DOMESTICATION AND FOREIGNIZATION IN TRANSLATING PUNS: INSIGHTS FROM *MURDOCH MYSTERIES*

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Abstract

This article addresses challenging issues related to translation studies, particularly the recurrence of puns and double-entendre in audio-visual translations. The structure of this article explores how translation procedures operate as dimensional frameworks in which we construct the interpretation experience. The methodological approach includes applying the criterion sampling technique on forms of wordplay extracted from over 500 *Murdoch Mysteries* episodes and identifying their Romanian equivalent.

The Foreignization strategies include borrowing, exoticism, extension/addition, formal equivalence, intratextual gloss, literal translation, transliteration, while the Domestication strategies incorporate cultural adaptation, discourse transfer, simplification, situational equivalence.

Key-words: *Puns, Translation, Double Entendre, Murdoch Mysteries.*

Introduction

Regarded for centuries as a trade, the practice of selecting the proper expressions from the target language and comparing them to the idioms in the source language offers translation the prerogative to become an art. Employing translations procedures on the source text requires an expertise acquired through the thorough examination of formal and informal register and the multiple varieties of language, including the dialects that alter the literal version of a language.

The translation of puns is influenced by a set of constraints, among which the fact that the structural features that engender the semantic or pragmatic effect of the wordplay in the source-text (such as homophony, polysemy, idiomatic meaning or grammar in general) are not always found in their translated-text counterpart. The subtitling of a film allows the authorised target viewer to benefit from the original language nuances, accent and intonation included and develops a complex apprehension of the source culture.

1. Definitions of Key Terms

Researchers have strived to elaborate definitions of puns comprehensively, derived from the general definitions supplied by British and American dictionaries. Both the online versions of *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

and *Oxford Dictionary* consider 'puns' a use of words that have multiple meanings or sound the same with a humorous intent. The latest update of the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2025) regards 'double entendre' as a linguistic method (similar to puns) of employing words or expressions that bear two interpretations, one of which is usually risqué, while the *Cambridge Dictionary* bluntly states that one of the meanings in double entendre usually possesses a sexual connotation.

The issue concerning the translatability of verbal humour, especially the one based on language-play or word play, has been in the sphere of interest of several specialists in the field of linguistic research, the unanimously expressed opinion being that their exact translation is most of the time impossible. Among the proponents of this statement we find Fitts (1959: 39), who considers jokes as "a nuisance" in terms of translation options, Delabastita (1993: 173-177), who infers that wordplay is, usually, not translatable, Vandaele (2001), who presents a whole list of publications that reflect a doubtful point of view regarding humour focused on language-play, or Boyer (2001), who remarks that the translation of humour is hindered not only by the linguistic obstacle, but also by the cultural one.

Schröter (2005: 112) succinctly presents several points of view regarding pun translation. Hygrell (1997: 74) opts for the use of four classic translation strategies ("exclusion", "adoption", "copy" and "substitution"), generally valid, not particularly for humorous texts. Much more specifically, Qvale (1995: 224) refers to wordplay itself and suggests three alternatives: 1. Omitting wordplay, 2. Using a play on words that resembles translation, 3. Using a wordplay in the target language, this third variant recalling Flotow's (1997: 55-59) suggestion to explain "particularly expressive puns" in a footnote.

The issue of screenplay translation was in the focus of Pisek's work (1997: 49, *apud* Schröter 2005: 114). In film-related examples, he distinguished three "basic procedures", presented below:

> [A] pun can be taken over from the source language in combination with an attempt at explaining it, it can be reproduced with only little changes due to structural similarities between the two languages, or it can be lost […] when it is not only dependant on words but also on the action presented on the screen.

