some cases the image may give the impression that something has been eliminated from the ST.

Finally, *omission* can be difficult to distinguish from neutralisation because in audiovisual products "the codes of the audiovisual text do not normally allow full omission of the original message" (2016: 72, my translation), since the image gives complementary information and text extracts cannot be removed. Thus, in this paper, omission is understood as either a non-translation of the wordplay or a translation that is confusing or incomprehensible in the TT. In other words, neutralisation replaces the wordplay with a semantically neutral and linguistically natural utterance in an attempt to disguise the loss of the ST's humorous effect (2016: 141-142), while omission does not dissimulate this loss. Therefore, the TT offered through omission might give stronger feelings of strangeness and even lead to a lack of understanding.

5. Objectives and Research Questions

The aims of the study are:

O1. To study the translation from English into Spanish of visually restricted wordplays found in audiovisual products, more specifically, in four seasons (1, 2, 7, and 8) of the American situation comedy *Modern Family* (2009-2020).

O2. To analyse the range of options that translators have when dealing with this type of wordplay, as well as to learn about the potential restrictions and difficulties faced during this translation process.

In line with these objectives, the research questions posed are the following:

RQ1. To what extent are visually restricted wordplays preserved in the TT?

RQ2. Which are the most frequent translation techniques to deal with visually restricted wordplays?

6. Methodology

Given the research questions formulated, a corpus-based and descriptive study of visually restricted wordplays and their translation into Spanish was conducted based on quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative analyses were carried out with the aim of responding to the research questions, while the purpose of the qualitative analysis is to demonstrate reasoning followed to classify each instance of the corpus and to detect the restrictions and difficulties that were probably encountered during the translation process.

The taxonomy of translation techniques upon which the analysis builds is the taxonomy proposed by Martínez Tejerina (2016). Regarding the corpus examined in this paper, it comprises both the ST and the TT, which is the dubbed Spanish version, and it was extracted from seasons 1, 2, 7 and 8 of the American sitcom *Modern Family* (2009-2020). The sample consists of 84 instances of visually restricted wordplays, which seems appropriate in size considering the scope and purpose of this paper. These were recorded on numbered cards as referenced in the qualitative analysis section below.

The selection of examples was based upon the presence and interplay of two items –a linguistic component in the form of a wordplay and a visual component– that potentially create a humorous effect when presented together. Therefore, examples of wordplays that are purely visual or verbal/linguistic were disregarded. The procedure used to build the corpus involved the following phases: viewing the product, detecting potential examples of visually restricted wordplays, assessing their suitability as such on the basis of their components, and making notes of information relevant to the analysis of each instance, such as the ST, the TT, and the context in which these are inserted, that is, the visual information upon which the wordplay relies.

Last, the show *Modern Family* was chosen because, based on anecdotal evidence, the expectation to identify numerous examples of visually restricted wordplays in it was relatively high, especially considering the specificity of this type of wordplay. Firstly, the choice of this specific sitcom stems from the fact that a fairly ample use of a mix of visual and verbal resources to generate humour was spotted. Additionally, all the main characters seemed to use wordplay. In fact, the analysis presents examples of only Phil, Claire, Gloria,

and Cameron using this comedic device in combination with visual cues, but the corpus –which can be found in the Appendix– shows that almost all the main characters –only with the exception of Lily– and even some supporting characters use visually restricted wordplays.

7. Qualitative Analysis of Visually Restricted Wordplays and their Translation

Five examples of visually restricted wordplays representative of each technique (literal translation, substitution, recreation, neutralisation, and omission) will now be examined from a qualitative viewpoint. This illustrates how the whole analysis was carried out, which entailed classification of examples according to the translation technique used and description of the solution adopted in each case.

7.1. Literal translation

Card: 20
Season: 2
Episode: 7 - Chirp
Context: Phil has lost a client and Luke is concerned that the family may run out of money. He finds a little keyboard that he considers selling.
SV: *Luke*: I think I found a place online where I can sell this **organ**. Can you drive me to the **black market**? *Phil*: I think they mean a different kind of organ, buddy.
TV: *Luke*: He encontrado un sitio de internet donde puedo vender este **órgano**. ¿Puedes llevarme al **mercado negro**? *Phil*: Creo que se refieren a otra clase de órgano.

