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DUBBING VERSUS VOICE OVER: CULTURE-BOUND JOKES & REFERENCES IN THE ENGLISH-ITALIAN- POLISH TRANSLATION OF HUMOUR IN ADULT ANIMATED SITCOMS

Abstract: This material is aimed at discussing and comparing the translations of culture-bound jokes and references with special attention paid to the translation of adult animated sitcoms. The material will encompass the Italian dubbing and Polish voice-over versions of the American TV show “Family Guy”. The analysis will focus on the different approaches to the translation of the above mentioned elements and their correspondence and closure to the original version of the series.

Key words: culture, dubbing, humour, translation, voice-over.

Introductory remarks

Audio-visual translation can be performed by the application of three main techniques, namely dubbing, subtitling and voice-over. The last one is not very popular throughout the world, but has established a firm position in various former communist countries like Poland. The reason for its popularity can be explained by financial factors as well as the preferences of viewers. Simply, voice-over translations are more time-efficient and cheaper than dubbings. It therefore seems that audio-visual translation markets are greatly influenced by tradition as well as the financial situation of a given society. An example based on traditional reasoning is the high popularity of dubbing in Italy due to historical factors such as the Fascist

regime wanting to protect the purity of the Italian language, effectively blocking all foreign influences.

Dubbing and voice-over are also different in the way in which cultural elements are translated from one language and culture into another. Dubbing is considered to be closer to the target culture (TC) and as such be an instrument of 'colonialism' (Iaia 2011). This view is upheld by Basnett (2002) who believed that dubbing produces sense-for-sense translations. Therefore, source culture (SC) references are usually replaced by TC equivalents to facilitate the reception of the translation. Here, adaptations and the neutralization of foreign cultural content are frequently applied tools. Voice-over however, should be more faithful and closer to the SC.

The following material will analyse the translation of cultural elements in adult animated sitcoms. The material will encompass episodes of "Family Guy", an American TV show which mocks popular culture. The aim of the analysis is to indicate whether cultural references stored in the jokes presented in the series will be translated differently by the Italian dubbing and the Polish voice-over versions. Additionally, the analysis will indicate whether the voice-over translation technique transfers cultural elements in adult animated sitcoms more faithfully than dubbing.

Adult animated sitcoms

An adult animated sitcom, also known as an adult cartoon, is a special type of animation which is especially devised for adult viewers. Adult content, language and thematic patterns which are used in such animations can be considered as distinctive features which determine their categorization. Nevertheless, it may be difficult to set rigid and definite boundary requirements which would meet the needs of adult viewers. Due to the nature of the content, teenagers can also be perceived as a vital part of the audience because of their desire to deal with more complex, adult forms of entertainment. Even though the visual aspects of such sitcoms are usually associated with ordinary cartoons devised for children, it is the content, thematic patterns that are discussed and the language used by the characters which serve as an audience determinant factor. Due to their form, adult animated sitcoms are sometimes negatively perceived by some adult viewers. There is concern about their appropriateness and accessibility by children, and the controversies are therefore based on the form, which is viewed as one that should be reserved for a younger audience (Mittel 2004). Adult animated sitcoms are also characterized by the presence of humour which is frequently exaggerated and denotes various important subject matters. It covers a full spectrum of topics which usually demand an adequate level of cultural knowledge to make them fully comprehensible, attractive or funny. Feasey (2008) considered 'adult humour' to be the most important factor which assigns

a given animated sitcom to the category of adult animations. Dobson (2009) underlined that the humour in adult animated sitcoms is a mixture of various slapstick, visual gags and satirical references and commentaries to the sphere of culture. Frequently, such programs take into their scope various controversial themes, motives, characters and events to comment on reality. The discussion is usually centred around philosophical dilemmas, diseases, deviant behaviours, mental disorders, incidents, social inequalities, ethnic minorities, politics, prejudices, religion, scandals, sexuality, etc. (Organ 2015). The themes are typically presented in an exaggerated way to demand attention from the viewers. Furthermore, the surrealistic and humorous presentation of these themes is accompanied by the application of violent language. Batchelor and Hammond noted that adult animated sitcoms [...] *wanted viewers to forget that they were watching a cartoon, but still have the ability to use animated tropes, such as violence and exaggerated satire that live actors could not perform without physical or moral outrage* (2012:228). Additionally, such cartoons aim to propose humorous commentaries on reality as well as events which are currently publicized in the press, TV or internet. The recognition of ridiculed elements and cultural references in humorous scenes can be treated as a special strategy of commenting on reality as well as a technique of creating and gathering the audience. It was stated by Pike: *these texts interact with diverse audiences, from cocktail waitress to factory workers to artists to university workers* (2012:21). Consequently, adult animated sitcoms are created to meet the needs of the average adult viewer who is able to comprehend various humorous references which are deliberately placed by the authors of such shows.

