Translating English Verbal Jokes into Arabic

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ملخص

يرتكز بحث هذه الورقة على ترجمة النكتة اللغوية من اللغة الإنجليزية الى اللغة العربية، في محاولة لتسليط الضوء على الاستراتيجيات الممكن ترجمتها. ان النكتة اللغوية هي تلك التي تتضمن عنصرا لغويا يعمل كأداة لاستثارة النكتة بخلاف الفكاهة الثقافية والتي تم تجنها في هذه الدراسة. تتسم النكتة اللغوية بصعوبة ترجمتها لاعتمادها على سمة لغوية خاصة بلغة المصدر. فالصعوبة تكمن في إيجاد مفرد مقابل يمكنه أن يحدث تأثير فكاهيا بنفس تأثير لغة المصدر. كما يهدف هذا البحت الى تحليل عناصر او بنية النكتة وأيضا الى استعراض نظريات الفكاهة او الدعابة. وكإطار تقييمي للترجمات اعتمد البحث على منهج "نيو مارك" (1988) للمكافئة الدلالية والتواصلية.

تتكون عينة البحث من عدد 7 نكات مترجمة للغة العربية بواسطة سبعة مترجمين اختير الأنسب منها. ولقد تم اختيار النكت بشكل عشوائي من بعض الكتب ومواقـع الانترنت. من اهم ما توصلت إليه الدراسة انه بالإمكان ترجمة النكتة اللغوية الى اللغة العربية وفقا لنسبة الترجمات التواصلية.

Abstract

This paper investigates the translatability of English verbal jokes into Arabic. These jokes are mainly based on incongruities in linguistic inconsistencies. Also, it highlights the possible strategies for

translating verbal jokes. The verbal joke is the one that includes linguistically specific elements. In fact, these jokes are notoriously difficult to translate. This study aims at classifying the internal structure of jokes. As well, it aims at presenting theories of humor. An evaluation of Arabic translations was made according to Newmark's (1988) approach of semantic and communicative translation, as a framework of this study. The original and the translated Jokes are analyzed part by part to determine which of Newmark's translation procedures can be identified. The corpus consists of 7 English Jokes with their Arabic translations. The jokes were chosen randomly from books and internet web sites. One of the main findings of the study is that it is possible to translate linguistic jokes from English into Arabic according to the number of communicative translations.

Key words: Humour, Verbal jokes, Punchline, Equivalence

1. Introduction:

Jokes make people laugh. Therefore, they love them. These jokes rely on the verbal meanings of words in sentences. Jokes might be serious, offensive, and convey a powerful message. A joke is an ancient kind of human activity. It can be found in old and new literature, poetry, advertising, films, stories, and daily conversation. In fact, jokes are everywhere both in spoken and written texts. Thus, translators face them regularly. People find pleasure in telling and listening to jokes that are expressed verbally and often depend on their humor on that. The problem with translating verbally expressed jokes is in how to maintain the structure of the original and in how to deal with the pivot or the punchline that has two interpretations. This study is a comparative analytical study. A comparison is drawn between the original English jokes and their Arabic-translated versions. The problem of finding a one-to-one equivalent word that generates the punch line prevents translators from conveying the meaning that will make a target language (TL) reader laugh in the same way that makes a source language (SL) reader laugh. If a joke is not translated as a joke, simply the translation is not communicative. This paper tries to explore these difficulties and the solutions adopted by translators.

2. Literature Review

Wilson (1979:17) considers jokes as a puzzle or incongruity that the individual can master and resolve. This leads to say that a joke is a puzzle solved. Aaccording to Cambridge English Dictionary, a joke is "something which someone says to make people laugh, usually a short story with a funny ending". Ritchie (2004:15) argues that a joke is a brief text which, for a given group, is recognizable as having, as its primary purpose, the production of an amused reaction in its reader/ hearer, and which is typically repeatable in a wide range of contexts. Attardo and Chabanne (1992:169) regards jokes as a very short narrative fictions reduced to the most economical form. The narratives are generally focused on a short dialogue between rarely more than two characters. The crucial outline is that the verbal joke is oriented to and by a punch- line, which lies at the end of the text. The function of the narrative is that of providing enough contextual information for the punch-line to build upon, or rather to be incongruous with Attardo and Chabanne (ibid:169). Kreidler (1998:2) declares that jokes often depend for their humor on double meanings of words. Therefore, speakers appreciate jokes which depend on more than one interpretation.