This wordplay is based on the polysemy of the word *organ*, which can mean "a part of your body that has a particular purpose or function" (COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary, 2018, online) and "a large musical instrument [that] has keys and pedals rather like a piano" (COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary 2018: online).

Both the image and the dialogue make it clear that this particular wordplay is polysemy-based. The first meaning of *organ* is evoked by the dialogue, as Luke mentions the *black market*, which is "an illegal traffic or trade" (Oxford Dictionaries 2018: online) and is commonly associated with body organs. The second meaning, however, is conveyed through a visual element, because the audience can see Luke carrying a little toy piano/organ.

Fortunately for the translator, *órgano*, which is the Spanish equivalent for *organ*, is also a polysemic word whose meanings correspond the English ones, and *mercado negro*, which is how *black market* translates, coincides in meaning and connotation as well. Therefore, the translator managed to respect not only the wordplay, but also the image by using the equivalents of both expressions (*organ* and *black market*), that is, by putting forward a literal translation of the joke.

7.2. Substitution

Card: 45
Season: 7
Episode: 16 - The Cover-Up
Context: Phil is into black women and Claire knows it. He just met one at a coffee shop who gave him her phone number. Claire sees the number written on the cup and asks Phil about it. He lies saying that the woman who gave him that phone number is actually old, fat, and Irish.
SV: *Phil*: It was just **a white lie**. Ironically.
TV: *Phil*: Me quedé con **la mente en blanco**. Irónicamente.

This wordplay is based on an idiom, *a white lie*, which can be interpreted both literally and figuratively. Figuratively, a white lie is "[a] harmless or trivial lie, especially one told to avoid hurting someone's feelings" (Oxford Dictionaries 2018: online). This interpretation originates from the audience's background knowledge, which is automatically activated when they hear the expression. Its literal meaning, however, is evoked by the contrast between the word *white* and the black woman on screen.

There is an accurate Spanish equivalent for this idiomatic expression: *una mentira piadosa*. Nevertheless, the visual element does not allow the translator to choose this option because it does not make any allusion to colour. As a consequence, with the aim of preserving the pragmatic intention of the utterance, the translator resorted to substitution and replaced the original idiomatic expression with another that has a different meaning yet refers to colour. The chosen idiom was *quedarse con la mente en blanco* [to go blank], which means "sin poder recordar o sin saber qué decir" [not able to remember or know what to say] (Diccionario de la lengua española 2014: online).

In this case, the translator gave more importance to pragmatics than to semantics. As a result, despite the slight change of meaning (a lie was replaced with an inability to think fast), they managed to provide the target audience with an alternative which guaranteed coherence with the image as well as potential preservation of the humorous intention.

7.3. Recreation

Card: 56
Season: 8
Episode: 4 - Weathering Heights
Context: Beginning of the episode.
SV: *Claire*: This morning has gotten off to a bit of a **rocky**… **Horror Picture Show**. What did you do to your face? *[Phil is wearing make-up: blush, eyeliner, and red lip gloss]*
TV: *Claire*: Esta mañana está empezando… **Como una película de terror**. ¿Qué te has hecho en la cara? *[Phil is wearing make-up: blush, eyeliner, and red lip gloss]*

This wordplay relies on the combination of a culture-specific element, in particular the musical film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and the collocation *a rocky start*, *rocky* meaning "full of obstacles or difficulties" (Webster's New World College Dictionary 2010: online). As regards *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, it is known for the main characters' striking and outlandish make-up. Therefore, it is closely linked to the image.

Due to the reference to a culture-specific element, the main translation problem could be that the target audience may lack the necessary background knowledge to understand the joke. However, given that *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is relatively famous in Spain, the fact that the title of the film was not translated into Spanish is the source of difficulty. The reason is that the translator might be unable to create a wordplay in Spanish if one of the items is inevitably in another language. In addition, the collocation *a rocky start* cannot be left untranslated because it would not make sense to the target audience. Consequently, it seems that the only solution is to eliminate the culture-specific element.