An adult animated sitcom can be exemplified by the American show 'Family Guy'. This series created by Seth MacFarlane focuses on the adventures of the Griffins, a nuclear family living in the fictional city of Quahog, Rhode Island. The family consists of parents Peter and Lois, their children Stewie, Chris and Meg as well as their anthropomorphic dog Brian. 'Family Guy' is famous for its specific sense of humour which is presented in the form of cutaway gags frequently referring to American culture. Very often, the humour in the series lampoons current events, cultural icons and celebrities. Here, the jokes are usually presented in the form of cutaways which are seemingly not related to the main plot. First, the introduction to the joke is presented and then a cutaway with a culture-bound joke takes place, for instance:

INTRODUCTION OF THE JOKE

[Quagmire is chained to the bed after sex with a prostitute who has stolen all of his money. Instead of helping him, Stewie decides to steal his bus.]

BRIAN: We're stealing the Winnebago, aren't we?

STEWIE: Oh, you can read me like a book, Brian.

THE JOKE:

[Stewie begins to drive and puts a John Deere hat. Immediately, the Smokey and the Bandit theme song begins playing.]

STEWIE: Breaker, breaker, Sidewinder this is Party Pooper.

STEWIE: Don't want to be a ratchet-jaw, but it looks like we've got a seat cover feeding the bears in the chicken coop, come on.

The understanding of this scene depends on the ability of the viewer to notice various cultural references. Therefore, the cultural competence of the viewer is regarded a vital element in comprehending and appreciating the humour and jokes. In the above presented example, the viewer should be familiar with the 1977 action comedy film "Smokey and the Bandit" to value its parody.

Humour & translation

Tomaszkewicz (2006) considered humour as something that does not take place automatically. For her, humour is a process which happens in certain situations in which various different factors co-occur. This process requires two essential factors, namely a humorous object and a person who would be able to notice it and react by a smile or laughter. The reception of humour is also determined by culture as it is frequently asserted that a given TV series, movie, person or a book has a British, American, Polish or German sense of humour. From this point of view certain things, situations or references may be considered amusing in some societies and cultures whereas unacceptable, iconoclastic, tasteless or vulgar in others. Moreover, subtle jokes or culturally based humour can even go unnoticed in certain cultures and societies. Additionally, certain jokes, characters, themes and behaviours can be treated as a taboo or be simply forbidden.

The transfer of humour from one language and culture into another is generally considered a difficult task. Some scholars even claim that the translation of humour is an example of untranslatability. In a similar tone Diot stated: When it comes to translating humour, the operation proves to be as desperate as that of translating poetry (1989:84). Schröter (2004) perceived the problem of humour translation as troublesome in all types of modern media, but especially difficult in the case of screen translation. The translator who deals with the transfer of humour has to overcome not only various linguistic obstacles but also cultural elements which can be culture-specific (Chiaro 2010). From this view, the specificity of the audience plays a crucial role: [...] the language used in films or cartoons, the scenes represented and other characteristics, like the sense of humour, also depend on the audience the show has been created for (Iaia 2011:173). Consequently, a given joke, humours reference or element will only fulfil its task when adequate linguistic and cultural knowledge is shared by both, the sender and recipient of

the joke (Chiaro 1992). However, the transfer of humour between languages and cultures may alter its amusement power. It was observed by Ying and Jing who stated: In translation, it is likely that the target context differs from the original one, and the change may not be able to produce the original effects of humorous expressions (2010:454). Humour can be established by the application of various linguistic means, such as wordplays which are used for their multiple meanings in a given source language, however these wordplays may not be as effective in another language.