There are three ways in which puns can be recognised by the audience within the fictional visual context (like a film). First, the pun is intentionally placed in the screenplay and it is as such perceived both by the characters and the audience. Another situation is when a pun occurs unintentionally and its utterance is consequently perceived only by the other characters and by the audience. In the third case, there are unintended and unintentional puns that seem to be conceived by the authors of the screenplay in order to influence the audience's perception of the characters involved in the communicative exchange. For example, in *Murdoch Mysteries*, intentional puns are more frequently uttered by characters who want to display wit and authority. Translation procedures such as *adaptation, equivalence,*

modulation and transposition are based on the language and the culture of the target text (Pușnei, 2018).

The process of *foreignization* in a translation implies a form of preservation of non-native words, phrases or expressions that occur in the TL, sometimes securing the (rigid) cultural values of the SL (Venuti, 1995: 23-24). For instance, the term *Monsieur* is used in the show to expose speaker's ethnicity, instead of the classic *Mister*, or even *Det.* The opposite notion for *foreignization* is *domestication*, which is used massively for cultural accessibility by replacing foreign elements with TL equivalents. "Foreignizing signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language" (Venuti, 1995: 20).

Among the foreignization procedures of translation, the most commonly used in subtitling *Murdoch Mysteries* were *addition/extension* (expanding a notion from the Source Language in order to clarify any Target Reader's possible misinterpretation); *formal equivalence* (identifying a notion that is suitable semantically, lexically, grammatically; *borrowing* (employing a word in its original form since there is no translation for that word in Target Language, while being integrated in Target Language since the audience is already familiar with it); *exoticism* (an extreme form of borrowing that emphasizes cultural distinctiveness or otherness, making the translation feel foreign); *intratextual gloss* (borrowing a notion from the Source Language and providing an explanation within the text, instead of a footnote).

2. Research Methodology

The aim of this article is to verify Pușnei's taxonomy of translation procedures (2018). The corpus contains puns extracted from 17 seasons, selected by virtue of their wit, multiple meanings, ambiguity, provided that they include Cockney rhyming slang and double entendre. The research method of selecting puns is criterion sampling technique (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006) that enables the author to choose puns that fit Foreignization and/or Domestication processes.

Bearing in mind the particular features of the text under scrutiny (a film screenplay) and the whole context of the *Murdoch Mysteries* series, my investigation will focus on the potential of translated puns to render the message conveyed by its counterpart in the source language, testing if the translation is successful.

3. Domestication and Foreignization Processes in *Murdoch Mysteries*

Given that *Murdoch Mysteries* is not currently broadcast on any streaming platforms, and since there are reruns starting with season 14, the most difficult methodological aspect was to find a proper translation provided by an authorized professional. Most of the translations were rendered by memory, and from here and there I improved some puns that were omitted by the translator, who was unaware of the context.

Pun in *Murdoch Mysteries*	Domestication (D) vs Foreignization (F) processes	Romanian translation
(1) JCK: Better to be an elf than an alf.	Cultural adaptation (D) transpires when some circumstances occur only in the SL (Pușnei, 2018: 125-131).	JCK: Mai bine să fii un spiriduș decât un bădăran.
(2) Murdoch: Maybe the killer was making a statement. The use of arrows suggests the killer had a flair for the dramatic. Ogden: It's rather well-executed.	Situational equivalence (D) involves the replacement of a SL pattern with a TL similar pattern (Pușnei, 2018: 125-131).	Murdoch: Criminalul probabil voia să declare ceva. Faptul că a folosit săgeți sugerează că îi place să teatralizeze. Ogden: E destul de bine executat.
(3) Brackenreid: Really, son? [You slept with a] married woman? John: I know, father. She was frustrated. […] Apparently [the husband] had... Trouble. Brackenreid: Couldn't rise to the occasion….	Situational equivalence (D)	Brackenreid: Serios, fiule? [Te-ai culcat cu o] femeie căsătorită? John: Știu, tată. Era frustrată […] Se pare că [soțul] avea… probleme. Brackenreid: Nu se ridica la nivel.
(4) Comedian: My father once told me: [Y]ou should always know when to stop if you're going to drink. I said: I do know when to stop. At the next place I come to.	Situational equivalence (D)	Comediant: Tatăl meu mi-a spus cândva: Trebuie să știi când să te oprești când bei. I-am zis: Știu când să mă opresc. Când ajung la următorul local.
(5) Suspect: I believe I have a right to a barrister. Brackenreid: I have a right, too, and a left.	Formal equivalence (F) implies employing a word or phrase lexically and/or grammatically similar in TT (Pușnei, 2018: 125-131).	Suspect: Cred că am dreptul la un avocat. Brackenreid: Un drept am și eu, și un stâng.
(6) Paddy: I didn't know the Detective had a sense of humour. Brackenreid: I'll tell you something else you didn't know: how close you are to meeting my fist!	Formal equivalence (F)	Paddy: Nu știam că detectivul are simțul umorului. Brackenreid: Îți mai spun ceva ce nu știi: cât de aproape ești să încasezi un pumn.
(7) (A man in poisoned with wood alcohol and the cure is regular alcohol) Brackenreid: I've always said that whiskey saves lives.	Borrowing (F) preserves the original word from the SL since the word does not exist in TL (Pușnei, 2018: 125-131).	Brackenreid: Mereu am spus ca whiskey-ul salvează vieți