Thus, the translator used recreation and replaced the wordplay with a different humorous resource. In this particular case, a comparison based on a generalisation was the chosen solution: *como una película de terror* [like a horror movie]. As a result of this decision, the culture-specific element was removed, but the coherence between the visuals and the script, and even part of the semantics of the original, were conceivably maintained.

7.4. Neutralisation

Card: 2
Season: 1
Episode: 1 - Pilot
Context: Jay and Gloria have just arrived at Mitchell and Cameron's. Phil and Claire are by the door, and they greet them.
SV: *Phil*: Hi, Gloria. How are you? Oh, what a beautiful dress. *Gloria*: Ay, thank you, **Phil**. *[Phil starts gently caressing her around her hips. Claire sees him and angrily slaps his hand]* *Claire*: That's how she says "**Phil**." Not "**feel**." Phil.
TV: *Phil*: Hola, Gloria. ¿Cómo estás? Qué vestido tan bonito. *Gloria*: Ay, gracias, Phil. *[Phil starts gently caressing her around her hips. Claire sees him and angrily slaps his hand]* *Claire*: ¡Quieto! **Se mira pero no se toca**, ¿vale?

This wordplay is based on the phonetic similarity between *Phil* and *feel*. In this case, *feel* is used as a synonym for "touch" (Collins Thesaurus of the English Language 2002: online). Due to Gloria's accent, Phil thinks that she is telling him to touch her, but she is only saying his name. Therefore, the vocative *Phil* is conveyed through the dialogue, while the verb *feel* is expressed through Phil's reaction and Claire's utterance, that involves both the visual and auditory channel.

When translating this joke into Spanish, two restrictions need to be taken into consideration: the image and the name of the character, as none can be altered by the translator. Moreover, it appears that a word in Spanish that sounds like *Phil* and means 'feel' does not exist. As a result, the translator had to resort to neutralisation and replace the wordplay with a non-punning sentence which may be considered humorous in this particular context: *se mira pero no se toca* [you can look but not touch]. Thus, although the wordplay disappeared, the translator managed to disguise this loss while respecting the visual element.

7.5. Omission

Card: 71
Season: 8
Episode: 10 - Ringmaster Keifth
Context: Jay and Gloria got Cameron and Mitchell some presents. Cameron's gift is an apron that says, "Cam and get it".
SV: *Cameron*: It's an apron. With bells on it. *Gloria*: And it says, "**Cam and get it**!" *Cameron*: So that's not a mistake?
TV: *Cameron*: Es un delantal. Con campanillas. *Gloria*: Y pone "Cam and get it!". *Cameron*: ¿Entonces no es un error?

This wordplay is based on a combination of the phonetic similarity between *Cam* and *come* and the idiomatic expression *come and get it*, which is an informal way of saying "dinner is ready" (McGraw-Hill Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs 2002: online). The character and the apron are visual items, whereas the idiom is conveyed through both the

image and the dialogue. The reason is that in this particular case there is a caption, that is, the punning sentence is shown on the screen. Thus, not only is the idiom transmitted through the auditory channel, but also through the visual one.

Since there is an apron and the viewers know that the character's name is Cam, the translator could attempt to put forward a food-related wordplay which includes the word *Cam*. Nonetheless, the fact that the target audience can have access to the original wordplay considerably constricts the translation. Even if the translator had resorted to substitution to offer a different wordplay, coherence could not have been fully achieved because the expression on screen would differ from the words uttered by the character, which could give rise to criticism. In addition to this, considering that English is probably the most frequent L2 among Spanish viewers, one could assume that they will probably be able to understand the original.

Consequently, the translator left the wordplay untranslated, that is, omitted it. Despite the explanation given previously, it could be argued that this solution may be rather disappointing for some of the Spanish-speaking audience because they might experience a lack of understanding and, as a result, a loss of the humorous intention.