Humour is not only created by linguistic means, but also by various elements of culture like references to history, traditions, heritage, religion, literature, etc as well. However, the rules of their application and understanding can be verified among different groups and cultures (Vandaele 2010), resulting in a different perception. To illustrate this point one can think of a parody in which a given celebrity is spoofed. Here, the understanding and appreciation of humour will also be determined by the ability to recognize the imitation and compare it with one's existing knowledge of the character. Therefore it seems that cultural competence plays a key role in the creation and translation of humour.

It is common that a mixture of linguistic and cultural elements are used to create a joke. The success of the humorous event is expressed by various visible physiological manifestations, for instance a smile or laughter. This point is of great importance for the translator as the lack of a smile or laughter on the side of the recipient can be equalled to the failure of translation. Consequently, [...] communication breaks down when the levels of prior knowledge held by the speaker/writer and by the listener/reader are not similar. While this is true of any communication, the breakdown is particularly obvious in the case of translated humour, whose perception depends directly on the concurrence of facts and impressions available to both speaker/writer and listener/reader (Del Corral 1988:25). However, as stressed by Belczyk (2007) humour applied in sitcoms is frequently based on situational comedy which has a universal nature and as such is recognizable and meaningful for the audiences belonging to different cultures alike.

Analysis

This analysis will focus on the translation of cultural references in the jokes presented in "Family Guy". The material will encompass five humorous scenes presented in the fourth season of the show and previously indicated by Iaia (2011). The contrastive analysis will demonstrate the differences in translation strategies and the alterations introduced during the transfer from the original. They will be observed in Italian dubbing and Polish voice-over. The instances of change due to the translation will be demonstrated and commented on to prove that in the case

of culture-bound jokes and references the Polish voice-over translation is closer to the original than Italian dubbing.

Example 1:
Episode “Blind Ambition”

English Version	Italian Version	Polish Version
<p>PETER: Everybody, you’re looking at a guy who’s gonna set a new world record. I am gonna eat more nickels than anyone has ever eaten before. Setting this World Record is gonna make me famous, just like the world’s fattest twins over there.</p> <p>FAT TWIN 2: Did I tell you that I’m doing Atkins?</p> <p>FAT TWIN 1: Oh... That’s not good for you.</p>	<p>PETER: Notizia per voi! State guardando l’uomo che stabilirà un nuovo record del mondo. Il sottoscritto mangerà più nichelini di quanti ne abbia mai mangiato un umano prima d’ora. Stabilire questo record mi farà diventare famoso come i gemelli più grassi del mondo lì davanti.</p> <p>FAT TWIN 2: Te l’ho detto che faccio la dieta delle patate?</p> <p>FAT TWIN 1: Non è che poi ingrassi troppo?</p>	<p>PETER: Rodzinko, ustanowię nowy rekord. Zjem najwięcej monet na świecie i stanę się sławny jak te najgrubsze bliźniaki.</p> <p>FAT TWIN 2: Próbuję diety doktora Atkinsa.</p> <p>FAT TWIN 1: Kiepsko na tym wyjdiesz.</p>

The joke presented in this scene is based on a character that is not well known in Italy or Poland, namely nutritionist Robert Coleman Atkins. Peter wants to stand out and be remembered by his family and the rest of society, so he decides to break the record of eating coins. During a car journey, Peter announces his decision and points out that he wants to be as famous as the Fat Twins. The action moves to a cutaway in which the Fat Twins are riding on motorbikes that are obviously too small for them. Here, the humour is based on the perception of typically obese American southerners. One of the twins is afraid that his brother would be thinner than him because he had undertaken a controversial low-carbohydrate Atkins Nutritional Approach. In the Italian dubbing, the cultural reference in the joke is lost in translation as it is replaced by a counterpart of a similar value in the TC. The Italian translator was probably afraid to create a non-joke by following the original version so he decided to replace Atkins Nutritional Approach with potato diet. Nevertheless, the cultural reference and satirical nature of the joke is partially lost as a direct reference to the Atkins diet is not rendered. On the other hand, the Polish voice-over is closer to the original version and the TC as it includes a direct reference to the diet. However, the Atkins diet is also not very well-known in Poland so the translation does not propose an equivalent humorous effect. Here, the Polish translator could have adopted a more familiar diet in Poland to establish a corresponding humorous effect. For example the famous low-carbohydrate Optimal diet proposed by Jan Kwaśniewski which had been popularized by Polish TV. In the translation of this joke, the Polish voice-over version includes the English culture reference but

undermines its humorous effect. On the contrary, the Italian dubbing eliminates the reference and proposes a more general and culturally-neutral counterpart to avoid the risk of creating a non-joke.

