Book Review

Margherita Dore (2019). *Humour in audiovisual translation: Theories and applications.* New York and London: Routledge, 296 pp. ISBN: 9780367432317

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The first 20 years of the 21st century have witnessed an explosion of audiovisual translation (AVT) products. Unlimited as to time, space and economic status, the widespread use of online streaming media has made AVT entertainment a feature of daily life. Among the various genres, comedy – with the laughter, happiness, and social commentary it brings – continues to enjoy popular appeal. Humour is indeed a universal phenomenon; its presentation in audiovisual products understandably attracts wide scholarly attention, and Margherita Dore's monograph, *Humour in audiovisual translation: Theories and applications*, is one of the latest works to explore it.

As the title suggests, this volume brings together humour studies and AVT research, emphasising the field's interdisciplinary nature. Unlike previous studies that have focused mainly on particular aspects, this book is both a handy primer for those wishing to familiarize themselves with the basic concepts and theories, and also a meticulously written guidebook that provides replicable empirical study material for researchers, with an eye toward future directions. Using mostly data collected from the first two seasons of a famous sitcom (*Modern Family*) the book discusses the major problems posed in translating audiovisual humour – namely wordplay, culture-specific references, and multilingualism; in parallel, it also captures the strategies deployed to cross such barriers. Across its six chapters, divided thematically into two parts – namely theories (chapters one and two) and applications (chapters three to six) – the book effectively sets the tone of practice-based research.

Part I covers current theories concerning humour and audiovisual translation. In Chapter 1, the author explores the vast literature in humour studies and humour translation, equipping readers with the basic knowledge to understand humour and its mechanisms. Proceeding firstly from the definition, use and function of humour, the author attempts to summarise the existing literature on this engaging and elusive topic. We are next introduced to different categories of humour theories, which are generally summarised as *superiority* (or *hostility*) *theories*, *incongruity theories*, and *relief* (or *release*) *theories* (p. 18). From script-based theories to verbally expressed humour, the author

discusses the core question debated heatedly over the last century – the (un)translatability of humour – and concludes that "functional manipulation" can be used to retain the original effect (p. 42).

Chapter 2 presents a brief overview of AVT. The author first looks back on its historical development in the European context, then goes on to explain a variety of AVT modes, generally categorized as *captioning* and *revoicing*, along with their respective advantages and constraints. Going beyond the usual scope of conventional interest, Dore broadens the spectrum to include the thriving phenomena of *fandubbing* and *fansubbing*, thus affording us a panoramic view of AVT. As she reminds us, captioning is easy to implement, saves time and money, and – most importantly – retains the original spoken dialogue, thus helping cultivate cultural awareness; however, the audience is obliged to juggle between reading the subtitles and enjoying the scenes – potentially quite a burden. Revoicing, on the other hand, keeps the screen clear and is more audience-friendly, but relies heavily on the performance of voice actors (in the case of audio narration, the narrators can even determine the audience's focus); it also faces numerous constraints that can result in the unnatural scripting (*dubbese*) that has long been the centre of AVT criticism. In her analysis the author includes both dubbed and subtitled versions of *Modern Family*, thereby laying the foundation for further discussion in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 marks the beginning of the book's practical part. Applying the general theory of verbal humour (GTVH) matrix proposed by Attardo and Raskin, Dore analyses (1) how humour functions in the source text (ST), (2) which translation strategies are used to tackle the difficulties, and (3) what differences the ST and the target text (TT) present. From these three different levels, the author determines that the translation strategies applied to deal with humorous puns are mainly *transference*, *equivalence*, *substitution*, *neutralization*, *omission* and *compensation*. The chapter's conclusion contains three reader-friendly figures that compare frequencies of the six identified strategies, making the author's results straightforward and accessible. Another finding is that both dubbing and subtitling prefer to preserve the original humour mechanism, but differ in terms of the variety of strategies applied in response to the influence of AVT modes.