Pun in *Murdoch Mysteries*	Domestication (D) vs Foreignization (F) processes	Romanian translation
(8) Comedian: I missed her [my mother-in-law] at first, so I reloaded and tried again. That did it.	Intratextual gloss (F) involves an explanation within the TT (Pușnei, 2018: 125-131).	Comediant: Am ratat prima dată, așa că am reîncărcat pistolul și am tras iar. Am reușit.
(9) Prostitute: I'm Charity. […] I knew he probably wouldn't remember my name, sauced as he was. Besides, everyone deserves a little charity.	Discourse transfer (D) implies a change in register (Pușnei, 2018: 125-131).	Prostituată: Eu sunt Charity. […] Știam că nu o să mă recunoască la cât era de amețit. În plus, toată lumea merită acte de caritate.
(10) Brackenreid: Do you know the pun about horticulture? You can bring a whore to culture, but… Watts: Um, thank you, Inspector.	Simplification (D) implies a decrease of the connotation force (Pușnei: 125-131).	Brackenreid: Știi poanta cu horticultura? Poți să… Watts: Ă, mulțumesc, dle Inspector.

Conclusions

Multiple translations procedures may be applied in the effort of preserving the humorous effect for non-native speakers. Finding a possible equivalent for a pun in the target language demands creativity. When an alternative for translation is impossible to find, then the translator can opt for an omission of the pun within the given context.

The empirical material investigated in this article consists of 10 examples of puns, selected from *Murdoch Mysteries*. My purpose was to make a comparative analysis of the puns from the English version of the screenplay and the personal adaptation of the translation provided by the Romanian subtitled version, and to comment upon the preservation of humorous effect within the transfer between languages (in other words, if the translation is successful or not).

The prevailing procedures of *domestication* encountered in the *Murdoch Mysteries* subtitles that aided the intercultural mediation were *situational equivalence* (replacing the Source Language pattern by a similar pattern in the Target Language), *simplification* (devaluating lexically and semantically the essence of the connotation); *cultural adaptation* (when there is no equivalence in the Target Language) (Pușnei, 2018: 125-131); whilst the most common foreignization procedure was *formal equivalence* (employing a word or phrase lexically and/or grammatically similar in Target Text).

Domestication procedures pierce through the semantic level of the puns and reach a chore of (paremiologic) wisdom and universal wit that probe the successful translatability of puns. If we return to the necessity of a classic analysis, linguists must bear in mind that Artificial Intelligence may speed up an analysis, but it requires human refined insights for accuracy and real-world relevance,

especially in the case of double entendre. This topic requires further research by means of multiple software analysis in order to achieve comprehensive results from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective.

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