3. Statement of the Problem

The study provides a thorough discussion and analysis of key issues in the translation of English verbal jokes into Arabic. The study focuses particularly on strategies for the translation of jokes between two very different languages that are remote linguistically (i.e., English and Arabic). The problem is that verbal jokes rely, for their humor, on the double meaning of one word that generates the punch-line and its amusement. Finding an equivalent counterpart for the word in question which generates the humor is a difficult task.

4. Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this paper is to identify and classify the structure of verbal jokes and investigate the major problems these jokes pose in translating from English into Arabic. It also analyses the

strategies used by translators to overcome these difficulties. The objectives of this paper are as follows:

- To introduce translating verbal jokes as a challenging issue.

- To present a classification of theories of humor.

- To explore the problems that the translators face when translating verbal jokes, and the techniques used.

- To investigate the possibility of translating English verbal jokes into Arabic.

5. Research Question

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- To what extent English verbal jokes are translatable into Arabic?

- What are the techniques or methods used by translators?

6. Significance of the Study

This study will provide insights into the translation of English verbal jokes and the internal structure of jokes in general. Therefore, translation scholars and researchers will further realize the different types of jokes and theories of humor. Also, the strategies used to resolve the problems that verbal jokes pose in the process of translation will help them. Moreover, the analysis that is presented in this study will convey valuable information for future research that would explore the various elements and other types of jokes. Consequently, the findings of this study will contribute to our understanding of translating verbal jokes regarding the many problems posed. Lastly, It is worth mentioning that there is a shortage of research on translating jokes from English into Arabic and vice versa. This study will contribute to bridging this gap.

7. Methodology

The analysis of the verbal English jokes into Arabic is determined by three procedures of analysis. First, Newmark's (1988) Semantic and Communicative translation approach was used in this analysis to determine which approach was used by the translators in

translating the jokes. Second, the researcher chose a comparative analysis to be conducted in this analysis. There is a comparison between the original English jokes and their Arabic translations. This comparison helps in penetrating into the deep structure of the jokes. By that, the translation analysis of verbal jokes was performed. Third, this put focus on determining the differences between English jokes and their Arabic counterpart, which revealed certain translation strategies, and also to what extent their translations were successful.

9. The Structure of Verbal Jokes

The jokes of this paper depend on the possibility of two meanings being understood from the utterance. Ross (1998:8) believes that jokes often have the following:

•- There is a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke.

•- This conflict is caused by ambiguity at some level of language.

•- Jokes have a punch-line that works as an element of surprise. Raskin (1985:103) sees that a joke is based on four maxims.

•- Maxim of Quantity: Giving precisely as much information as the joke required.

•- Maxim of Quality: Say only what is related to the joke.

•- Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.

•- Maxim of Manner: Be concise.

10. The Internal Structure of Jokes

Hockett (1960) cited by Schwarz (2010:65) stated three parts to the joke.

1) **Set-up** or (the body). The Set-up is the sentence that introduces the jokes.

2) **Pivot**. The pivot implies the word around which the double meaning is created.

3) **Punch-line.** The punch-line represents a surprise effect which is responsible for the amusement. Attardo (1994:223) declares that the exact wording of the punch-line of the joke is extremely

important because it is crucial for the verbal element to be ambiguous and to link the two opposing senses in the text. The set-up or the body of the joke has two different interpretations, only one interpretation is apparent to the mind of the hearer or the reader until the punchline comes and contradicts with this obvious interpretation, enforcing the mind of the reader or the hearer to trigger the hidden interpretation linking it with the set-up incongruously. A punchline should come as a surprise, a sudden flash, a sudden expose that there was another possible interpretation; it is a punch as in Boxing. The three parts of jokes can be illustrated by the next joke:

► The set-up: ***Daughter: mommy, there's a strange-looking man at the door.***

► The pivot*: **Mother: Does he have a bill?***

► The punch-line*: **Daughter: No, just a regular nose***

11. Linguistic Theories of Humor

Most of the humor theories proposed by scholars in the field of humor are actually mixed theories. According to Raskin (1985:47) "linguistic theories of humor should determine and formulate the necessary and sufficient linguistic conditions for the text to be funny. Therefore, it is supposed to account and measure the possibility of one linguistic text to be funny or not, in terms of some certain linguistic properties". Nash (1985:77) declares that the majority of humor is born of the linguistic medium. humor resulting from unusual intensities of linguistic patterning. The theory recognizes the existence of the boundary between our knowledge of the language and our knowledge of the world.

12. The incongruity theory

This theory could be introduced by the following joke:

An English bishop received the following note from the vicar of a village in his diocese: "Milord, I regret to inform you of my wife's death. Can you possibly send me a substitute for the weekend?" Raskin (1985:106). According to Ross (1998:8) incongruity theory focuses on the element of surprise. This theory states that a joke is

created out of a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in it. In fact, incongruity refers to the possibility for two meanings being understood from the utterance and its humor have the following elements:

• There is a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke.

• The conflict is created by a linguistic ambiguity at some level of language.

• The punch-line is unexpected because it is not the expected interpretation.

Laughter is merely caused by the sudden comprehension of the incongruity between a concept and the actual things that have been thinking about it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity (Schopenhauer 1883 quoted by Ritchie (2004:46). Thus, incongruity is the conflict between what is expected and what occurs in the joke. Incongruity simply opposes Grice's maxim " be relevant".

13. The Semantic Script Theory of Humor

The semantic Script theory of Humor (SSTH) is considered as a complete linguistic theory on humor which was introduced and developed by Victor Raskin (1985). Moreover, Raskin (1985:57) states that the purpose of this theory of humor is to formulate a set of conditions which are both necessary and sufficient conditions for the text to be funny. The theory is outlined as follows:

A text can be considered as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the following conditions are satisfied:

(i) the text is fully or partially compatible with two different scripts.

(ii) the text is compatible with two scripts that are diametrically opposed. Raskin (1985: 99)

According to Raskin's theory, a text to be humorous, it must consist of the following (abstract) objects: the set of all scripts available to the speakers accompanied with their labeled links and a

set of combinatorial rules. Raskin (1985:81) defines script as "a large mass of semantic information surrounding the word or aroused by it". The script is a cognitive form that the native speaker has internalized, and it reflects the native speaker's understanding of a small part of the world. Every speaker has a wide repertoire of "common sense" scripts that reflect his or her knowledge of certain routines, normal procedures, simple circumstances, and so on. Raskin (1985:100) clarifies his theory by the next joke:

"Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper.

"No," the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."

The first step of the analysis or the comprehension of this joke by the hearer or the listener, is that there are two overlapping scripts (senses) one is visiting the doctor and the other is adultery. According to Raskin (1985) the relationship between the two parts is overlapping and opposite and this oppositeness creates the joke. Raskin (1985:100) declares that an overlap is not a sufficient condition for a text to be funny. In spite of the fact that any ambiguous text has two or more scripts but not every ambiguous text is supposed to be funny.
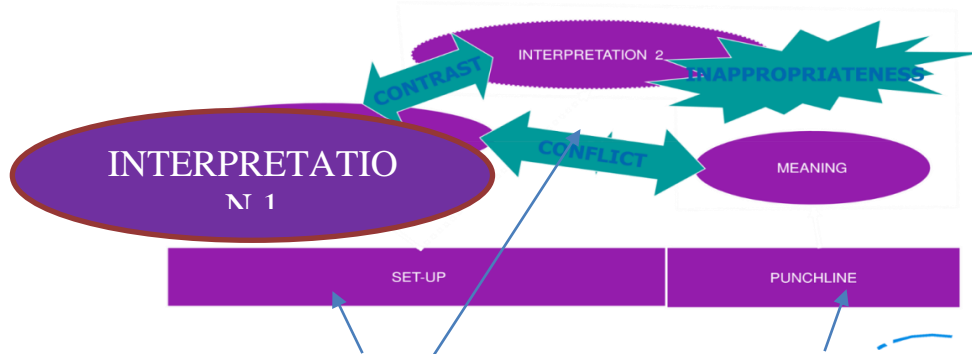