8. Quantitative Analysis

Apart from the qualitative analysis set out in the previous section, a quantitative analysis was also carried out with the aim of establishing the frequency of use of each translation technique, as well as the number of wordplays that have been omitted and rendered. It should be borne in mind, however, that since this is a descriptive study, the effectiveness with which the rendering actually elicits laughter will not be assessed here. All the analyzed instances of visually restricted wordplays are illustrated in the form of two pie charts.

A total of 92 episodes from the sitcom *Modern Family* were examined, out of which 84 restricted wordplays were identified and analyzed. This means that the rate of restricted wordplays per episode is 0.91.

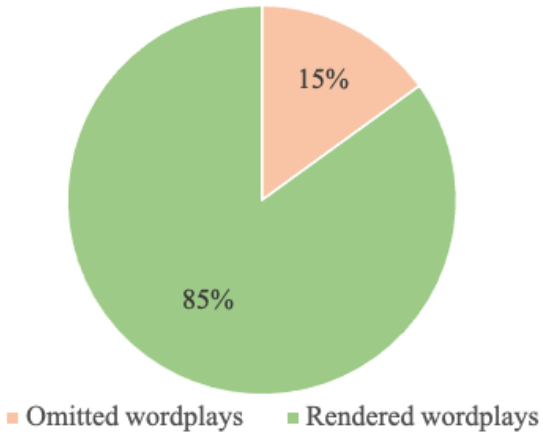

Figure 1. Percentage of rendered and omitted wordplays in the TT.

Figure 1 above shows the percentage of analyzed wordplays which have been translated and those which have been omitted in the TT. Even though omission has been regarded as a translation technique throughout this project, it implies that no translation is provided or that the translation provided does not make sense, hence it implies the elimination of a wordplay.

As can be seen on Chart 1, in 71 out of 84 wordplays (85%) the translator managed to provide the target audience with a translation, be it by resorting to literal translation, substitution, recreation, or neutralisation. It should be noted that this does not necessarily mean that the humoristic effect of these jokes is preserved. The other 13 cases (15%), however, were not rendered into Spanish as the translator opted for omission.

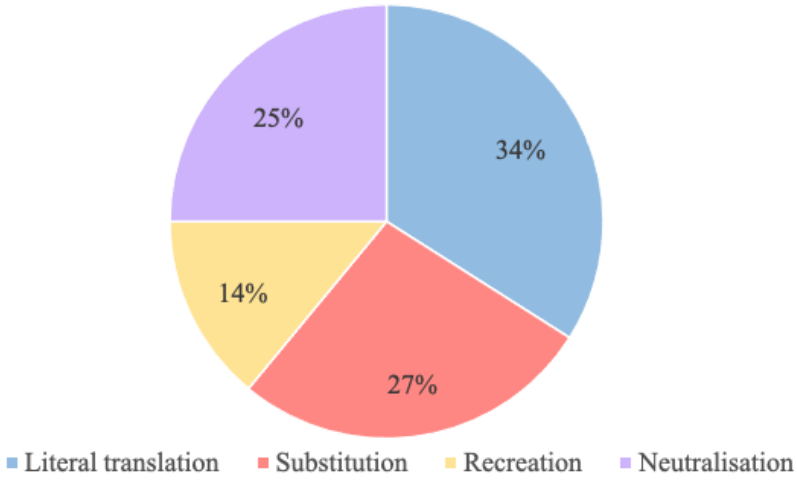

Figure 2. Frequency of use of each translation technique.

Figure 2 shows the frequency of use of the previously examined translation techniques in the four seasons of *Modern Family* analyzed. Omission has not been included in this pie chart because it has already been commented upon in the previous one. Therefore, a total of 71 wordplays are displayed on this graph.

Firstly, 24 out of the 71 examples (34%) have been rendered into Spanish by using literal translation, which implies that, in this case, this is the most used translation technique for visually restricted wordplays. The second most frequent translation technique is substitution, accounting for 19 of the analyzed wordplays (27%). This technique is slightly more frequently applied than neutralisation, which has been utilized in 18 of the 71 cases (25%). Finally, only 10 of these examples (14%) have been translated by resorting to recreation, thus making it the least used translation technique for visually restricted wordplays.