Example 2:
Episode “Model Misbehaviour”

English Version	Italian Version	Polish Version
<p>SPEAKER: Newport would like to extend a special welcome to all those here today who have children stationed overseas in Iraq. [THE VOICE STOPS] [LAUGHS] Just kidding!</p>	<p>SPEAKER: La nostra città vorrebbe dare un caloroso benvenuto a tutti coloro che sono qui oggi e che hanno figli impegnati in missioni di guerra. [THE VOICE STOPS] [LAUGHS] Stavo scherzando!</p>	<p>SPEAKER: Witamy ciepło rodziców których dziele dzieci walczą w Iraku. [THE VOICE STOPS] [LAUGHS] Żartuję!</p>

The joke presented in this scene is an example of a culture-bound commentary referring to a current political situation in the US. Peter wants to impress his father-in-law so he decides to take part in a yacht race. The action moves to the coast in Newport where the wealthy are gathering to support their crews. The people are calm and indifferent when the speaker warmly welcomes all those with children on the mission in Iraq. Their attitude completely changes when the gesture is turned into a joke; the wealthy are sneeringly sniggering and clapping. This scene ridicules the attitude of wealthy Americans who consider the mission in Iraq as a major concern of the less affluent US citizens. Interestingly, the Italian dubbing does not mention Iraq as the exact place of the war, it only generally refers to children who are taking part in military missions. From this point of view, the joke is censored due to the possible negative reaction from the Italian viewers, who at the same time could be observing the atrocities of the Iraqi war in the news. On the contrary, the Polish translation is closer to the original and directly refers to Iraq. This can be explained by the American and Polish active involvement in the Iraq war, so that the theme is closer to the given audiences. On the other hand, both the Polish and Italian translations do not convey the satire included in the original version, as the speaker in the translations does not mention that the action is taking part in Newport. The place of action is actually a vital part of the satire, as Newport is a famous American seaside city and summer resort with luxurious mansions belonging to the affluent American upper class. Moreover, the place is also the home of a Naval War College and a major United States Navy training centre which is another significant element in this context. In the Polish and Italian versions the additional information conveyed by the associations connected with the place and its residents is not rendered. The lack of cultural reference partially devalues the humorous effect of the joke.

Example 3:
Episode “Model Misbehaviour”

English Version	Italian Version	Polish Version
COOKIE MONSTER: YOU GUYS ARE NAZIS, MAN! YOU’RE FREAKIN’ NAZIS!	COOKIE MONSTER: SIETE UN BRANCO DI TERRIBILI DITTATORI!	COOKIE MONSTER: NAZIŚCI! PIEPRZENI NAZIŚCI!

Example 4:
Episode “Untitled Griffin Family History”

English Version	Italian Version	Polish Version
HITLER: Peter, can’t you see I’m busy? PETER: Hey, what are you doing? Stuff? HITLER: Yes. PETER: Nazi stuff? HITLER: Yes, Peter: Nazi stuff.	HITLER: Peter, non lo vedi che ho da fare? PETER: Ja! Che stai scrivendo? Un discorso? HITLER: Sì. PETER: Un proclama nazista? HITLER: Sì, Peter: un proclama nazista.	HITLER: Peter nie widzisz że pracuję! PETER: Czym się zajmujesz? Sprawami? HITLER: PETER: Nazistowskimi sprawami? HITLER: Tak, nazistowskimi.