Figure 1 incongruity of joke. Graeme Ritchie

14. Translation

Translation has been defined by many scholars in the field depending on how they view the language and translation. Nida and Taber (1982:12) declare that translating consists of reproducing in the

receptor language the closest natural equivalence of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style. It is the process of the replacement of a linguistic component from one language by an equivalent into another. According to Ghazala (1995:1) translation is generally used as a reference to the process and methods that is used to convey the meaning from the (SL) into the (TL) ". Also, Catford (1995:20) considered translation as the transformation of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language.

15. Newmark's Semantic Equivalence and Communicative Equivalence

Newmark (1988:46) differentiates between the two approaches. Semantic and Communicative translation. In Semantic Translation, the translator seeks to reproduce the target language's semantic and syntactic structures as nearly as possible to the source language's exact meaning. This technique is Source text-oriented, in this way, the end result of this technique is readable, but it is still bound by the original text bias.

On the other hand, Communicative Translation tries to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the source readers. Hence, rendering the effect upon the target language reader in the same way upon the source language reader. In this regard, any translation should be to achieve an equivalent effect. It is the translation that produces the same effect as Nida (1946:159) calls it "dynamic equivalence". Newmark (1988:46) adds that in the communicative translation of vocative texts, equivalent effect is not only desirable, it is essential. Hence, the method that emphasis Target Language is communicative translation. Henceforth, it is being set at the reader's level of language and knowledge. Its goal is to create an equivalent effect. So, the equivalence effect is an important intuitive principle that could be tested.

Example (1)

Daughter: mommy, there's a strange-looking man at the door. Mother: Does he have a bill? Daughter: No, just a regular nose.

All the Arabic translations choose to translate this joke as:-

الطفلة: يا ماما، هناك رجل غريب علي الباب -الام: هل يحمل فاتورة؟ الطفلة: لا، مجرد أنف عادى.

The reader of this translation will feel something strange, awkward, something unacceptable in the message. What is the link between the mother's question and her daughter's reply. Logically , even if أنف and فاتورة there is no connection between the Arabic word we assume that the girl is a bit deaf. On the contrary, the English version's reader will understand the daughter's manipulation of the second meaning of the word *bill* as " birds beak" or her insufficient language competence.

Set-up	The Pivot	The Punchline	Equivalence Type	
			Semantic	Communicative
✓	X	X	✓	

Example   (2)

- Lady at the zoo Mr. keeper, if one of the lions escapes what the steps would you take?

Keeper: the biggest I could.

In this joke. the pun is a polysemic one, the word "step" could be interpreted as 'procedure', which is the meaning that the lady meant, or putting one foot in front of the other" running" as it interpreted by the keeper.

Translations produce the same meanings of the original by translating the word " biggest " as the fastest " أسرعها " or " "أكبرها" . Both Arabic words collocate perfectly with the word "خطوات".

في حديقة الحيوان تسأل سيدة الحارس: إذا هرب أحد الأسود ما هي الخطوات التي ستتخذها؟ الحارس. أسرعها.

Set-up	The Pivot	The Punchline	Equivalence Type	
			Semantic	Communicative
✓	✓	✓		✓

Example   (3)
What is the difference between a canoe and Canadian?
The canoe tips.

ما الفرق بين القارب والرجل الكندي.
القارب ينقلب.