Chapter 4 touches on humorous culture-specific references (CSRs), and the strategies these involve in terms of transference, explicitation, lexical recreation, substitution, and omission. The author remarks that a little over half of the CSR instances (144 out of 287) derive from popular culture, followed by CSRs deriving from "high culture" (68 instances); most are linked with topics discussed in the sitcom, triggering humour while reflecting North American sociocultural reality.

In Chapter 5 the author examines multilingual humour. In her theory discussion concerning multilingualism, Dore introduces the term "third language" (L3) to refer to "any instance of linguistic expression that is not standard L1 (audiovisual ST) or L2 (TT)" (p. 230), thus giving it greater breadth by encompassing not only languages and dialects but also linguistic variants. For example, one of the sitcom's main characters is Gloria, whose variety of Latin American-immigrant speech features her Spanish-accented English, mispronunciation, lexical errors, and continuous Spanish-English code-mixing and code-switching. Dore notes how both the dubbed version and captioned versions dedicated extra effort to retaining Gloria's original multilingualism.

In Chapter 6, the author explores a relatively new practice: audio description (AD). She uses the English and Italian AD of a romantic comedy titled *The Big Sick* as data for comparative analysis. Unlike the cross-modal translation activity (captioning) that we are more familiar with, AD transforms visual images, on-screen texts and sound effects into words. In her findings, Dore uses the "what, when, how and how much" standard proposed by

Vercauteren (2007: 142–147) to describe and demonstrate the differences between the two versions. The English AD "tends to describe a good deal of actions and facial expression to convey the character's feelings" (p277) while the Italian AD fails to achieve that level of accuracy. In terms of word count, the English version (2965) is also significantly higher than the Italian version (1295) – that is, there is much more information that can be added to the Italian AD to compensate for missed visual cues.

In summary, Margherita Dore has written an extensive discussion of the ideas and techniques behind humour in audiovisual translation. *Humour in audiovisual translation: Theories and applications* provides a clear roadmap for postgraduates and early-career researchers in the fields of humour studies and AVT studies; it will also appeal to film and media students. It is well-structured both in its arrangement of theories and practical examples, and in its overall organisation, as Dore explains the classification of all the different strategies, how the selected examples fall within each of them, and presents her findings in a logical and relevant way. From the beginning of each application chapter, the author follows a path of 'background introduction – definition – theories concerning the topic – categorization – data analysis – conclusion', explaining the various strategies in a gradual way; her continuous emphasis on catering to a diverse audience should also be acknowledged. Worth noting too is the book's comprehensive presentation of AVT, from its most visible forms of dubbing and subtitling, to relatively virgin research areas such as AD – effectively balancing a 360-degree view of the whole field with the primary focus on AVT humour.

The author should also be credited for the large amount of data collected. Chapters 3-5 consider a total of 2112 minutes of video, the original ST transcript, the dubbed Italian version, the official subtitled Italian version, and the fansubbed version. For Chapter 6, both the English AD and the Italian AD of *The Big Sick* have been retrieved despite initial difficulty due to copyright protection.

Last but not least, in service of readability the author takes great care in presenting the statistics, numerous tables and figures used to lay the theoretical foundation, and in explaining relevant background information.

However, some improvements might be made. First is the fansubbing and AD introduction in the theory part of the book. With AVT modes being primarily categorized as revoicing and captioning, fansubbing and AD are squeezed in just before the almost three-page introduction on dubbing, alongside partial dubbing and audio subtitling. The latter two modes are simply bolded, without their own subsections for any in-depth discussion. As one of the three data sources used, and the major topic in Chapter 6, fansubbing and AD would merit further scholarly attention. Second, the author's data analysis largely focuses on verbally expressed humour, namely the linguistic code (Chaume, 2004). However, as Chaume notes, AVT has other factors to deal with "the linguistic code, despite its predominant role, is but one more code at play in the construction and later transfer of meaning in audiovisual texts." Thus, "the musical code and the special effects code", "iconographic codes", "photographic codes" (2004) can also play a vital role in multimodal approaches to rendering 'language' beyond the linguistic range.

Potential for improvement notwithstanding, *Humour in audiovisual translation: Theories and applications* is a sophisticated guide to humour and AVT studies – a fascinating realm which awaits further explorations.

References

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