9. Discussion and Conclusions

The main aim of this paper was to examine translation practices concerning visually restricted wordplays and their rendering into Spanish. For this purpose, two research questions were formulated, which could be answered based on the descriptive study carried out.

RQ1 intended to elucidate to what extent visually restricted wordplays are preserved in the TT. As can be seen in Chart 1 in the section above, the translator managed to preserve 85% of all the analysed wordplays, thus omitting only 15%. Therefore, it would appear that when confronted with visually restricted wordplays, the translator seeks to preserve as many as possible in the TT.

Regarding RQ2, it aimed to determine which are the most frequently used techniques when translating visually restricted wordplays. As displayed on Chart 2 in the analysis above, this type of wordplays in the examined corpus were most commonly translated by using literal translation (34% of the cases). The second most frequently used technique was found to be substitution (27%), which was closely followed by neutralisation (25%), and the least frequent translation technique for visually restricted wordplays was recreation (14%).

The implications of these results are essentially two. Firstly, the frequency with which literal translation was used despite the marked formal and phonetic differences between English and

Spanish is worthy of note, especially in such a restrictive context: not only did the translator have to deal with the restrictions of translating wordplays, but also with those imposed by the image and its connection with them. Even though a reception study would be desirable to draw a more reliable conclusion in this respect, this finding would seem to call into question whether literal translation should be deemed inappropriate and disregarded when translating humour in audiovisual products, as some authors have suggested (e.g., Attardo 2002).

The reason behind this perception of literal translation as an unsuitable translation technique for humour could be that even if a wordplay can be translated through literal translation (because semantically it makes sense, for instance), that does not necessarily imply that it will have the desired effects on the target audience. In other words, literal translation does not guarantee laughter. Nevertheless, sometimes it *can* be effective in this respect. In these cases, it could be argued that the transfer of wordplays into another language could –and, according to Martínez Tejerina (2016), *should*– be close to literal translation.

Secondly, the number of wordplays eliminated seems remarkably low given the difficulty of translating visually restricted wordplays. Despite this, since 15% of the instances were omitted, there is still a "negative punning balance" in the TT, which, at least partially, confirms Marco's (2010) assertion that the translation of wordplays –in this case, in dubbing contexts– inevitably entails a certain humorous loss. This study also provides evidence that the visual factor can contribute to reducing the degree of translatability of wordplays, even though it does not necessarily imply that visually restricted wordplays are untranslatable.

In this respect, although the image indeed might impose restrictions when translating visually restricted wordplays, the type of wordplay at hand may also be a factor that influences the choice of a particular technique. By way of example, in the case of literal translation, it was observed that this is a fairly common solution for polysemy-based wordplays (e.g., Card 20 in §7.1.), whereas it was barely used at all for idiom-based wordplays (e.g., Card 45 in §7.2) and for those that rely on a culture-specific element (e.g., Card 56 in §7.3) or phonetic similarity (e.g., Card 2 in §7.4). Thus, the nature of the wordplay seems to facilitate or hinder the application of the translation techniques available.

Finally, I would like to propose ideas for future research in this field with the aim of having further information available for translation training and practice purposes. For instance, since this project examined only four seasons of the show, the corpus of visually restricted wordplays on *Modern Family* could be expanded to analyse more examples. Examining newer seasons (9, 10 and 11) would also be desirable to obtain more up-to-date data about the type of visually restricted wordplays presented in sitcoms and how translators deal with them, as this would shed light on whether there have been any changes in translation practice. Apart from this, the same analysis could be conducted on another situation comedy to study other similar cases as well, and to find out whether the frequency of use of translation techniques varies or whether there is a different percentage of omitted wordplays, for example.

These proposals may be worth pursuing because they may give rise to an extension of the classification of translation techniques and, therefore, provide translators with a greater number of options to carry out and improve their work. However, the limitations of purely descriptive research in this respect should be acknowledged, as this approach cannot reveal the actual effectiveness of the techniques used. It therefore seems relevant to point out the need to conduct reception studies as well, since this type of research is what could eventually contribute to improving translation practice, in this case, with regard to the translation of visually restricted wordplays.

Appendix

The complete corpus of instances examined in this paper can be accessed by scanning the following QR code:

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