Set-up	The Pivot	The Punchline	Equivalence Type	
			Semantic	Communicative
✓	X	X	✓	

All translations maintain the body of the joke but they could not translate the pivot or the punch-line. The word (*tips*) has two meanings or interpretations that fit the canoe and Canadian. while the Arabic word only compatible with the word canoe. ينقلب

The two interpretations are as flip over or giving extra amount of money that you give to somebody. So, it generalizes that all Canadian are stingy.

xample (4)
Man in a restaurant: I'll have two lamb chops, and make them lean, please.
Waiter: To which side sir.

The man used the word " lean " as an adjective, which means, make the lamb chops less fatty. While it was interpreted by the waiter as a verb, means " bend".All translators did not succeed in conveying the message. **The pivot is omitted**.

الرجل: من فضلك، أريد قطعتين من لحم الخروف، ولتكن بدون دهن.

Set-up	The Pivot	The Punch-line	Equivalence Type	
			Semantic	communicative
✓	X	X	✓	

النادل: من أي جهة، سيدي.

Example (5)

A lady wrote to the " Dear Abby" column in newspaper…she said " I have been engaged to a man for some time, but just before wedding, I found he has a wooden leg. Do you think I should break it off?"

The pronoun 'it' refers to what? the wooden leg or to the relationship.

Three translations translate the word *break* as قطع the word collocates with both breaking a relationship and breaking body's organ. While others, who chose to translate break as يكسر or يفصل both words do not collocate interchangeably with breaking a relationship and breaking body's organ.

Set-up	The Pivot	The Punch-line	Equivalence Type	
			Semantic	communicative
✓	✓	✓		✓

تكتب سيدة لصحيفة ... لي علاقة برجل منذ فترة، وقبيل حفل الزواج عرفت أن إحدي ساقيه خشبية. هل ترى على أن أقطعها.

The enclitic pronoun "ها" could refer to the leg or to the relationship.

Example (6)

When the prisoner was told by his lawyer that he had a stay in execution, he smiled and said,' well, no noose is good noose'.

Here the prisoner played on the idiom 'no news is good news', to express his happiness, he altered the vowel of the word news /nju:z/ by the vowel of the word noose /nu:s/ and the last consonant from /z/ to/s/.One translation was as follow:-

عندما أخبر المحامي السجين بأنه تم إلغاء حكم الإعدام، أبتسم السجين وقال: لا

قبر... أحسن خبر

This translation translates humors effect by an equivalent effect.

Set-up	The Pivot	The Punch-line	Equivalence Type	
			Semantic	Communicative
✓	✓	✓		✓

Example (7)
Man in a restaurant: do you serve frogs' legs?
Waiter: we serve anyone who is able to pay.

Serve is a di-transitive verb,i.e. you serve something to someone, so it is here implying a direct object. But *serve* in the sentence " we serve anyone who's able to pay" understood as indirect object. The ambiguity lies in the fact that the verb serve has two objects, i,e one serves something to someone.

All translators chose to translate this joke as;-

رجل في مطعم: هل تخدم " أتخدمون" أرجل الضفادع.

النادل: إننا نخدم أي شخص قادر علي الدفع

Set-up	The Pivot	The Punch-line	Equivalence Type	
			Semantic	Communicative
✓	✓	✓		✓

The translations perfectly rendered the two meanings of the original, if we accept the word أتخدمون as *do you make or cook frogs' legs in your restaurant?* as well as the meaning of dish up. This translation renders the ST punch line by TT punch line.

16. Conclusion

This paper has examined the translation of English verbal jokes into Arabic. Verbal jokes pose a serious problem. The samples of this study included a word that evokes a punchline or incongruity based on a linguistic element. English verbal jokes cannot be translated into Arabic because of the two incompatible meanings of the two languages. The study concludes that there is a loss of information when translating English jokes into Arabic because of the remote between the two languages. This causes communication failure during the translation process. Also, this study revealed that the challenge of translating jokes, to some extent, was resolved by implementing strategies that allow the TL audience to comprehend the jokes' message.   Three translations of the samples used the compensation technique to render the jokes with deviation from the original idea. Based on the analysis of the data, using Newmark's translation model as a tool, three translations out of seven successfully rendered the source language jokes communicatively. Thus, rendering verbal element by another different verbal element.

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