Both scenes are referring to Nazism, however their translations are carried out in totally different ways. In “Model Misbehaviour” Stewie asks brain to contact the Cookie Monster. The action then moves to a detox clinic where the cell of the Cookie Monster is being checked by three doctors who are on the ward round. During the inspection, a hidden plate of cookies is found in the bed. The Cookie Monster presents the typical behaviour of a drug addict and tries to convince the doctors that the cookies were planted in his bed. After a short scrimmage the Cookie Monster is forcibly anaesthetized. Here, the humour is based on a well-known character from a childrens’ TV show whose characteristic behaviour is overdrawn to create a funny and exaggerated image. The general recognisability of the character in both target cultures greatly facilitates translation as it does not require any additional explanations. However, the outrage of the Cookie Monster is translated differently into Italian and Polish. The Italian translation does not directly refer to Nazism but more generally alludes to a dictatorship. On the other hand, the Polish voice-over is closer to the original as it directly refers to Nazism. Interestingly, at the same time the Polish version is more vulgar to stress the outrage of the Cookie Monster. Simultaneously, it makes the scene even more grotesque and funny for the elder viewer who is able to notice its exaggerated nature whilst comparing it to the original scene from Sesame Street. Conversely, in the scene “Untitled Griffin Family History” both translators directly refer to Nazism. The scene is a flashback representing the history of Peter’s ancestor. In this parody Peter is presented as a younger and beloved brother of Adolf Hitler. Peter Hitler in an irritating way is interrupting Adolf Hitler

while he is working in his office in Reichstag. Due to the general recognisability of the character, the viewer is also able to notice and appreciate the inappropriate nature of the questions, which additionally stress the humorous reception of the scene. However, the Italian dubbing and Polish voice-over differ in terms of their tone. Both the English and Polish versions are less respectful than the Italian dubbing. The parody of Nazism is stressed by the words of Peter when he refers to the thing on which Hitler is working as ‘Nazi stuff’. Here, the use of the general term is deliberate to emphasise that these things should only be associated with the atrocities of Nazism. Therefore, the use of this term additionally triggers these associations, which in this case are recognizable in both the English and Polish languages and cultures, enhancing the effects of the parody. However the humorous effect in the Italian dubbing seems to be less tangible as the translator has replaced the generic word with the more natural and specific ‘proclamation’.

Example 5:
Episode “The Cleveland-Loretta Quagmire”

English Version	Italian Version	Polish Version
HOST: My friend, my friend! [HE KICKS PETER] PETER: What? HOST: You’ve been kicked in the nuts!	HOST: Amico, amico, senti! [HE KICKS PETER] PETER: Cosa? HOST: Sei su Scherzi a parte!	HOST: [HE KICKS PETER] PETER: HOST: Kolego, kopnąłem Cię w jaja na wizji.

In this scene, Peter is on his way home when suddenly a man dressed in a blue jump-suit, sunglasses, and a bright orange afro wig attacks him and kicks Peter in the crotch. Achy Peter is angry with the man until it turns out that he is a victim of the show ‘Kicked in the Nuts’. Therefore, the whole scene is a spoof of the hidden camera shows created by Mike and Patrick Henry. The translation of the lines is governed by different strategies concerning the transmission of cultural elements. In the Italian dubbing, the translation follows the rules of domestication to meet the demands of a rather self-centred Italian commercial television market. Here, the original quote from ‘Kicked in the Nuts’ is replaced in Italian by a quote from a famous Italian hidden camera show entitled ‘Scherzi a parte’. On the contrary, the Polish version is closer to the original, but the potential recognisability of the reference is questionable, and as such negatively affects its humorous nature.

Concluding remarks

This analysis has proven that the translation of cultural references and culture-bound jokes is a difficult task, which is conducted differently in the Italian dubbing and Polish voice-over version of the famous adult animated sitcom “Family Guy”.

The differences in the approaches to the translation of certain elements have confirmed that the Italian dubbing version of the show is closer to the TC than to the SC. On the other hand, the Polish voice-over is closer to the SC and in this respect is not ‘culturally colonized’ in translation. Furthermore, the analysis has proven that a good translation of humour and culture-bound jokes is possible to achieve, either by maintaining original cultural references or by adapting them for the needs of the audience.

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Materials used:

Family Guy - episode "Blind Ambition"

Family Guy – episode "Model Misbehaviour"

Family Guy – episode "Untitled Griffin Family History"

Family Guy – episode "The Cleveland-Loretta Quagmire"